

## CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE (GSI): AN EXPLAINER

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Image source: The China Global South Project.<sup>1</sup>

On February 21, 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) published a comprehensive concept paper entitled, *The Global Security Initiative (GSI)*.<sup>2</sup> Earlier, the GSI was proposed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping on April 21, 2022, at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022. The theme of the conference was: “The World in COVID-19 & Beyond: Working Together for Global Development and Shared Future.”<sup>3</sup> President Xi delivered a keynote speech at the opening ceremony via video link and said that “security is the precondition for development,” and quoted a Chinese axiom that “Stability brings a country prosperity while instability leads a country to poverty.” His keynote speech at the forum was focused on “Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Cobus van Staden, “What Is Xi Jinping’s Global Security Initiative? New Government Document Gives Clues,” *The China Global South Project*, February 23, 2023, <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/2023/02/23/what-is-xi-jinpings-global-security-initiative-new-government-document-gives-clues/>.

2 “The Global Security Initiative - Concept Paper,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, February 21, 2023, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221\\_11028348.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html).

3 “Full Text: Xi Jinping’s Speech at 2022 Boao Forum for Asia,” CGTN, April 21, 2022, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-04-21/Full-text-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-at-2022-Boao-Forum-for-Asia-19ppial90Eo/index.html>.

4 Ibid.

President Xi emphasised the prevailing traditional as well as non-traditional security threats and the ways and means to mitigate the global challenges including Covid-19, unilateralism, and protectionism. He said that besides non-traditional threats, new traditional security threats were also emerging which were further fuelled by the fragile global economic recovery and the widening of the development gap. He drew attention towards the lack of climate change governance and digital governance. President Xi quoted an ancient Chinese saying that “One must not change his commitment or give up his pursuit even in the face of danger and risk.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, he reiterated his confidence in mitigating the traditional as well as non-traditional threats being faced by the international community. One argues that the concept paper published by the Chinese MFA is the reflection of President Xi’s keynote speech and has a great value in understanding the future contours of China’s foreign policy.

Let us now deconstruct the GSI concept paper to have a better understanding of its principles, priorities of cooperation, and platforms and mechanisms. The GSI has six core principles and twenty priorities for cooperation; and it calls for a greater role to be played by the international organizations including the United Nations (UN) and its relevant organs and committees, SCO,<sup>6</sup> BRICS,<sup>7</sup> CICA,<sup>8</sup> and using multilateral platforms and mechanisms of cooperation.

### **Core Concepts and Principles**

1. The vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security.
2. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
3. Adherence to the UN Charter.
4. Addressing legitimate security concerns.
5. Peaceful conflict resolution.
6. Security in traditional and non-traditional domains.

### **Priorities of Cooperation**

The GSI aims to support UN’s conflict prevention and peace-building efforts. It encourages action to deter organized crime and enhance the counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations by allocating

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> SCO is an abbreviation of Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

<sup>7</sup> BRICS is an acronym of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> CICA stands for Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

sufficient resources for such endeavours. Most importantly, it calls for facilitation of political solutions to international, regional, and local hotspots, and upholding the universal consensus that a nuclear war cannot be won by anyone.

Further, it aims to promote international cooperation on climate change, energy and food security, and public health. It calls for establishing and strengthening international security governance in areas like artificial intelligence, outer space, digital space, and information. It fully supports ASEAN-like consensus in the Middle East and Africa for sustainable peace and security.

### **Platforms and Mechanisms of Cooperation**

The GSI encourages states to engage in discussions on peace and security at the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and relevant organizations. It aspires using the platforms and mechanisms of cooperation such as enhancing the role of SCO, BRICS, CICA, and other international organizations to promote multilateralism and security cooperation. High-level meetings and conferences can be organised under the auspices of GSI to promote policy communication and intergovernmental dialogue.

It emphasises the pivotal need of highlighting and supporting international dialogue platforms including the Beijing Xiangshan Forum and Global Public Security Cooperation Forum. The GSI supports establishing international platforms and mechanisms for cooperation in combatting organized crime, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, biosecurity, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies.

### **Analysis and Conclusions**

The GSI is a thoughtful and holistic theory that aims to create favourable conditions for global development and to minimize the ever-widening development gap. At its core, it calls for security and equality across all domains, regardless of the size or strategic value of a single country.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the GSI adheres to the basic principles of international law and endorses the juridically equal status of all nations, devoid of any discrimination. The GSI likely will have a thorough impact not only on the Chinese foreign policy but also on the international approach towards security. It underscores for “indivisible security” and stresses that “security of one country should not come at the expense

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<sup>9</sup> “The Global Security Initiative - Concept Paper.”

of that of others.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, it clearly aims to downplay or perhaps alleviate the Realist concept of Security Dilemma, where security is seen in relative terms.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding GSI's adherence to the international law, it has garnered suspicion and criticism from the Western commentators.<sup>12</sup> Arguably, the GSI defies the conventional wisdom of international relations by considering all the nations juridically equal and creating equal opportunities for the future of humanity. For instance, Saudi Arabia and Iran have historical ideology-driven mutual disagreements and the regional geopolitics drew a wedge between the two. Nonetheless, China brokered an extraordinary Saudi-Iran rapprochement in March 2023 and helped the two in resuming diplomatic ties.<sup>13</sup> Such a significant move towards normalization of bilateral relations was perhaps unimaginable for many scholars on Saudi-Iran politics and statesmen around the world.

In hindsight, the GSI is a comprehensive and wide-ranging approach that follows the established norms and values, and has the potential of advancing its stated core concepts and principles. It aims to address the traditional as well as non-traditional security threats which are being equally faced by the international community, and such threats are clearly leading to fissures among peoples and nations. Such fissures serve as hotspots in international relations and keep on flaring up from time to time. Sometimes, these fissures lead to organized crime and terrorism, which compromise security and hinder development. By adopting security cooperation across all domains, such threats could be mitigated and the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security could be achieved.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (January 1950): 157–80.

<sup>12</sup> Please see: Carla Freeman and Alex Stephenson, “Xi Ramps Up Campaign for a Post-Pax Americana Security Order,” United States Institute of Peace, May 4, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/05/xi-ramps-campaign-post-pax-americana-security-order>; Michael Schuman, “How China Wants to Replace the U.S. Order,” *The Atlantic*, July 13, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/07/china-xi-jinping-global-security-initiative/670504/>.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Baker, “Chinese-Brokered Deal Upends Mideast Diplomacy and Challenges U.S.,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/11/us/politics/saudi-arabia-iran-china-biden.html>.