FIGURES OF SPEECH IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

OCTOBER 2022

Introduction

François Godement

Any state has a declarative foreign policy which may differ from its acts in some aspects. **"Organized hypocrisy" is a permanent feature of international relations**.[1] Norms are recognized but are also violated to varying degrees. Yet hypocrisy can also be a peacekeeper, preventing full-blown conflict and escalation, and providing negotiated ways out of conflict.

1. Krasner Stephen D. 1999. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press.

Yet hypocrisy can also be a peacekeeper, preventing full-blown conflict and escalation, and providing negotiated ways out of conflict.

Since Xi Jinping's predecessor Hu Jintao in 2007, "soft power" has become a key concern of China's CCP. In international relations, it is frequently expressed as "discourse power" (话语权). Zheng Bijian, Deng Xiaoping's key international adviser and the promoter of China's "peaceful rise", appears to be the first who used the term in a 2004 Shanghai Oriental Television interview.[2] **Although Xi Jinping frequently refers to discursive power, and emphasizes the need to "tell China's story well" since 2013,[3] his own expressions about China's international stance are frequently laced with exhortations towards "struggle"**, a notion directly connected to his vision of the CCP's role at home. On the eve of the CCP's 20th Congress opening on October 16, 2022, "struggle" is still his key message, in a context of "great changes unseen in a century" in the world where the CCP must stay ahead.[4] At other times, he has celebrated a "once in a hundred year strategic opportunity for China".

2. Lynch, Daniel. "Chinese Thinking on the Future of International Relations: Realism as the Ti, Rationalism as the Yong?" *The China Quarterly* 197 (2009): 87–107.

3. "Telling China's Story Well", *China Media Project*, April 16, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/telling-chinas-story-well/

4. "The Historic Mission of CPC in the New Era (新时代中国共产党的历史使命)", *Qiushi*, September 30, 2022, http://archive.today/03iAv

That is not the core of the elements of Chinese foreign policy that our sources find in this issue of *China Trends*. Instead, several trends stand out. One is the presentation of China as non-hegemonic, constructive, rational – in almost constant opposition to the behavior attributed to America or sometimes Western powers. **The international order is outdated, but the reason cited is not a hypothetical power shift from America and its allies to emerging and developing countries** (Chinese sources do not use the term of "Global South", just as they never used the term of "Third World" until Deng Xiaoping gave it a

new meaning after 1978). Indeed, the use of force, coercion, manipulation remain Western attributes. Instead, many Chinese authors point out the inability of the old leaders of the international order to solve multiple problems. From climate mitigation to economic governance and international security, China offers solutions that are a potential model and should position it at the heart of a new global order. Xi Jinping's new Global Security Initiative, far away from his rhetoric of struggle, is all about dialogue and consultation, the UN Charter, cooperative and sustainable security. With ASEAN – in some ways an ideal regional partner given its professed neutrality and China's leverage in Southeast Asia, one expert goes as far as to cite the building of "emotional trust".

Realism intervenes in two directions: one is the economic influence that China has gained at every level, including for one source as a "shaper" of global economic policies. But the other consists of warnings or reservations. These are minority views expressed by Da Wei, a Tsinghua University don, Zheng Yongnian, a well-known returned overseas expert, and, more surprisingly, Dong Chunling, a junior member of the think tank operating under the Ministry of State Security. Da Wei reminds readers that economic dependence goes both ways, and that the West has proven to be surprisingly united in front of the war on Ukraine. For Dong Chunling, US-China cooperation on terrorism has been useful, and much of the differences obstructing US-China cooperation today are ideological. Zheng Yongnian hints at a possible analogy between the Ukraine and South China Sea issues: a hardline attitude from China may usher in an "Asian Nato", and China should therefore make more efforts towards ASEAN.

Again, these are almost anecdotal reservations – although Tsinghua's Da Wei has the most factual and argued reasoning. Apart from these, one problem stands out: **our Chinese sources never go into specifics, and never outline a concrete and factual proposal from China**. Yet these exist – from the huge Belt and Road loans to China's rare but real pledges on environmental issues, or to its contributions to international organizations. China's experts, at least in their publications, appear focused on systemic issues and on broad-brush diplomatic initiatives. Clearly, these are directed at SCO members, BRICS and non-Western G20 participants: they do represent the largest constituency in the international community. Again, it is Da Wei who quite rightly points out the need for "positive" Chinese offers.

We often tend to confuse China's policy of influence and coercion, running through its immense trade leverage over exporters of primary products, debtors through large Chinese-run projects, and business lobbies with a genuine form of soft power. China exploits obvious gaps in Western offers to the world – and, one might add – too much Western reliance on the power of common values over practical interests. **Its own offer is much more woven with trade dependency and the perception that crossing China is likely to be punished: coercion plays an increasing role**. Aid is through loans rather than grants, vaccines are sold rather than given, contributions at times of crises are typically limited, especially if one considers the size of China's economy. When Xi Jinping announces an emergency humanitarian supply for developing countries at the September 2022 Shanghai Cooperation Summit, the total amount comes to €215 million, or 0.0000625% of China's foreign trade in 2021. Similar discrepancies could be pointed out in other areas.

While China's stand on international issues needs to be assessed seriously and has large consequences for the resolution of many global issues – or for the lack of a solution – the gap between rhetoric and actions remains huge.

There are accordingly good reasons for China's experts to avoid specifics, and to stick with figures of speech. While China's stand on international issues needs to be assessed seriously and has large consequences for the resolution of many global issues – or for the lack of a solution- the gap between rhetoric and actions remains huge, and is not only attributable to "red" or "wolf warrior" ideologies. **A strategic weakness in China's future global role is its almost sole focus on self-interest, and stinginess over international cooperation**. It remains to others, of course, to prove that they have a better offer to the world.

ABOUT
China Trends seeks understanding of China from Chinese language sources. In an era where the international news cycle is often about China, having a reality check on Chinese expressions often provides for more in-depth analysis of the logic at work in policies, and needed information about policy debates where they exist. China Trends is a quarterly publication by Institut Montaigne's Asia program, with each issue focusing on a single theme.

THE REMAINS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: SHAPING MULTILATERALISM OR WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS?

Greatly enhanced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the realization that inter-state war is back in Europe after decades of peace, **political discussions in Europe are currently focused on the implications of strategic competition and systemic rivalry**. This is also leading to a re-assessment of the existing international order: The EU is resuscitating negotiations for free trade agreements from India to Latin America as the mechanisms of the World Trade Organization are inadequate for the problems faced; under German leadership, the G7 is pushing for a Climate Club[5] to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement with a smaller group of ambitious countries. These developments embody greater skepticism towards the ability of global governance institutions to deliver under the current geopolitical reality.

Russia's war and Beijing's assistance through deference, disinformation, and diplomacy have left many Europeans in a gloomy state about the return of strongmen politics and the impact on the future of global institutions. At the same time, however, **the global nature of the multitude of parallel crises** – from food security to pandemics, mounting debt burdens in the developing world, and above all the already palpable effects of climate change – **would make collective global action and constructive and efficient governance processes beyond the nation-state a rational imperative**.

Chinese scholars are worried about how clubs and cliques dominated by the West and its partners and allies are increasingly undermining the global order. At the same time, an alternative multilateral reality – non-Western led, virtually indifferent to the internal organization of a state, and vocal in its pragmatic pushback against Western hegemony – has been emerging for a while: The recent summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Association (SCO) in Samarkand brought together Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping with the heads of state from Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and even India. **It serves as a particularly powerful demonstration of a new normal, of more fluid coalitions, and of the contest for winning over a large non-aligned or more isolated group**.[6] Simultaneously, Beijing is promoting the BRICS format, which according to Zhao Bin,[7] Executive Director of the Center for International Studies at Xi'an Jiaotong University, has already reshaped the global geo-economic landscape and triggered an important discussion about the role of emerging powers in global governance.

Does China still have an interest in global governance structures, or does the leadership under Xi Jinping regard them as obsolete in an era of great power competition, dominated by power maximization and nationalism? In a selection of recent journal articles, Chinese scholars argue that **Beijing is far from declaring global governance dead, but instead actively contributing to shaping and restructuring an order that is more attractive for China to**

JANKA OERTEL

Dr. Janka Oertel is the Director of the Asia Program at the European Council on Foreign Relations. She previously worked as a Senior Fellow in the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States' Berlin office, where she focused on transatlantic China policy including on emerging technologies, Chinese foreign policy and security in East Asia. Prior to joining GMF, she served as a program director at Körber Foundation's Berlin office.

5. "G7 Statement on Climate Club", *G7 Germany*, June 28, 2022, https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/974430/2057926/2a7cd9f10213a481924492942dd660a1/2022-06-28-g7-climate-club-data.pdf

6. Aydıntaşbaş et al., "Rogue NATO: The new face of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 16, 2022, https://ecfr.eu/article/rogue-nato-the-new-face-of-the-shanghai-cooperation-organisation/

7. Zhao Bin: „The Present and Future of Global Climate Politics (全球气候政治的现状与未来)", *People's Tribune*, August 08, 2022, http://archive.today/IInnJ

operate within and that reflects "Chinese wisdom" while offering "Chinese solutions".[8]

8. Ibid.

Global governance is dead – long live global governance?

With regard to the overall global governance system, Wang Dong and Li Zongfang[9] from Peking University argue within a research project for the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that the current system of global governance has failed to adequately adapt to the emerging reality. They see a new consensus emerging in "the international community": a new, more just and more "reasonable" (合理的) international order is needed. **In their view, however, changing the existing order is inherently difficult as the US and its partners and allies continue to dominate the structures**.

9. Wang Dong and Li Zongfang, "Promoting Changes in the Global Governance System and Demonstrating the Role of Responsible Powers (推动全球治理体系变革 展现负责任大国担当)", *Chinese Social Sciences Net*, August 26, 2022, http://archive.today/exp5w

While noting that **the US, impaired by domestic politics and increasingly self-isolated, has lost the ability to lead on issues of global governance**, Wang and Li also underscore another important aspect: "In order to further strengthen the Western governance model and maintain dominance over global governance", Western powers "stigmatize governance models and concepts proposed by emerging countries such as China that do not meet Western standards". For Wang and Li, this does not only happen directly, but also through bureaucratic structures underpinning institutions of global governance, which are still dominated by Western staff and procedures, thereby perpetuating existing power dynamics.

Necessity to lead

Wang and Li are convinced that if China wants change, it needs to lead a global effort by working with other major powers – including select Western governments. They employ the concept of the "international community", which has often been invoked by Western powers to claim broad support for initiatives. Chinese scholars (and officials for that matter) increasingly push back and challenge this notion, **stressing China's ability to have a majority of countries on its side when addressing imbalances in the global governance system**. For example, the number of countries that have signed up to the Belt and Road Initiative is cited as an indicator of this change.

Shi Bin, Adjunct Professor of International Politics at Nanjing University, makes a similar case for the need for reform and Chinese leadership, inherently informed by **what he describes as "a knowledge system based on China's cultural tradition" – rich in Chinese characteristics, but with global appeal**. He argues that because China has successfully developed, it can offer better options to developing countries wishing to maintain their independence.[10]

He argues that because China has successfully developed, it can offer better options to developing countries wishing to maintain their independence.

10. Shi Bin, "Chinese Exploration of International Order and Global Governance System Construction (国际秩序与全球治理体系建设的中国式探索)", *Aisixiang*, August 30, 2022, http://archive.today/t7OjJ

Climate Governance

This holds particularly true for the area of international climate governance. Zhao Bin, Associate Professor at Xi'an Jiaotong University's School of Marxism, argues that tensions loom large between traditional and emerging powers in this realm.[11] However, he cautions that it remains yet to be seen

11. Zhao Bin, "The Present and Future of Global Climate Politics (全球气候政治的现状与未来)", *People's Tribune*, August 08, 2022, http://archive.today/IInnJ

whether emerging powers can really become the initiators and creators of a new global order. **While China's growing status and influence have, in his view, injected a positive dynamic into the process, he remains overall less optimistic about the future of post-Glasgow climate governance in its current form**.

Zhao sees a clear link between China's domestic decarbonization agenda and its ability to shape the next phase of international climate diplomacy. He argues that by setting an example within the framework of Xi Jinping's "ecological civilization" concept, China can provide a model for other countries to follow. At the same time, **there is a clear recognition that China has a long way to go when it comes to reaching its ambitious development and decarbonization targets** and should thus, according to Zhao, "make good use of multilateral climate diplomacy platforms and mechanisms". This should occur in close cooperation with emerging economies and developing countries to ensure that, for the time being, Chinese interests are safeguarded within the existing frameworks.

Global economic governance

While China's ability to lead in international climate governance is still unproven, China's growing role in the global economy has long become a reality – with ever more obvious implications for the future of global economic governance.

While China's ability to lead in international climate governance is still unproven, China's growing role in the global economy has long become a reality.

According to Zhang Xue from the School of Politics and Public Administration at Soochow University (Suzhou), **China's ability to shape the global economic governance framework results from the ability to link domestic and international policy**.[12] In short, it implies using China's market size and domestic development as a stabilizing factor for the global economy and as a safeguard mechanism to avoid spillovers of domestic instability. This ability is regarded as a virtue in itself. He argues that China has now fully taken up the role of "shaper" of global economic governance and has made a massive contribution in this field because of its "strong decisive power and appeal". He also highlights that China has achieved such a contribution despite the "restraint by dominant countries in the current governance system" and the tendency towards de-globalization. According to Zhang, China has introduced an attractive set of solutions to improve the existing system, but this is not enough.

While he acknowledges the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO), he underscores Beijing's consistent focus on alternative and China-led mechanisms for developing countries, particularly with regard to "green and sustainable paths" towards realizing development. China's Belt and Road initiative is in this context seen as a comprehensive, competitive as well as complementary offer for a "new model of globalization".[13]

Zhang argues that the global governance approach put forward by China is inherently linked to its domestic governance model: **China is different from the West in its internal organization and thus has a different set of options**

12. Zhang Xue: China's Participation in Global Economic Governance in the New Era. Progress, Challenges and Directions of Efforts (新时代中国参与全球经济治理: 进展、挑战与努力方向)", *China International Studies*, March 15, 2022, https://archive.ph/uZqXR

13. Ibid.

to bring to the table. The terminology employed reflects the Chinese vocabulary of win-win cooperation, mutual benefit, and equality, but is inherently designed to distinguish Beijing's approach from that of the West, especially from that of the United States.

It's the system, stupid!

Zhang argues that systemic change is necessary for the rules of global economic governance to adjust to the changes in the international balance of power. **China's goals are thus not only in line with the aspirations of the developing world, but also "on the right side of history"**. According to Zhang, the US in cooperation with its allies and partners is trying to hold up a trend that would lessen their own grip on the rules for the global economy and are therefore using their privileged position to restrain China from trade deals to export controls that limit access to high technology. Enhanced cooperation between the US, Europe, and Japan as well as in the broader G7 context is seen by Zhang as particularly problematic in this regard as they counter Beijing's ability to effectively act as rule-shaper. In this sense, the US is accused of erecting borders between the developing and the developed world and constructing "ideological camps" in a reference to the notion of democracy vs. autocracy in current US policy discourse.

The US is accused of erecting borders between the developing and the developed world and constructing "ideological camps".

Zhang argues that for now, **China should focus on the G20 and BRICS, with the objective to build a strong coalition with non-Western partners to create a system that does not hem in China's ambitions and creates leverage for China's global rule and standard setting**. But as Zhang recognizes, systemic change must move slowly to avoid a backfire: particularly in the space of global economic governance, China has benefited greatly from the existing frameworks. Thus, nothing should be given up too fast, particularly not before the domestic market is fully developed and greater independence is achieved.

Keeping it real

This notion of not going too fast is generally supported by Da Wei, Director of the Center for International Security and Strategy (CISS) at Tsinghua University.[14] He underscores that "only if China remains fully connected to the world will it be able to complete its national renaissance and deal with the relationship between the unprecedented changes of the past century and the overall situation of national renewal". **He argues that while decoupling in the high-technology realm and on research and innovation is very likely, China cannot afford to be cut off from the developed world if it wants to maintain its economic development**.

He sees a bigger strategic picture at play and, within this, he thinks it will be hard to directly shift the US approach. **China, however, has the potential to shape the international environment within which Washington can make choices, making it harder for the US to restrain China**. Da argues that this could happen through slowing down the capacity to weaponize globalization and the securitization of economic and trade relations, but also through

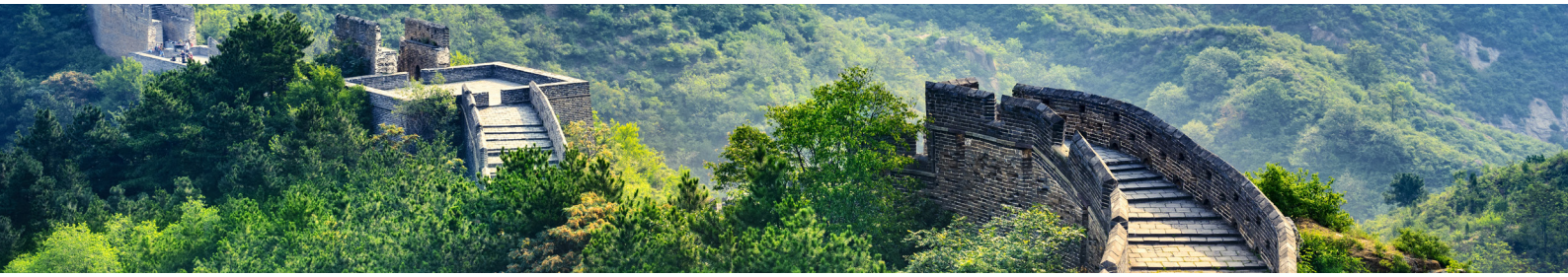
14. Da Wei: "China Needs to Look at the Big Picture and Stay Fully Connected to The World (中国要着眼于大势, 保持同全球充分连接)", *Fisnet*, June 08, 2022, http://archive.today/yEmPc

encouraging other developed countries to stay closely connected to China and the Chinese market through unilateral market openings.

Da maintains that it is not good enough to simply criticize the US for its actions, but that China actively needs to offer better alternatives. **While he sees among Chinese scholars a desire for all the current measures by Washington to fail, he argues that the reality is a different one:** he sees a resurgence of the US alliance model, a more assertive Europe when it comes to approaching China and a strengthened NATO coupled with an overall retreat into a less open and integrated world order; he regards none of these developments as beneficial for China.

Da maintains that it is not good enough to simply criticize the US for its actions, but that China actively needs to offer better alternatives.

The debate on how much the Chinese leadership's current approach will change the existing order and institutions of global governance has only just begun to really take hold in Western capitals. Chinese scholars seem torn between seizing the moment of opportunity to reshape the existing set-up in a way that better suits Chinese interests, at the same time they do acknowledge existing weaknesses that would become more evident if the existing mechanisms were not in place. **A slow but steady shift seems the most advisable strategy from their end**. However, slow and steady, careful and biding one's time does not seem to be too consistent with the Chinese approach under Xi Jinping. This will lead to significant frictions within the institutions of global governance in the months and years to come. Just how ready the "international community" is to embrace "Chinese solutions" and "Chinese wisdom" will then become more evident.



XI'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: RALLYING THE GLOBAL SOUTH AGAINST THE WEST

MATHIEU DUCHÂTEL

Dr. Mathieu Duchâtel is Director of the Asia Program at Institut Montaigne since January 2019. Before joining the Institute he was Senior Policy Fellow and Deputy Director of the Asia and China Program at the European Council of Foreign Relations (2015-2018), Senior Researcher and the Representative in Beijing of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2011-2015), Research Fellow with Asia Centre in Paris (2007-2011) and Associate Researcher based in Taipei with Asia Centre (2004-2007).

VIVIANA ZHU

Viviana Zhu is Research Fellow at Institut Montaigne's Asia Program and the editor of the Institute's quarterly publication, China Trends. She contributes to the Program's research work and closely follows EU-China relations and China's economic and technological developments. Before joining the Institute in January 2019, she was the Coordinator of the Asia Program of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative (GSI) is almost six months old. The concept does not get much traction in Europe, to say the least. Inside China, however, the Global Security Initiative receives a strong political push. Looking into Chinese commentaries regarding the nature, the meaning and the value of the GSI, it is striking that the initiative is first and foremost against features of the international order already being denounced by the Chinese foreign policy establishment: "Cold War mentality", group politics, bloc confrontation, double standards, unilateral sanctions, long-arm jurisdiction, unilateralism... **What China rejects is clear, and the desired strategic outcomes of such a posture are conceivable in terms of China's search for leadership in the "Global South"** - to use the term often heard in European foreign policy discussions, to which Chinese authors prefer "developing countries". What China proposes is less clear, as it is framed in general principles which Chinese foreign policy sometimes fails to respect.

What's in a name?

At the April 2021 Boao Forum for Asia, the Chinese leader delivered a keynote speech outlining China's "six commitments":[15]

- to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security;
- to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries;
- to abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter;
- to take the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously;
- to peacefully resolve differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation;
- and to maintain security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi published a paper on People's Daily **emphasizing the "GSI's practical significance and its values to our times (现实意义和时代价值)" by listing global challenges the world currently faces**.[16] Chinese experts are also weighing in, lauding the initiative as a Chinese solution to global security challenges. Given the strong push for the GSI in repetitive, vague and abstract language quoting Xi's seminal initial speech, one might consider the GSI "just another loose project", which

15. "Xi Jinping's Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Boao Forum for Asia (习近平在博鳌亚洲论坛2022年年会开幕式上的主旨演讲)", *State Council of the People's Republic of China*, April 21, 2022, https://archive.ph/D730x

16. Wang Yi, "Implementing Global Security Initiatives to Safeguard World Peace and Tranquility (落实全球安全倡议, 护世界和平安宁)", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, April 24, 2022, https://archive.ph/PJOVN

Given the strong push for the GSI in repetitive, vague and abstract language quoting Xi's seminal initial speech, one might consider the GSI "just another loose project".

follows the Global Development Initiative[17] evoked just six months earlier.

According to Wu Xiaodan, Researcher at the Xi Jinping Center for the Study of Diplomatic Thought, the GSI puts forward a collection of ideas and propositions for maintaining world peace, providing an important conceptual lead for maintaining international stability. But **this is far from the first initiative by Xi aiming at promoting versions of security communities on Chinese terms**. And indeed, Wu Xiaodan sees continuity with Xi's previous security visions: In 2014, Xi proposed to actively advocate a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable concept of security in Asia at the Asia-South Summit in Shanghai; in 2017, in his keynote speech at the United Nations in Geneva, Xi first mentioned the community of common human destiny, emphasizing adherence to common construction and sharing to build a universally secure world; in 2017, at the opening ceremony of the 86th plenary session of INTERPOL, Xi proposed a common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable concept of global security; in 2020, at the 20th meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Xi further pointed out the need to build a security community.[18]

17. The Global Development Initiative was proposed by Xi Jinping at the general debate of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly. It calls for bolstering confidence and jointly addressing global threats and challenges to build a better world for all. For more information, see "Xi Jinping Attends the General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and Delivers an Important Speech", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, September 22, 2021, https://archive.ph/w6owW

18. Wu Xiaodan, "Global Security Initiative: A Chinese Solution to Crack the Security Deficit (全球安全倡议：破解安全赤字的中国方案)", *Aisixiang*, June 20, 2022, https://archive.ph/wip/aij5j

What the GSI stands against

Reading Chinese experts, the line is clearly drawn between China's Global Security Initiative and the US-led international security order. And they put **a strong accent on what they consider a striking contrast between China's quest for a "community of common destiny (人类命运共同体) and Western countries' "repeated displays of selfishness (一再表现出来的自私自利)"**.[19]

The main contradiction Chinese experts seek to exploit is the old cleavage between developed countries and the developing world. According to Wu Xiaodan and Zhang Weipeng, both from the Xi Jinping Center for the Study of Diplomatic Thought, the vast number of developing countries are facing serious difficulties in economic and social development, and encounter an aggravation of internal inequalities. But at such a time, some developed countries are still **in pursuit of "absolute security (绝对安全")" and "exclusive security (独享安全)"**, seriously undermining the sovereignty, security and development interests of many developing countries. The argument that "absolute security does not exist" is a constant in Chinese foreign policy discourse.

In short, the developing world seeks development while the developed world plays power politics. Wu Xiaodan and Zhang Weipeng go on to argue that such "bullying of the weak states by the West (西方以恃强凌弱)" has triggered discontent and opposition from more countries and people around the world. In that context, **the GSI provides a path to abandon and transcend Western geopolitical theory (对西方地缘政治理论的扬弃超越)**.[20]

In the same line of thinking, Lin Limin, Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies, makes a strong argument about the unequal distribution of world wealth. He sees it as the root cause of most prominent security challenges, from energy crisis to terrorism, from global warming to nuclear proliferation,

19. Xu Bu, et al., "Theoretical Significance and Implementation Path of Global Security Initiative (全球安全倡议的重大理论意义与实施路径笔谈)", *China International Studies*, July 15, 2022, https://archive.ph/4WbGm

20. Wang Gong, Liu Jun, "The Core Essence of the Global Security Initiative, its Theoretical Innovation and World Significance (全球安全倡议的核心要义、理论创新与世界意义)", *China International Studies*, May 15, 2022, https://archive.ph/kSPU7

from environmental pollution to migration trend. He also notes that compared with the various types of security initiatives and practices that have been advocated by the US, Britain, and other Western powers to **"seek the long-term stability of their own hegemonic order (以谋求自身霸权秩序长治久安)"**, the Global Security Initiative is not based on China's selfish interests, but it seeks to achieve security, peace, development, and prosperity for all mankind, and fundamentally solve security dilemmas.

The GSI also appears to stand against what Zhang Chao and Wu Baiyi, researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), see as a trend towards "pan-securitization (泛安全化)", which they warn against.[21] They note that since the end of the Cold War, a large number of non-traditional security issues have been incorporated into the scope of national security policies, so that they have reached an all-inclusive level (几乎无所不包的程度). Echoing this view, Wang You and Liu Jun, researchers from East China Normal University, argue that **a few countries are acting recklessly in the name of security**. This may sound as a description of Xi Jinping's approach to national security (or even Russia's), but the target is the spread of "protectionist" thinking and action in the West, which creates obstacles to Chinese trade surpluses and access to foreign technology. In such a context, Zhang and Wu invite the international community to vigorously fight against existing obstacles and resistances.

The GSI also appears to stand against what Zhang Chao and Wu Baiyi see as a trend towards "pan-securitization (泛安全化)", which they warn against.

21. Zhang Chao, Wu Baiyi, "The 'Pan-Securitization Trap' and Beyond ('泛安全化陷阱'及其跨越)", *Aisixiang*, May 2, 2022, https://archive.ph/LOm1b

A convenient system of relativism

Xi Jinping's GSI speech was pronounced in the obvious context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The GSI does not suggest immediate solutions to the war, but it provides a Chinese perspective on its causes, which can be described as a posture of absolute relativism.

Chinese experts constantly argue that the situation in Ukraine reveals the urgency of strengthening global security and exposes the deep problems with the current international security order. Fu Mengzi, Vice President of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), states that **the confrontation between the US/Western camp and the non-Western camp is not so much the result of changes in the global balance of power, especially in link to the rise of China**. Instead, he sees the result of an inherited Western mindset. This is a familar Chinese narrative by now, best summarized by Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Zhanshu[22] during his visit to Moscow, which blames the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the US and NATO expansion.

22. "Li Zhanshu: China Fully Understands the Protection of Russian Interests in Ukraine (Ли Чжаньшу: КНР с полным пониманием относится к защите РФ своих интересов на Украине)", *Duma TV*, September 9, 2022, https://archive.ph/WYU4s

But alongside this repetition of the Russian narrative, there is another perspective, which toys with neutrality. Under GSI, China commits to uphold "indivisible security", and to "oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security". Using this political principle as an analytical framework to understand the real world, Wang Yuzhu, Director of China-ASEAN Research Institute at Guangxi University, **places Russia and Ukraine on equal feet, arguing that they both "think that they are fighting for their legitimate interest", but in the end, they are both "in the state of war, and being harmed by war (都同样处在战争状态中, 都被战争所伤害)**.[23]

23. Wang Yuzhu, "Awareness and Action for Building a Community of Human Destiny (共建人类命运共同体的认知与行动)", *Aisixiang*, October 2, 2022, https://archive.ph/wip/ul5qE

The same relativist principle places the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the retaliatory Western sanctions on the same level, as two sides of the same coin. In Wang Yi's words, "international practices have fully demonstrated that neither war nor sanction is a fundamental solution to disputes" and "the international community should unequivocally support all efforts conducive to peaceful settlement of crises". According to Wu Xiaodan and Zhang Weipeng, after the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, the US united with its allies and partners to impose all-round sanctions on Russia in the fields of finance, energy and assets, which seriously damaged the supply chain of the global industrial chain and threatened global food security, and its deep-rooted effects continue to emerge, with negative chain effects seriously impacting the world economic recovery process.[24] Again, **a Chinese attempt to claim moral leadership in the Global South by blaming development challenges on power games played by the West** (rather than on Russian imperialism in this particular case) can be detected.

24. Wu Xiaodan and Zhang Weipeng, "Global Security Initiative: Connotation, Meaning and Practice (全球安全倡议：内涵、意义与实践)", *China's Diplomacy in the New Era*, August 8, 2022, https://archive.ph/ywJtq

A recipe to co-exist peacefully with the US in Asia and in the world?

When coming to US-China relations, Dong Chunling, Assistant Research Fellow at CICIR, suggests that if China and the United States can both consider their relationship from the bigger picture of common development and security of all mankind, they would find more strategic consensus and common responsibility, allowing both to flourish (各美其美、美美与共).[25] Her reference point is US-China cooperation on antiterrorism after 9/11, which not only made a contribution to the global fight against terrorism, but also improved US-China bilateral relations. **She even characterises US-China differences in ideology, development paths and social systems as "old problems (老问题) that should be contained so that they do not become the sources of "new contradictions" (新矛盾)"**.

25. Dong Chunling, "Implications of the "Global Security Initiative" for U.S.-China Cooperation on Global Security Governance (全球安全倡议"对中美全球安全治理合作的启示)", *CFISnet*, May 9, 2022, https://archive.ph/csAX8

Han Aiyong, Associate Professor at the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party, makes reference to China's neighborhood diplomacy when outlining the importance of the Global Security Initiative.[26] **He sees in China's regional environment a striking contrast between China's neighboring regional cooperation, with a multitude of economic cooperation structures on the one hand, and the lack of a security architecture that meets regional realities and the needs of all parties on the other**. This contradiction (rather than the realist logic of balancing) explains, according to him, the growing defense spending in China's neighborhood. He argues that the US led security mechanism structures China's neighboring regions, with the highest degree of institutionalisation, strongest capacity for collective action, and longest history, but in disconnect with the prevailing security problems in the region. The best solution, in his option, is to build a functioning regional security architecture under the guidance of the Global Security Initiative. He refrains from outlining how apart from referring back to the commitments outlined by the GSI, but one can assume that he suggests a US withdrawal from Asian security issues.

He argues that the US led security mechanism structures China's neighboring regions, but in disconnect with the prevailing security problems in the region.

26. Han Aiyong, "Global Security Initiative and Building a New Architecture for Peripheral Security (全球安全倡议与构建周边安全新架构)", *China International Studies*, July 15, 2022, https://archive.ph/ceOLd

The long way from political principles to actionable policies

It is unclear how GSI might be materialized, to the point that feasibility may not be the most relevant framework to analyze the GSI. Most Chinese papers on the Global Security Initiative highlight the undeniable differences between developed and developing countries when forming their respective security policies. But apart from suggesting each side to embrace the Chinese vision, the GSG does not outline concrete solutions to the current differences and fails to explain how the world should collectively move towards the Chinese proposed model.

The Global Security Initiative might appear weak, given the lack of practical steps. But **rather than a concrete roadmap, it is a political message to the Global South, which seeks to exploit perceived Western mistakes**. Two points present in the Chinese narrative deserve attention in this regard, as they reveal the strategic interests and a deep-rooted hyperrealist vision of the international order behind the cooperative language of the GSI.

First, while condemning the unfair US-led international security order and proposing China's alternative vision, China is also creating two confrontational camps that will likely cause further security instability. **While it stresses the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security (我们要坚持共同、综合、合作、可持续的安全观), China actively fosters global divergence**.

And second, while advocating for equality of power of each states, Han Aiyong also points out **the need of large states to be respected for their status (大国对自己地位受到尊重的需求)**, and urges China to study how to gather its neighboring countries and form a collective action. Fu Mengzi also notes that China should prioritize the management of the neighborhood and enhance China's strategic space (做厚做强战略空间依托).[27]

27. Fu Mengzi, "Global Security Initiative: China's Answer to Challenges (全球安全倡议: 应对挑战的中国答案)", *CFISnet*, September 6, 2022, https://archive.ph/OhmYm

China's quest for an international "power of discourse" is in the end about strategic competition with the United States, rather than about the development interests of the Global South. In that sense, the GSI appears to be another division to be launched on the ideological battlefield to rally the developing world against China's main rival, in a logic of power maximization.

The GSI appears to be another division to be launched on the ideological battlefield to rally the developing world against China's main rival, in a logic of power maximization.

LOVE THY NEIGHBORS: POLICY ACTIONS AND RHETORIC IN CHINA'S SOUTHEAST ASIA POLICY

Introduction

Southeast Asia has become the key contesting ground between China's neighborhood diplomacy and the US's Indo-Pacific Strategy. **In October 2013, Xi Jinping convened the first-ever "neighborhood diplomacy" work conference in China, marking the increasing diplomatic importance China places upon its neighboring regions**. Among the neighboring regions, China identified Southeast Asia as a "high priority" (优先方向).[28] On the other hand, the *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* released by the Biden administration in February 2022 specifies that the US "objective is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, [the US's] allies and partners, and the interests and values [they] share".[29] Clearly, Southeast Asia is right in the middle of the "Indo-Pacific".

The growing importance and saliency of neighborhood diplomacy are not lost to China's academia too. In the past few years, at least three academic institutions have set up research centers on neighborhood diplomacy (Fudan University, Yunnan University, and Renmin University of China). Chinese scholarly writings on neighborhood diplomacy have been featured more frequently now.

As claimed by Liu Qing of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), the essence of the neighborhood policy is "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness" (亲诚惠容).[30] The idea purportedly combines the wisdom of Marxism and inspiration from the diplomatic practices of Imperial China. The "Marxist" element in it is essentially about the grasp of "objective laws" (客观规律) in the observable world and the "dialectical thinking" (辩证思维), which informs a world-view that thrives on contradictions. Therefore, **recognizing lingering conflicts or contentions between China and some of its neighbors while promoting the above-mentioned essence of the neighborhood policy is not contradictory to China**. Zhang Guihong and Yu Jiao of Fudan University highlight the institutional approach of China's neighborhood policy where China actively advocates and leads in constructing "new types of neighborhood relations" while promoting new era diplomacy with its "status advantage" ("身份优势").[31] Their reading of China's privileged position may be at odds with Liu's advocacy for a "sincere and friendly" Chinese approach. Both sentiments are true under different circumstances,

Hoo Chiew Ping

Dr. Hoo Chiew-Ping is Senior Lecturer in Strategic Studies and International Relations at the National University of Malaysia (UKM). She is concurrently a member of the Consultative Council on Foreign Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia; Adjunct Lecturer at the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College and the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations of Malaysia.

Ngeow Chow Bing

Dr. Ngeow Chow-Bing is Director of the Institute of China Studies at the University of Malaya. In addition, he has also been appointed a Special Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2017-2020), and served as a delegate of the Southeast Asian Young Leaders Programme (SEAYLP) at the International Institute for Strategic Studies' 17th Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018.

28. Chong Qing, "ASEAN is a Priority Direction of China's Neighborhood Diplomacy (中国的周边外交东盟是优先方向)", *Chinanews*, October 09, 2013, https://archive.ph/VY9ia

29. For the full text of the "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States", see the White House website: https://archive.ph/B6GGD

30. Liu Qing, "Theoretical Innovation and Practice of China's Neighborhood Diplomacy in the New Era (新时代中国周边外交的理论创新与实践)", *International Studies*, March 10, 2022, https://archive.ph/QUFAb

31. Zhang Guihong and Yu Jiao, "Neighboring International Organizations and China's Neighborhood Diplomacy (周边国际组织与中国周边外交)", *Journal of Wuhan University of Science and Technology*, June 2022, https://archive.ph/Aq5iP

China actively advocates and leads in constructing "new types of neighborhood relations" while promoting new era diplomacy with its "status advantage" ("身份优势").

presenting an enigma of China's policy rhetoric and actions. Chinese scholars, however, do recognize the significant challenges China faces. For example, Wang Gaoyang, of Zhengzhou University, realistically assesses that cyber security cooperation with China's neighbors is still in its infancy, riddled with challenges.[32]

32. Wang Gaoyang, "China's Cybersecurity Cooperation with Neighboring Countries: A New Agenda for Neighborhood Diplomacy(中国与周边国家网络安全合作：周边外交新议程)" *Socialism Studies*, May 19, 2021, https://archive.ph/tSoaj

Chinese Perspectives on ASEAN and Southeast Asia as part of its "Neighborhood"

Chinese scholars largely echo the official position whereby ASEAN is a high foreign policy priority. Although most analysts in the Western world will highlight the contentious issues between China and ASEAN countries, most notably the South China Sea dispute, **Chinese scholars generally prefer to portray positive developments between China and ASEAN/ASEAN member-states**. As we shall see below, some recent developments are particularly encouraging and would suggest that China's neighborhood diplomacy towards ASEAN and ASEAN countries has borne fruit.

I. China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

The upgrading of the "Strategic Partnership" between China and ASEAN to the level of "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" in November 2021, in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue relations, is highlighted as a milestone achievement by Chinese analysts. Wei Ling, former Head of the Institute of Asian Studies at China Foreign Affairs University, contended that in the past 30 years, China-ASEAN cooperation has been the driving force behind East Asian regional integration, the foundation of peace and prosperity, and the core of East Asian regionalism. In this context, Wei speaks highly of the 2021 Joint Statement that established China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.[33] She argues that the Joint statement exemplified not only China's best efforts to take care of the concerns and interests of ASEAN, but also China's commitment to certain norms and rules in the region. China-ASEAN cooperation will proceed based on normative principles, mutual benefits and consensus, and **this is the kind of consultative strategic partnership that will build a "consultative regional order" (以协商型战略伙伴构建协商型地区秩序)**.[34]

33. For the full text of the joint statement, see the ASEAN website: https://archive.ph/Cs048

Luo Shengrong, Researcher at Yunnan University, believes that the China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will be crucial in the construction of a China-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny.[35] So far, only some ASEAN member-states (such as Laos and Cambodia) have endorsed China's normative vision of Community of Common Destiny, but Luo seems to believe that with sufficient political trust between China and ASEAN slowly being built up, such an idea will eventually be accepted. **He argues that the China-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny emphasizes a kind of "emotional trust" (一种情感信任), whereby the self-determined sustainable developments of ASEAN and China are infused together**, with both sides committed to avoiding zero-sum games and selfish narrow actions, which will bring about truly win-win cooperation and shared destiny.

34. Wei Ling, "Re-Upgrading Partnership: ASEAN Concerns, Chinese Responsibilities and Regional Order (伙伴关系再升级：东盟关切、中国责任与地区秩序)", *China International Studies*, November 15, 2021, https://archive.ph/dofum

35. Luo Shengrong, "Building China-ASEAN Political Mutual Trust: Historical Experience and the Path to Enhancement (构建中国–东盟政治互信：历史经验与提升路径)", *Fudan Institute of Belt and Road & Global Governance*, April 17, 2022, https://archive.ph/nd2vl#selection-605.4-605.25

II. Open Regionalism and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific

Chinese analysts also prefer to describe China-ASEAN cooperation as embodying open, inclusive, and to a certain extent, "Asian-style" regionalism, that such cooperation is not targeted against any third party and is truly based on equality, consultation, and mutual benefit.[36] **The "Indo-Pacific" strategy put forward by the US and its allies, in contrast, is unsurprisingly criticized as exemplifying divisive and exclusivist "Cold-War mentality."** In this context, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) garnered praise from both the Chinese government and analysts as truly exemplifying open regionalism.

36. Sun Wenzhu, "Infusing positive energy into East Asia's development with open regionalism (以开放的区域主义为东亚发展注入正能量)", *China Institute of International Studies*, August 9, 2022, https://archive.ph/D5d4k

China first endorsed AOIP in the above-mentioned Joint Statement in November 2021, taking note that AOIP is an "ASEAN's independent initiative, being open and inclusive... intended to enhance ASEAN's Community building process". China reiterated its support for AOIP in July 2022 in the China-Indonesia Joint Statement, and most recently in August 2022, in the Position Paper on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture. **The Position Paper aims to reassure ASEAN of the essentially benign intention and supportive positions of China towards ASEAN.**[37]

Chinese analysts also prefer to describe China-ASEAN cooperation as embodying open, inclusive, and to a certain extent, "Asian-style" regionalism.

37. "Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, August 4, 2022, https://archive.ph/D5mLr

Chinese analysts also praise AOIP's "Indo-Pacific" vision which focuses on cooperation and pursuance of common prosperity rather than confrontation. Sun Wenzhu, a researcher at China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), writes that **the norms and values of AOIP are in line with China's long-held vision for neighborhood diplomacy (与中国长期坚持的周边外交理念相契合).** In practical terms, the policy objectives of AOIP can also be manifested in the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation between China and ASEAN.[38] Similarly, Du Lan, another researcher at CIIS, takes note of the "diluting" (淡化) effect of AOIP on the "exclusivist and confrontational" Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US, and how AOIP presents strategic opportunities to further enhance China-ASEAN cooperation.[39]

38. Sun Whenzhu, "Infusing positive energy into East Asia's development with open regionalism (以开放的区域主义为东亚发展注入正能量)", *China Institute of International Studies*, August 9, 2022, https://archive.ph/D5d4k

39. Du Lan, "New Developments and Future Challenges in China-ASEAN Relations under the Epidemic (疫情下中国—东盟关系的新进展与未来挑战)", *China International Studies*, December 31, 2021, https://archive.ph/fFAfz

III. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and China-ASEAN Economic Relations

In 2020, ASEAN became China's largest trading partner. Also in the same year, 15 economies, including all member-states of ASEAN and China, successfully concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. These developments further testified to the growing economic and strategic importance of ASEAN to China and the rationale for placing ASEAN as the "high priority" of China's neighborhood diplomacy. Geo-strategically speaking, **RCEP is viewed as a critical breakthrough in the "Indo-Pacific" encirclements that China faces**. Xiang Haoyu, a CIIS-affiliated researcher, writes that "the various regional cooperation mechanisms under the Asia-Pacific framework, represented foremost by RCEP, still has enormous vitality (以RCEP为代表的亚太架构下的各种区域合作机制有着强大生命力). Ensuring solidarity, cooperative development, and resisting bloc-based confrontations generally appeal to the regional countries".[40]

40. Xiang Haoyu, "Handling China's Neighborhood Diplomacy with Strategic Determination and Patience (以战略定力和耐心运筹我周边外交)", *China Institute of International Studies*, August 24, 2022, http://archive.today/2AAuo

Securing and consolidating China-ASEAN economic ties also hedges against attempts to isolate or decouple from China. Wang Jian, Director of the Institute of International Relations at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences,

is confident of the future prospects of China's economic integration with the Asian region. **He notes that 18 out of the top 22 intermediate goods traded in Asia critically depend on China**.[41] Furthermore, China's trade relations with ASEAN are at the heart of trade in Asia (中国与东盟的贸易关系在亚洲贸易中处于核心地位). Asia will continue to be the world's central manufacturing hub and China will not be relegated to secondary status. RCEP will further consolidate the "Asianization" of global trade.[42]

IV. South China Sea Dispute and Security Cooperation between China and ASEAN

Wu suggested that China should "guide (引导) or pressure (倒逼) the claimant states to shift from unilateral oil and gas operations to joint/ cooperative development with China."

The South China Sea dispute is the most critical challenge to China's neighborhood diplomacy towards ASEAN countries, and undermines China's diplomatic efforts towards ASEAN. Chinese analysts underline a low level of strategic trust between China and ASEAN countries (especially the claimant states), and correspondingly also a meagre level of security cooperation between them. Wu Shicun, the founding Director of National Institute of South China Sea Studies, reckons that **the South China Sea dispute is the most significant impediment to greater security cooperation between China and ASEAN**, but mostly blames "outsider powers' interferences" and the opportunistic behaviors of some claimant states for the persistent tensions in the South China Sea.[43] While Wu has often argued for more practical cooperation with the claimant states as a means for increased trust, he has also not shied away from advocating a hard-line approach. In an interview, Wu suggested that China should "guide (引导) or pressure (倒逼) the claimant states to shift from unilateral oil and gas operations to joint/cooperative development with China".[44] Any use of "pressure," however, will certainly further alienate the claimant states.

In a recent article, Zheng Yongnian, Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in Shenzhen and one of the most influential scholars in China, argues that as important as the South China Sea issue is, it should be viewed and understood by China in a larger macro context. In his view, China's neighborhood policy should not only be based on openness, but also facilitate relationship-building with the smaller states in the region. As an example, **he cites Ukraine's turn towards NATO due to its insecurity as an example of "inviting a wolf into its own house" (引狼入室)**, which in turn caused Russia's immense insecurity and led to the current war. In this regard, the advice he gave to China is to ensure it keeps a good rapport with Southeast Asian countries over the South China Sea issues to prevent further deterioration of trust, which will lead the smaller states to shift to a more pro-US stance as illustrated by the Ukraine case. He implies that without ample flexibility and the heart of a great power (大国胸怀), China may unintentionally contribute to the creation of an Asian NATO which will change the regional status quo and stability. In effect, Zheng appears to argue that it is time for China to be more accommodative towards ASEAN claimant states and back down from the hard-line position that has caused so much distrust in the region.[45]

41. This figure is cited from the *Asian Economic Outlook and Integration Progress Annual Report 2021*, released in the 2021 Bo'ao Forum, pages 62 and 64. The report is available for download here: https://english.boaoforum.org/newsDetial.html?navId=6&itemId=2&permissionId=235&detailId=5469. Among the 18 intermediate goods are rubber tires, steel materials, telecommunication equipment parts, wires and cables, lighting equipment and accessories, and so forth.

42. Wang Jian, "New Changes in China's Neighborhood Situation and the Construction of a Community of Destiny (中国周边形势新变化与周边命运共同体构建)", *Aisixiang*, February 5, 2022, http://archive.today/a8Oxp

43. Wu Shicun, "Filling the "Security Cooperation Gap" is the Only Way to Enhance China-ASEAN Relations in the New Era (补齐"安全合作短板"是新时代提升中国-东盟关系的不二法门)", *Aisixiang*, January 1, 2022, http://archive.today/mc8XK

44. Wu Shicun, "Stability Remains a Priority in South China Sea in 2022 (2022年南海作为继续"稳"字当先)", *Sina*, January 19, 2022, https://archive.ph/YAYAP

45. Zheng Yongnian, "How China Handles Relations with Small Countries (中国如何处理与小国的关系)", *Aisixiang*, May 27, 2022, https://archive.ph/oFvSa

Conclusion

Despite these Chinese scholars' writings that further elucidate China's neighborhood policy towards ASEAN, **China's actions however don't always and necessarily match with the policy rhetoric and scholarly writings**. In fact, in the past few years, as indicated in the elite surveys conducted by the Singapore-based think tank Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), the level of ASEAN elites' trust towards China had declined, and more and more of them see China as a security concern, if not yet an outright security threat. [46]

Though Southeast Asian countries often express their preferred strategic choice of not taking sides, **China does elicit stronger suspicions from the majority of the ASEAN Member States, due to the Mekong River and the South China Sea issues**. It is classic *realpolitik* that the US is seen as a balancing factor against China in the risk-mitigating strategies of the smaller states. Moreover, the US has a proven record of being a reliable military and security cooperation partner, and generally has earned the trust of the countries in the region. ASEAN member-states also pursue multiple partnerships. With the emergence of South Korea as a credible middle power partner, Southeast Asian countries also favor Korea over China when it comes to major power cooperation.

China needs to put more action into its pledges, be more accommodative, and shoulder greater responsibilities.

China, henceforth, still has a long way to go in building trust and goodwill with ASEAN. Its neighborhood diplomacy, with ASEAN as the high priority, is welcomed in the region. But China needs to put more action into its pledges, be more accommodative, and shoulder greater responsibilities.

46. Seah, S. et al., "The State of Southeast Asia: 2022", *ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute*, February 16, 2022, https://archive.ph/Cs048

INSTITUT
MONTAIGNE

Our mission is to craft public policy proposals aimed at shaping political debates and decision making in France and Europe. We bring together leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds - government, civil society, corporations and academia - to produce balanced analyses, international benchmarking and evidence-based research. We promote a balanced vision of society, in which open and competitive markets go hand in hand with equality of opportunity and social cohesion. Our strong commitment to representative democracy and citizen participation, on the one hand, and European sovereignty and integration, on the other, form the intellectual basis for our work. Institut Montaigne is funded by corporations and individuals, none of whom contribute to more than 1% of its annual budget.

Members

Joseph Dellatte
Research Fellow for Climate, Energy, and Environment - Asia Program
jdellatte@institutmontaigne.org

Mathieu Duchâtel
Director of the Asia Program
mduchatel@institutmontaigne.org

François Godement
Senior Advisor for Asia
fgodement@institutmontaigne.org

Claire Lemoine
Program Officer - Asia Program
clemoine@institutmontaigne.org

Viviana Zhu
Research Fellow - Asia Program & Editor of China Trends
vzhu@institutmontaigne.org

About the program

Institut Montaigne's Asia Program aims at formulating policy recommendations for France and Europe that respond to the trends and the challenges emanating from Asia. The program's activities include thematic policy research projects, track 1.5 dialogues and discussion formats with partners in Asia, Europe and the United States, and analytical commentary on Asian affairs. These activities lead to in-depth advocacy work with public and private sector decision-makers. The program's research themes include the political, economic and international trajectory of China, EU-China relations, European foreign policy vis-à-vis our partners in the Indo-Pacific, digital issues and the geopolitics of technology, and climate, energy and environmental policies.

Sign up to our newsletter on the website!