



ISSN 23939729

# CLAWS

No. 97

2022

MANEKSHAW PAPER

## **China's Global Security Initiative: A Preliminary Assessment**

Anil Jain

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

**Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, MC**, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



*Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC  
1914-2008*

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw  
**Photographs courtesy:** The Manekshaw family/FORCE.

# **CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

Anil Jain



Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



BLOOMSBURY

Director General CLAWS : Lt Gen (Dr.) Ranbir Singh, PVSM, AVSM<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, YSM, SM (Retd)  
Editorial Team: CLAWS

ISSN 23939729



Centre for Land Warfare Studies

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Phone: +91-11-25691308; Fax: +91-11-25692347

Email: landwarfare@gmail.com; Website: www.claws.in

CLAWS Army No. 33098

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent Think Tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional & sub-conventional conflicts and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

**CLAWS Vision:** To establish CLAWS as a leading Think Tank in policy formulation on Land Warfare, National Security and Strategic Issues.

© 2022, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this paper are based on the analysis of materials accessed from open sources and are the personal views of the author. The contents, therefore, may not be quoted or cited as representing the views or policy of the Government of India, or the Ministry of Defence (MoD) (Army), or the Centre for Land Warfare Studies. Attributability of the contents lies purely with the author.

All rights reserved.

Printed in India by

Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt. Ltd.

DDA Complex LSC, Building No. 4, 2nd Floor

Pocket 6 & 7, Sector – C

Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070

www.bloomsbury.com

# Contents

Important Elements of Xi Jinping's Keynote Address	I
The Idea of Indivisible Security	3
Contours of China's Global Security Initiative	5
China's Ardent Espousal of the Initiative	7
Precursors to the Global Security Initiative	9
China's Global Initiatives in the Last Decade	9
2013: Belt and Road Initiative	10
2020: Global Initiative on Data Security	11
2021: Global Development Initiative	12
Progress on Chinese Global Initiatives	12
China's Quest for Global Power Projection Capability	13
Preliminary Assessment of the Global Security Initiative	14
The Global Security Initiative and India	20
Conclusion	24
Notes	24



## **CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

On April 21, 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2022. The theme of the Conference was “The World in COVID-19 & Beyond: Working Together for Global Development and Shared Future”. Considering the import of Xi’s oration, the theme was distinctly felicitous. It was during the course of his address, that Xi declared to the world, China’s Global Security Initiative (GSI).<sup>1</sup> Thus far, international reaction to this novel enterprise by China has been surprisingly muted, evoking memories of a similar initial low-key response to the gargantuan Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by Xi in 2013. The principal reason for this relatively quiet reception, of course, could be that the contours of this initiative have not been clearly articulated by China as yet. Depending upon the *modus operandi* which China employs to follow up on this proposal, the global community would require to formulate its responses. Prior to an examination of the propounded initiative, however, it would be expedient to identify vital aspects of Xi’s speech, as that would assist in understanding the context and purport of the Chinese stratagem.

### **Important Elements of Xi Jinping’s Keynote Address**

Xi Jinping’s speech was titled “Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation”.<sup>2</sup> The English translation of his address has been taken from the official website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

The first major component of Xi’s speech was his perspective on humanity’s shared future. Xi emphasised the importance of nations working together to build a bright future through “win-win cooperation.” Within the advocated conviviality of international cooperation, however, two issues stood out. First was the prerequisite, in Xi’s opinion, for the world to work together to promote economic recovery. Second, Xi pointed out the need for an open world economy and the stability of global industrial and supply chains. Later during his talk, Xi mentioned, quite unreservedly, China’s economic strengths and the direction of her vision, which would enable the accomplishment of global economic development.

Another constituent of Xi’s vision of the future world was the importance of global stability and security for prosperity and development. Herein, Xi mentioned the concept of “indivisible security” and how the “Cold War mentality” would only serve to destroy the global peace framework. Xi was

quite vocal about how bloc confrontation would exacerbate 21st century security challenges. While Xi did not, at any stage, explicitly mention any particular alliance or grouping of nations, the innuendo to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), was quite apparent.

A topical issue that Xi touched upon obliquely, was the international isolation of Russia, after its Ukraine invasion. Xi stated that in today's interconnected world, unilateralism, decoupling of specific nations, and forging "small circles" along ideological lines were self-defeating. The allusion to Western sanctions imposed on Russia and the criticism of China's continuing tacit support to Russia's actions was clearly evident. The fact that it was Russia which was guilty of "excessively pursuing self-interests" and not "honouring international rule of law," issues mentioned by Xi during his speech, was largely ignored. This part of Xi's speech was possibly intended to justify to the international community, China's support to the Russian invasion of Ukraine – an act which has attracted almost universal excoriation.

The second important component of Xi's speech was the importance given to Asia for a prosperous and peaceful world. Xi proposed that Asia must be the anointed fulcrum of international activities, a driver, of sorts, for world peace, growth, and cooperation. He described three aspects that were germane to this development. One was that peace in Asia could only be derived by the joint efforts of its constituent nations and not as a consequence of external magnanimity, thus dismissing any role whatsoever, towards peace and stability in Asia, of any nation which was not Asian. The second was the need for greater Asian economic cooperation, and a more open pan-Asian market, wherein Xi spoke of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Chinese driven regional connectivity initiatives. Another aspect mentioned by Xi, was the centrality of regional Asian order and unity, again emphasising the irrelevance of external, non-Asian influences.

This was certainly not the first occasion that Xi had expounded on the "Asia for Asians" concept. He brought up this issue at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, way back in 2014. He had then called for the creation of a "new regional security cooperation architecture", and said that "China would take a leading role in exploring the creation of an Asian security partnership program."<sup>3</sup> Even then, Xi had proffered a different vision for Asia, based on an "all-inclusive regional security framework", rather than separate alliances with external players like the United States (US). Xi had then specifically stated that Asian problems



must be solved by the Asians themselves, without the need for extra-regional interference.

The third, and possibly the most important component of Xi's speech was his enumeration of the strengths of a virtuous and munificent China. He made a special mention of China's honouring its commitments, to provide over 2 billion doses of vaccines through the Covid pandemic. Xi also said that "China was working with the international community on solid implementation of the Global Development Initiative," another overarching enterprise, which was proposed by Xi in September 2021, during his address to the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>4</sup> Next, Xi described the "resilience, potential, and long-term sustainability" of the Chinese economy. Xi concluded by reiterating China's commitment to follow the "path of peaceful development, build world peace and defend the international order".

Before moving forward to discuss the contours of the Chinese initiative, examining the principle of 'indivisible security' might prove beneficial, particularly as this concept appears to have occupied centrestage in global deliberations in the recent past.

## **The Idea of Indivisible Security**

The genesis of the idea of "indivisible security" goes back to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act—"an agreement that was signed by 35 nations and included principles covering political and military issues, territorial integrity, the definition of borders, and peaceful settlement of disputes".<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, the phrase was mentioned in several documents concerning international security arrangements. Simplistically, the principle of "indivisible security" suggests that the security of a nation is inextricably linked to the security of other nations in its vicinity and thus cannot be viewed in isolation. The collective security concept then implies that if actions of one nation threaten another nation's security, the principle of "indivisible security" comes into play. Therefore, no state should strengthen its security at the expense of another.<sup>6</sup> However, over the years, interpretation of this phrase has differed widely between the Russians and the US along with Western European nations.

In Russia's understanding, "indivisible security" implied the involvement of Russia in the security decision-making process of entire Europe. As far as Russia was concerned, any expansion of NATO, that affected its core security interests, could not be made without its consent or it would be justified in taking whatever action it deemed fit, to prevent such plans from taking shape. This is the hypothesis that forms the foundation of Russia's justification for its invasion of Ukraine. Contrastingly, newly liberated Soviet satellites saw

the concept as an expression of their sovereign right to make their security arrangements, including joining the European Union (EU) or NATO.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Western nations laid more emphasis on individual security. These nations considered cooperation on security, economic issues, and human rights as equally important constituents of the larger idea of comprehensive security. In this context, indivisibility meant, above all, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>8</sup>

In the recent past, Chinese diplomats have raised the issue of “indivisible security” frequently in international fora or during bilateral discussions, even prior to its mention by Xi Jinping in his address to the BFA on April 21, 2022. Zhang Jun, China’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN), said at the UN Security Council on March 14, 2022, that “The indivisible security principle is of special significance in the current situation and should be upheld and put into practice. The final solution to the crisis in Ukraine is to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, respect the reasonable security concerns of all states”.<sup>9</sup>

Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi made similar remarks again on March 14, 2022, while discussing the Russia-Ukraine conflict during a meeting with the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Rome. Yang said:

“We should take a long-term perspective, to actively promote common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable views of security based on the principle of indivisible security, to seek construction of a balanced, effective, and sustainable security mechanism”.<sup>10</sup>

Wang Yiwei, Director of the Institute of International Affairs at the Renmin University of China, told the *Global Times* while discussing the Ukraine crisis, that:

“The eastward expansion of NATO is dominated by the US, and such a view of security is based on the sacrifice of Russia’s security. In the Asia-Pacific region, the US is trying to impose a similar view of security on regional countries and to establish a NATO-like alliance to build a divisible and unbalanced security mechanism in Asia, to target China just like what it did to Russia in Europe”.<sup>11</sup>

Understandably, China appears to be laying the foundation for its version of security architecture, as per its interpretation of “indivisible security”. This principle also forms the basis for China’s opposition to groupings such as the Quad and AUKUS, as it feels they threaten its ‘core’ security interests.

Recurring instances in the recent past, when China shared its perspective on “indivisible security,” are likely indicators of consultations between Russia

and China, to convey, in concert, their interpretation of the phrase, as it applies to recent geopolitical developments. However, considering China's long-term perspective on strategic issues, it may be injudicious to presume that the Chinese utterances were intended merely to justify their position on Russia's Ukraine invasion. It is more likely, that China has deliberated upon the relevance of the concept, as it applies to its national interests, not only in the Asia-Pacific, but globally, as China firmly believes that its legitimate interests now have a global dimension. Moreover, China would possibly utilise this idea, to legitimise its version of a 'balanced and effective' security mechanism, as it begins to implement the GSI.

Articulation of the idea of indivisible security by China is not a recent phenomenon but has been employed in the past as well, as part of carefully crafted international declarations. For example, following the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of State, held via video conference on November 10, 2020, the Moscow Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO, stated:

"The member states are in favour of shaping a multipolar world order based on generally recognised principles of international law, multilateralism, equal and indivisible security, and strengthening of global and regional security and stability".<sup>12</sup>

Incidentally, India is a member state of SCO; current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi also attended this video conference and India was also a signatory to this Declaration.

Considering the repeated pronouncements on the subject, it was a logical reiteration of the Chinese position that Xi Jinping mentioned "indivisible security" during his keynote address to the BFA.

## Contours of China's Global Security Initiative

While the GSI was proposed by Xi Jinping, he restricted his comments to a conceptual description. Xi announced that "China proposes a Global Security Initiative to promote security for all in the world, through six commitments." These are as follows<sup>13</sup>:

- (a) Adhere to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, and joint cooperation to advance world peace and security.
- (b) Remain committed to mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and respect for different countries' independent development paths.

- (c) Follow the principles of the UN Charter; reject Cold War mentality, and oppose unilateralism and confrontation between rival blocs.
- (d) Respect legitimate security concerns of all nations, uphold the principle of indivisible security, and build a balanced, effective international security architecture, that does not centre on only one country's insecurities.
- (e) Seek to always resolve differences through dialogue, oppose double standards, long-arm jurisdiction, or unilateral sanctions.
- (f) Insist on joint coordination to manage traditional and non-traditional security challenges, and cooperation on shared regional and global challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and climate change.

Following Xi's speech, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin, at a press briefing, said that:

"The GSI is yet another global public good offered by China. The initiative is open to the world and China welcomes the participation of all countries. We are ready to work through the UN and bilateral and multilateral channels to have an in-depth exchange of views with all parties on the initiative".<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, on April 24, 2022, in an article published in *People's Daily*, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that the "initiative echoed the global need for economic recovery in the post-pandemic era". He elaborated on the proposal, as follows<sup>15</sup>:

- (a) The initiative's core concept was that of a shared, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, taking into account the security concerns of all countries.
- (b) The proposal aimed at improving the global security governance system and building regional security to maintain peace and stability in Asia.
- (c) The proposal adhered to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.
- (d) The initiative was aimed at resolving disputes through peaceful means and jointly practicing true multilateralism.

In his article, Wang Yi also elaborated on China's role in adopting the initiative. He stated that:

"China was a responsible global power, had upheld the values of peace, development, and mutually beneficial cooperation, and had made positive contributions to the maintenance of global security".

Wang committed that “China would never claim hegemony, expansion, seek spheres of influence, or engage in an arms race, and would remain committed to world peace”.

The American response to this initiative by China was predictable in its wary suspicion. Soon after Xi Jinping’s address announcing the initiative, the US State Department spokesperson Ned Price, responding to a question about Xi’s speech, said that “China continued to parrot some of what we have heard coming from the Kremlin, including the concept of indivisible security.” Price reiterated that the “United States would continue to uphold the rules-based international system it had built with like-minded partners based on respect for human rights, sovereignty, and self-determination”. Price further said that “We are committed to upholding the various systems that certain countries around the world, and Russia and the PRC are among them, seek to challenge, and in certain instances, seek to tear down and even destroy”.<sup>16</sup>

### **China’s Ardent Espousal of the Initiative**

China appears to be promoting this initiative quite vigorously since it was announced, which is probably indicative of the importance accorded to it in the Chinese strategic vision for the future. At an online dialogue of global think tanks called “Seeking Peace and Promoting Development” on May 6, 2022, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng, said that, “The idea with the Global Security Initiative is to take the new vision on security as the guiding principle, mutual respect as the fundamental requirement, indivisible security as the important principle, and building a security community as the long-term goal”.<sup>17</sup> Le Yucheng also stated that, “We cannot allow bloc-based confrontation to repeat itself in the Asia-Pacific; we cannot allow certain countries to succeed in their self-serving attempt to drag the Asia-Pacific into conflict”.<sup>18</sup> What stands out distinctly in these statements is the reiteration of China’s firmly held disapproving views on “external influences in the Asia-Pacific—alliances like the Quad—which it believes would have disadvantageous geopolitical consequences for China, and by extension, the entire region.

Hosting a video conference of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Foreign Ministers on May 19, 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the “Global Security Initiative bridges the peace deficit and guides the way to solve global security dilemmas. Those who believe in genuine multilateralism and oppose all kinds of unilateralism are under obligation to join hands in this new process”.<sup>19</sup> China, here, appears to be wooing those nations, which are not entirely comfortable with the

unipolarity of strategic direction, that the world had acquired, post the dissolution of the erstwhile USSR. Such nations may be more amenable to informal alliances or groupings with China, as the putative alternate global power centre.

On May 20, 2022, in phone calls with his counterparts from Uruguay, Nicaragua and Ecuador, Wang Yi went on the 'geopolitical offensive' and said, "China opposed efforts by some countries to use ideology to divide the international community and it had no geopolitical considerations when working with Latin America". Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada told Wang that his country would join the initiative, while Uruguay's Francisco Bustillo said that the plan was aligned with Uruguay's foreign policy position. Juan Carlos Holguin, the Ecuadorean Foreign Minister, did not refer to the initiative but said Ecuador supported China in safeguarding its sovereignty, security, and development interests.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately following China's outreach to Latin America, Wang Yi visited the Pacific Island nations in May 2022, to pursue a "Pacific-wide deal covering policing, security, and data communications cooperation". The China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision draft document stated that China and the Pacific Islands will "strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the fields of traditional and non-traditional security". The Agreement envisaged cooperation on "law enforcement capacity, data networks, cybersecurity, and smart customs systems", and for Pacific Islands to "take a balanced approach to technological progress, economic development, and protection of national security".<sup>21</sup>

Predictably, there was an immediate and strong American response to the developments in the Pacific Islands, with the US State Department spokesman Ned Price expressing concern about China's intentions, saying that "Beijing might use the proposed accords to take advantage of the islands and destabilize the region". He warned that China "has a pattern of offering shadowy, vague deals with little transparency or regional consultation", and added that agreements that include sending Chinese security officials to the nations "could only seek to fuel regional international tensions and increase concerns over Beijing's expansion of its internal security apparatus to the Pacific".<sup>22</sup>

Australia, located in the vicinity of the Pacific Islands, and traditionally the dominant nation in the region, was equally prompt in its diplomatic response to the wide-ranging Chinese outreach. The recently sworn-in Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, stated, "We will be proactive in the region, we want to engage"; and his government's plan included a defence training school, support for maritime security, a boost in aid, and re-engaging the region on



climate change, while his Foreign Minister Penny Wong pointedly stated, with implicit criticism of Chinese tactics, that “Canberra will be a partner that does not come with strings attached”.<sup>23</sup>

Despite China’s aggressive push for a formal agreement during the Ministerial Meeting on May 30, 2022, the Pacific Island nations opted for more discussions to shape greater consensus on the proposed Chinese deal. Notwithstanding the setback to Chinese efforts to rapidly finalise the deal, Wang Yi summarised the success of the May 30, 2022 meeting as, “Deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership, safeguarding national sovereignty, and advocating true multilateralism”, and further said that “China will jointly build an even closer China-Pacific Island Countries community with a shared future”.<sup>24</sup>

## Precursors to the Global Security Initiative

It is imperative for a holistic evaluation of the GSI—for it to be viewed as a continuum of China’s geopolitical activities over the past few years. Treating the GSI as an independent and self-contained conceptualisation, may not enable discernment of the actual objectives of this seemingly platitudinous global offering by China.

One factor that necessitates examination in the context of the GSI is the increasing Chinese propensity, notably over the last decade or so, for extending its presence, whether economically, diplomatically or militarily, well beyond its shores. This tendency becomes even more conspicuous when the Chinese presence or influence begins to manifest in geographical regions where, China, in the normal course, would have little reason to be either threatened or greatly interested, eg. South Pacific Island nations, Latin America, West coast of Africa, and the Arctic. These areas neither fall along China’s critical sea lanes of communication nor do they house any potential Chinese strategic competitor. Yet, the world has witnessed, growing evidence of Chinese persistent endeavours to develop an enduring presence in these areas, in some form or the other.

Another aspect that merits consideration is China’s predilection for launching mammoth global initiatives in the past decade. The GSI is not the first large-scale initiative by the Chinese and one suspects, may not be the last either. It may be useful, therefore, to very briefly revisit similar Chinese endeavours in the past.

## China’s Global Initiatives in the Last Decade

Over the last two decades or so, the world has witnessed the emergence of an increasingly assertive and resolute China. Both in geopolitical and economic

affairs, China has taken to articulate its perspective on the global future, one that corresponds to its concept of a “shared community of nations”. China is putting in greater efforts to assure its centrality in the world order, as well as in prominent international institutions.

Xi Jinping has called for China to “transform institutions and norms in ways that will reflect Beijing’s values and priorities”.<sup>25</sup> China’s endeavours in this regard are amply transparent and unapologetically support its national interests. On the one hand, it agrees to provide support to international institutions and agreements like the World Bank and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, when it suits its long-term objectives. Simultaneously, on issues where it deviates from the rules-based world order in pursuit of its strategic goals, China looks to present a justifying narrative and create alternative mechanisms.

China now feels increasingly compelled to assume the status of a world leader, introducing and pursuing global development and security frameworks, which conforms to the Chinese vision of global future order. In the last decade, China has announced several global initiatives and pursued them fairly vigorously, as it looks to challenge the USA in its position as the principal global player. The three major Chinese global initiatives in the last decade, prior to the GSI, are discussed ahead.

### **2013: Belt and Road Initiative**

Launched in 2013 by the current President Xi Jinping, China’s BRI is one of the most ambitious and far-reaching infrastructure projects in history. Its planned scope and reach are staggering and unprecedented. The initiative envisages a huge network of highways, railway lines, energy pipelines, and special economic zones, through a vast swathe of land, stretching from East Asia to Europe, substantially increasing China’s geopolitical and economic influence. The BRI also includes the Maritime Silk Road project, involving the development of ports in the Indian Ocean, essentially to support China’s energy movement along its critical sea lanes of communication.

The launch of the BRI coincided with the advent of an assertive Chinese foreign policy. Therefore, the advantages that will accrue to China in the long run are better assessed from a geopolitical perspective, rather than from a purely economic point of view. More than sixty countries have signed on to BRI projects or indicated an interest in doing so. China has already spent an estimated \$200 billion on these efforts, and the estimated overall expenses over the life of the BRI could reach \$1.2–1.3 trillion by 2027.<sup>26</sup>

In the recent past, there have been many concerns voiced internationally, including by affected nations, over the manner of execution and funding of



BRI projects. Many projects in the BRI have not strictly ensured international norms of accounting and transparency. The initiative has also fomented resistance in some countries involved in the BRI, that have taken on high levels of debt.<sup>27</sup>

The Indian position on BRI has been clear and consistent from the inception of the initiative. In 2017, India stated clearly:

“We are of the firm belief that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality, must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities, and must be pursued in a manner that respects [the] sovereignty and territorial integrity”.<sup>28</sup>

India’s position has been reiterated repeatedly and consistently, ever since.

### **2020: Global Initiative on Data Security**

On September 8, 2020, China announced that it was launching a global initiative to establish standards on data security, saying it wanted to “promote multilateralism” at a time when “individual countries” were “bullying” others and “hunting” companies.<sup>29</sup> Under its Global Initiative on Data Security, “China urged countries to oppose mass surveillance against other states”, and called on tech companies not to install “backdoors in their products and services to illegally obtain user data, control or manipulate user systems and devices”.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, the new initiative is an attempt at “contributing Chinese wisdom to international rules-making” on data governance.<sup>31</sup> It is, of course, entirely possible that China was simply seeking to exploit the fact that there existed a genuine requirement for a globally accepted framework of guiding principles on digital data and related issues. But with China, the true objectives behind its actions are normally concealed beneath layers of obfuscation.

After the announcement, China engaged in diplomatic outreach to countries in Central Asia, Africa, and Europe to build support. In keeping with Chinese efforts to build international consensus on its initiatives, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated its call for a “community with common goals”, stating:

“We underscore that all parties should join hands to forge a community with a shared future in cyberspace, featuring peace, security, openness, cooperation, and order. We call on all states to support this initiative, and

confirm the aforementioned commitments through bilateral, regional, and international agreements”.<sup>32</sup>

So far, this initiative has garnered interest from Russia, Tanzania, Pakistan, Ecuador, the Arab League, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. China has promoted this cause in various international fora in the last couple of years, including the China-EU meetings, SCO, BRICS and G20, amongst others, advocating it as a framework to develop a more robust global digital economy. On March 29, 2021, China and the Secretariat General of the Arab League signed an agreement on China-Arab Cooperation regarding digital data management.<sup>33</sup>

### ***2021: Global Development Initiative***

On September 21, 2021, during his video address at the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a Global Development Initiative (GDI) in steering global development toward a new stage of balanced, coordinated, and inclusive growth in face of the severe shocks of COVID-19. Xi said, “We need to foster global development partnerships that are more equal and balanced, and forge greater synergy among multilateral development cooperation processes.”<sup>34</sup> Xi also called for “caring about the special needs of developing countries and building a global community of development with a shared future”.

On April 24, 2022, during a meeting with the UN Development System Resident Coordinator in China, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said “More than 100 countries have expressed support for the GDI proposed by President Xi Jinping, and over 50 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI launched by China on January 20, 2022, at the United Nations.”<sup>35</sup> Wang described the GDI as another “global public product” advocated by Xi following the BRI.

### ***Progress on Chinese Global Initiatives***

Amongst the major global initiatives launched by China in the last decade, the BRI, of course, remains their flagship venture, which has been pursued steadfastly and painstakingly by the Chinese, despite impediments and slowdowns in some areas. Realistically, its sheer scale and reach would involve overruns, both in time and funds, but the Chinese long-term commitment to the BRI continues unwaveringly.

The other two global initiatives, however, have not yet taken on the momentum of the BRI. The vaunted Chinese Global Initiative on Data Security is yet to yield any significant results or any collaborative efforts towards formalisation of international digital guidelines. Of these three ventures, the

Data Security Initiative was the only one, which was possibly a direct response to an American initiative. This was the “Clean Network,” launched by the US in August 2020, ostensibly aimed at “safeguarding the nation’s assets, including citizens’ privacy and companies’ most sensitive information, from aggressive intrusions by malign actors, such as the Chinese Communist Party”.<sup>36</sup>

The GDI, of course, was launched recently and has not yet taken a structured form. The Chinese are coordinating actions under this initiative with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, with the lofty aim to accelerate the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, so far, actions under this initiative have yet to be formalised, and its true extent and reach are not entirely clear.

### **China’s Quest for Global Power Projection Capability**

As China grew steadily as a great economic and geopolitical power in the 21st century, its traditionally reticent attitude towards overseas military presence began to change perceptibly. China started believing in and justifying to the world at large, the importance of its worldwide interests, and hence the necessity of power projection capabilities, far from its shores. This is what a recent article in the state controlled *Global Times* had to say in this regard:

“China must protect its national sovereignty, security, and development interests, which include its overseas interests. The more overseas interests China has, the more it is necessary to build and maintain training and support bases nearby. Otherwise, China would be unable to respond quickly when its own interests are hurt”.<sup>37</sup>

China’s deepening interest in overseas power projection was confirmed in the US DoD Annual Report on China 2021, which stated:

“People’s Republic of China is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure, to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power at greater distances. Beyond its base in Djibouti, China is pursuing additional military facilities to support naval, air, ground, cyber, and space power projection. It has likely considered a number of countries, including Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan, as locations for PLA facilities”.<sup>38</sup>

In Africa, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, which facilitates its anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. China is reportedly “seeking to also establish a permanent military facility in the Central African

nation of Equatorial Guinea, most likely in the port city of Bata”, where Chinese companies have funded and constructed the port.<sup>39</sup>

Recognising the challenges that accompany the development of explicit military bases on foreign soil, China has shrewdly focussed on building dual-use facilities. This trend is most discernible in South Asia, “where China’s focus has been on developing structures that are formally civilian but amenable to PLA’s future use”.<sup>40</sup> In Asia, Chinese State Owned Enterprises and private companies have been involved for several years in the construction or enhancements of facilities in several ports. The projects include Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukphyu in Myanmar and Payra in Bangladesh, and are in varying stages of development.

Simultaneously, there were reports that “China will take full control of a military base in Tajikistan, one that both sides have been using jointly, and will also build a new base for the Tajik government”.<sup>41</sup> The base, if and when control is transferred by the Tajik government, will become the second overseas Chinese military facility.

In South East Asia, there were explosive reports in 2019, of China having “signed a secret agreement with Cambodia, granting its military exclusive use of part of the Ream naval base”.<sup>42</sup> These reports were vehemently denied by both Chinese and Cambodian officials. However, continued construction activities and other developments in the area have deepened concerns that “China appears to be accelerating construction of a new naval base in Cambodia.”<sup>43</sup>

In the Pacific, on April 19, 2022, China and Solomon Islands signed a security agreement, permitting Beijing to send its armed forces to the nation “to assist in maintaining social order”.<sup>44</sup> While the impression conveyed is that there are no immediate plans for establishment of a Chinese military base, however, the Agreement does have the potential to allow China to base its naval vessels on the islands, sometime in the not-too-distant future. In addition to the Solomon Islands, China has displayed considerable interest in developing its relations separately with other Pacific Ocean Island nations, including Tonga, Fiji and Kiribati, with substantial economic investments and inducements. There is also little doubt that China will pursue with full vigour, the expansive, 10-nation Pacific Island Pact, buttressed, no doubt, by substantial economic largesse.

### **Preliminary Assessment of the Global Security Initiative**

First, specific contours of the proposed GSI remain quite nebulous, despite several ‘elaborations’, including by their supposedly erudite and articulate Foreign and Vice Foreign Ministers and other officials. This apparent lack of

clarity may be a deliberate ploy, for several reasons. *One*, it affords requisite flexibility to the Chinese, to adapt to world reaction, and crystallise the specifics, as they go forward. *Two*, the amorphous nature of an announced geopolitical initiative, especially one with manifold ramifications, conforms to the customary Chinese tactic of keeping their cards close to their chest, so to speak, and letting their adversaries continue to attempt to decipher the true nature and purpose, even as the plan is put in motion. *Three*, the possibly premeditated ambiguity serves another, altogether different purpose. Restricting the description to vague, broad principles, especially those which find universal approval, such as ‘cooperation for world peace and security’, and “resolve differences through dialogue”, places dissenting nations in the unenviable position of having to oppose something which they may well be propagating themselves.

Next is the employment of familiar phraseology in describing the GSI, which finds repetitive mention in Chinese foreign policy speak, and often, does not convey much, beyond diplomatic niceties. Phrases such as “building a community with a shared future for humankind” and “win-win cooperation”, form part of the Chinese lexicon, and hence are often not paid much attention to, by analysts. However, such terminologies have specific connotations for the Chinese, conveying their perspective on international relations. The idea of ‘work to build a community with a shared future for humankind’ was adopted as a foreign policy goal of China’s Communist Party in 2017 and incorporated into the national constitution in 2018. Even when launching the Global Initiative on Data Security in 2020 and the GDI in 2021, China had appealed for a “community with common goals”, and a “shared future”. Therefore, zealous advocacy of such hackneyed phrases must be taken as *de rigueur* for Chinese diplomatic discourse. Moreover, the concept of a “shared future for humankind” also serves to elevate China’s foreign policy objectives to an international cause. This, in turn, would enable China to justify its aspirations for global geopolitical and economic influence, commensurate with its great power status.

The GSI comprises many contradictory and hypocritical elements. With this concept, China is propagating principles that it has violated repeatedly, displaying absolute disregard for international norms. Xi Jinping spoke of “respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity”, but China’s actions along its border with India and in the South China Sea unequivocally violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours. Similarly, Xi spoke about taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously and not pursuing one’s security at the cost of others, which is contradictory to China’s behaviour.<sup>45</sup> That said, hypocrisy has been an integral constituent

of diplomacy, with national interests, of course, reigning supreme at all costs. Hence, China's statements and actions being at variance should not be viewed as either surprising or unprecedented. However, it does offer other nations a yardstick for evaluating China's GSI, and possibly grounds for opposing it.

There is a line of thought that is gaining currency, especially in popular media, that the GSI is China's expeditious—in effect, a knee-jerk—response to the emergence and consolidation of alliances like the Quad and AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. This belief may hold partially true, and recent developments may have precipitated the timing of the Chinese initiative. However, this idea of the GSI being merely a short-term tool does a great disservice to the Chinese forte of formulating long-term strategies, which demands stoicism, immense patience, and perseverance. Stratagems with far-reaching implications, with protracted timeframes required for fruition, may not always be fully appreciated by China's competitors or adversaries, simply because they may not offer tangible short or medium-term benefits.

Domestic compulsions may also have contributed to the evolution of the GSI. In the recent past, China has been subject to intense international scrutiny and on occasion, opprobrium, for its likely involvement in the genesis of the Covid pandemic. In addition, China's slowing economic growth, as well as the impediments faced in several BRI projects, due to financial, political and security causes, have created many challenges for China. With this as the backdrop, Xi Jinping is seeking an unprecedented third term as President. Xi's domestic political position has to be unassailable, to enable him to fulfil his ambitions. As is normally the case in such situations, external successes, even if exaggerated or in the realm of the future, satisfactorily distract internal attention away from domestic ailments. The GSI, which panders to the "great rejuvenation" of the Chinese nation, and seeks to cement its position as a global superpower, can very well be touted by Xi Jinping as one of his major global achievements.

During his keynote address, Xi Jinping clearly articulated, without any prevarication, the inexorable rise of Asia, and the transference of global geopolitical gravity, from the US led Western world, to the Asian continent. Implicit in this thought process, was the underlying significance of Chinese leadership in Asia and by extension, the world, as global geopolitical and economic activities become increasingly Asia driven. China, as per Xi, was not only the natural leader within Asia, but, the only one. This supercilious orientation is almost certain to cause China to initiate and sustain measures, against all regional groupings or alliances in Asia, of which it does not form a part. Since China believes that only Asian nations have a role to play in



the growth, prosperity and security of Asia, it would, naturally, be openly confrontational, for any 'outsider nation or grouping' to coalesce in the Asian region. China, in its view, should be the driver of Asia's economic growth, riding on Chinese driven initiatives like the RCEP and taking advantage of Chinese led financial ventures, like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This theme had been clearly articulated in its "White Paper on National Defence" in 2019, stating that, "China advocates common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in Asia, and plays an important role in building an Asian security cooperation architecture".<sup>46</sup> The GSI naturally looks to build upon the edifice of supposed Chinese supremacy in Asia.

China has invested heavily in many developing nations across Asia, Africa, South Pacific, and South America, that are benefiting from infrastructural and connectivity projects under the BRI. It is undeniable that China is already in an advantageous position to exercise considerable economic influence upon beneficiary states. The GSI extends these efforts by providing a military complement to China's transnational geo-economic initiatives like the GDI and the BRI, which could eventually provide a security framework for China's regional and bilateral partnerships.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, as the size of its economy continues to grow, China will increasingly be able to determine, to a large extent, terms for global economic transactions. It would also be better placed to exercise greater influence in international finance organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in addition to strengthening China dominated institutions like the AIIB. Consequently, China's increasingly forceful presence, especially in development finance, may influence several nations to formalise security agreements under the GSI umbrella, and possibly take greater advantage of China's economic munificence.

Next, let us consider the GSI in relation to China's seemingly expansionist endeavours in the military domain. The GSI appears well placed to exploit and take further, its ambitious outreaches, right from Asia to Africa and the South Pacific. Considering China's long-term view on strategic affairs, it is well within the realms of possibility, that the idea of a formal, Chinese led security framework may have predated its global military overtures. Notwithstanding the chronology, China seems prepared to formalise multilateral security agreements on a regional basis, utilising the GSI, progressively building up to truly global security architecture. China had more or less indicated the same in its "White Paper on National Defence" in 2019, which stated:

"China's armed forces have responded faithfully to the call for a community with a shared future for mankind. China participates extensively in global

security governance, and endeavors to offer Chinese proposals for resolving major issues and formulating important rules”.<sup>48</sup>

If recent history is an indicator, Beijing’s quest for a military foothold in the Pacific is characteristic of its previous similar efforts, despite its vehement denials. “As Beijing has demonstrated in the South China Sea when it claimed and subsequently militarized unoccupied islands, the Chinese government has a track record of publicly denying its true intentions, while taking steps to enlarge its global military footprint”.<sup>49</sup>

The announcement of the GSI is also possibly, an indicator of a major shift in Chinese strategic thought process, as regards security or military alliances. Historically, China has avoided formal alliances, both due to its ideological persuasion, as well as its innate proclivity to avoid confrontations that generally accompany such alliances. China has only one formal ally, North Korea, with whom it shares a mutual defense treaty. It also has strong strategic partnerships with Russia (‘No limits friendship’ and a ‘new model of international relations’) and Pakistan (relationship ‘higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, stronger than steel and sweeter than honey’). Yet, China has traditionally preferred multilateral engagements and invested in regional groupings, like the SCO, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, China-Central and Eastern European Countries and Forum of China, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, etc. However, China’s traditional avoidance of formal military alliances may well undergo moderation in the future, with the advent of the GSI. In the recent past, China has upgraded its strategic partnerships and expanded military exchanges with many nations, including Russia, Pakistan, and Iran. China would look to build upon such existing ‘partnerships’, for the framework of the newly minted GSI. Chinese leadership may very well have decided that their national interest would be best served by China’s global network of military alliances, to engage, from a position of strength, with the US led alliance. If that is the case, the GSI might just be the perfect platform for China.

In recent years, Chinese leaders have begun to insist that they practice a “new type of international relations”, eschewing traditional power politics in favour of “win-win cooperation”.<sup>50</sup> These phrases augment China’s claims that its rise is not something to be fearful of, but that it holds the capability for world economic prosperity, with a ‘win-win’ situation for all concerned. China possibly desires to distinguish between its model of ‘all-inclusive’ economic development, as opposed to the American model of ‘exclusive’ economic advantages. It is amply clear, that through the GSI, China is offering the world a seemingly viable alternative—one that supposedly gives due attention to



the requirements of developing nations, and has immense mutual benefits. China's alternative alliance model is predicated on the belief that it "respects security interests of every nation and promotes multilateralism", unlike the Western alliance, that is "hegemonistic and discriminatory" and perpetuates an "outdated Cold War" mentality. From the Chinese perspective, "GSI is a collection of policy principles such as non-interference and grudges against US 'hegemonism', which requires nations to 'reject cold war mentality and bloc confrontation and work together to build a global community of security for all'.<sup>51</sup>

China is undeniably a powerful force in global governance. Its penchant for introducing initiatives with global ramifications is now well-established and conforms to China's acceptance of its expanding stature on the world stage. As was the case with the Global Initiative on Data Security and the GDI, the GSI is another manifestation of Xi Jinping's declaration for "China to lead the reform of the global governance system with the concepts of fairness and justice", where the terms fairness and justice signal a call for a more multipolar world, one potentially with a smaller US role in setting international rules.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, China's initiatives to shape the world in accordance with its unique vision of a stable world order, only serve to deepen international divides, especially with democratically inclined nations, which are firmly invested in a rules-based order. As China adopts a more aggressive stance in its desire for greater influence in international affairs, it would become increasingly difficult for the world to jointly address international challenges. Measures like the GSI would possibly lead to the creation of parallel and antagonistic systems of global governance, negatively impacting possibilities of multilateral cooperation, even in areas of mutual concern like climate change.

As China follows up on the GSI and begins to persuade nations to join the bandwagon, it will herald an interesting period in international relations. What are the benefits that nations across the world will be looking for, when they consider whether or not to align with the Chinese security initiative? Is China prepared to offer economic inducements, or will it indulge in a form of coercion, either economic and geopolitical or both, that would especially persuade smaller, developing nations across the globe? China's growing use of its economic power to achieve geopolitical gains was acknowledged by the Quad leaders during their summit meeting in May 2022, when they spoke of their "resolve to uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of military, economic, and political coercion".<sup>53</sup> However, China may not be entirely successful in its quest for allies, since it faces a degree of distrust internationally, as regards its long-term design and hegemonistic inclinations. Even its closest allies,

benefitting from the BRI, may be somewhat sceptical of China's advances in the security sphere. Moreover, many nations may be disinclined to disturb the global geopolitical status quo and may prefer not to align with either the US or China. The final choice, as ever in international relations, will be determined by national interests. Therefore, the much vaunted 'principled' alliance or 'respect for democratic and human values', as propagated by many developed nations, in their quest for geopolitical influence, will only remain relevant up to a point. At the end of the day, such decisions are invariably arrived at after a deliberate examination of the pros and cons, purely from a nationalistic perspective, notwithstanding the values and principles supposedly involved.

To summarise, it can be safely assumed that the GSI is not an expedient that has been thought up by China in isolation, or as a short-term rejoinder to the emerging groupings in the Indo-Pacific. The GSI aims to consolidate the substantial economic influence that the BRI has earned for China. It is also a manifestation of China's significant position in global governance and a logical progression to its previous global proposals like the Global Initiative on Data Security and the GDI. In addition, it is a means for the consolidation and perpetuation of the expanding Chinese presence and influence, across the globe, as well as the self-affirmation of China's 'near superpower status'.

However, it is not feasible to correctly assess, at this point of time, the earnestness with which China intends to follow up on this extremely ambitious initiative. It is very much a possibility that the GSI is merely a subterfuge, while the inscrutable Chinese focus on a different strategy altogether. The true nature of this gambit can only be perceived much later, but one cannot remain oblivious to this proposal in the meantime. The GSI has the potential to change the world in a manner that cannot be visualised in its entirety today. Therefore, at this stage, it is essential to treat this initiative with utmost seriousness and to formulate an effective, long-term, response strategy.

## **The Global Security Initiative and India**

China's apparent bid for exclusive Asian leadership holds implicit threats to India's aspirations as a regional power in Asia, the Indian Ocean Region, and the Indo-Pacific. During his keynote address to BFA, Xi Jinping mentioned that "nations must avoid bringing trouble to Asia", of "zero-sum games", quite obviously referring to geopolitical developments that China does not take kindly to, specifically in India's context, the Quad, and India's growing proximity to the US. Therefore, as India continues to act in its long-term interests, with strategic autonomy, being its chosen path in its foreign policy, China must be factored in its geopolitical calculations, even in its engagements with the US,

groupings like the Quad and economic forums like the Indo Pacific Economic Framework.

The GSI by itself may not hold immediate and direct implications for India as regards the Line of Actual Control (LAC) conundrum with China. However, the concept of “indivisible security”, which Xi Jinping appears to have embraced along with the articulation of the GSI, holds unpropitious indications for India-China relations. China prefers a narrow, self-serving interpretation of “indivisible security”, completely disregarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations, despite its self-righteous enunciation of the principle of “mutual respect”. Hence, it is quite possible, even probable, that China would engage in further unilateral and unlawful actions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. Moreover, China may not exhibit any inclination for the resolution of the border dispute with India anytime soon. This would imply a status quo on the LAC for the foreseeable future. Therefore, India must remain militarily prepared and vigilant for Chinese aggression all along the LAC, even when it continues with disengagement talks. In addition, China shares the Russian view on “indivisible security”, and it would feel entitled to be consulted on any issue or process, where its “core security interests” are affected. This is relevant when one considers the unjustified and completely illegal objections that China raises, in relation to India’s legitimate infrastructure developments in its territory, in the proximity of the LAC. Hence, while India must continue with its planned and essential infrastructural developments along the LAC, it must be astute enough to flag similar Chinese activities, on the same premise.

The next issue is that, notwithstanding the hypocritical elements in the GSI, especially considering the duplicity in China’s actions on the LAC, it is realpolitik that must guide India’s considered response. Simply accusing China of hypocrisy will neither be effective in international fora beyond a point nor will it yield any tangibles in bilateral engagements with China. India has traditionally adopted a values-based foreign policy, but it must be national interests that are placed at the forefront of India’s engagements with China, and not merely notions of morality and principles.

In this context, the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister to India on March 25, 2022 was conspicuous by divergent approaches of the two nations and gave a pointer to the probable future trajectory of India-China relations. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that “India-China are partners rather than rivals, and should help each other succeed instead of undercutting each other.” He also said that “as mature and rational neighbours, China and India should place the border issue in an appropriate position in bilateral relations, and should not let it define or even hinder the overall development

of bilateral relations”.<sup>54</sup> However, India’s position was quite clearly put across by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S Jaishankar, in the media interaction that followed the talks, when he stated:

“The frictions and tensions that arise from China’s deployments since April 2020 cannot be reconciled with a normal relationship between two neighbours. India wants a stable and predictable relationship. But restoration of normalcy will obviously require a restoration of peace and tranquillity”.<sup>55</sup>

It is exactly this kind of clarity of thought, policy and words, that India must persevere with, whether engaging with China bilaterally or in multilateral fora. The same matrix must also apply to the GSI, which is certain to infringe upon India’s national security interests in the not-too-distant future, especially when China’s engagements through the GSI extend onto India’s strategic neighbourhood, both in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean Region.

The GSI holds another unappealing prospect for India in its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia. With the exception of Bhutan, all of India’s neighbours, viz., Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Myanmar, are already beneficiaries of the BRI. Upgradation of their bilateral ties with China, to incorporate security alliances under the GSI, is a distinct possibility, in times to come. This would exacerbate India’s challenges of diplomatic engagements with all of these nations.

The GSI is also likely to accentuate India’s maritime security concerns in the Indian Ocean. For India, the Indian Ocean must facilitate free trade and remain safe from adversarial military competition. However, in addition to its overseas military facility in Djibouti, China is constructing or collaborating in commercial ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, which could possibly become dual-use facilities for future use of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy. Moreover, of all the key powers, China is the only one with a diplomatic mission across all six island nations in the Indian Ocean.<sup>56</sup> Although China’s ultimate aims in the Indian Ocean remain somewhat ambiguous, China appears to be actively pursuing capabilities that would allow it to undertake a range of military missions therein.<sup>57</sup> With the introduction of the GSI, it is possible, that China may formalise maritime agreements in the region, providing a virtual *carte blanche* to the PLA Navy to operate in India’s backyard.

India must be prepared for yet another possible fallout of the GSI in the future. As China embarks on its ambitious initiative, India may face diplomatic challenges in international institutions like the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, etc., where China’s prospective allies in the GSI could

be influenced to adopt positions that may be inimical to India's interests. Therefore, India must possess the necessary acumen and the foresight to identify such nations, and engage with them constructively, to make them more amenable to the Indian position.

India would do well to analyse the American strategy towards China and formulate its response accordingly. The US is acutely cognisant of the rise of China, and its long-term consequences, not only for American influence but for global geopolitical and economic balance. On May 26, 2022, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that "China is the most serious long-term challenge to the international order and the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it".<sup>58</sup> Blinken elaborated on certain measures which had been initiated by the US to meet China's challenge, including the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, AUKUS military cooperation scheme, and expanded collaboration through Quad".

The US counter strategy is, in some ways, a restatement of Blinken's March 2021 speech, when he said that the US policy towards China will be "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be".<sup>59</sup> Essentially, the US recognises the futility of attempting to impede China's almost inexorable rise and global influence, thanks in large measure to its substantial economic clout. Hence, American efforts would remain focussed on not openly confronting or challenging China, but, in concert with like-minded nations, continue efforts to strengthen and uphold the rules-based international order. Simultaneously, the US and its Western allies would endeavour to offer developing nations, pragmatic alternatives to China's BRI. This practical approach offers insights into the contours of a credible and effective long-term strategy to counter the China challenge. India could do worse than take a leaf out of this book, especially in its engagements in its strategic neighbourhood in South Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region.

China's national strategy aims to achieve the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049 and revise the international order to be more advantageous to its authoritarian system and national interests.<sup>60</sup> With the GSI, China has articulated one of the means to fulfil its stated goals. India must accordingly, formulate a balanced strategic response, without compromising its national interests. India must continue engaging with multilateral institutions like Quad, SCO and BRICS, which will enable it to adapt to and benefit from China's development as a global power while maintaining partnerships with different power centres. The Quad alliance,

in particular, conforms to India's preferred narrative of strategic autonomy in foreign policy, especially with its unstated but clear intent of creating a strategic counterbalance to China in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Conclusion

It has emerged quite clearly from Xi Jinping's address and the proclamation of the GSI, that China has now irrevocably eschewed the Deng Xiaoping mantra of "Hide your strength, bide your time". Xi believes that China is now ready to assume its rightful place as a superpower. When Xi spoke of humanity's shared future, what was left unsaid, was the inevitability of the predominant role that China must necessarily assume, in achieving this noble objective. It seemed that Xi had taken on for China, the onerous responsibilities of shaping a prosperous and peaceful global order, but one that has an unmistakeable Chinese imprint.

So is the GSI, the final step in China's declaration of intent to openly challenge the US led status quo in international relations, and to construct a confrontational, bipolar world order? Is the world headed for a descent into a more protracted, more dangerous, and inherently more unstable Cold War? Preliminary indicators hold ominous portents for the future. China's focussed, ever-increasing and no longer surreptitious efforts towards enhancing its global security presence may be indicative of a carefully considered and far-reaching strategy, that envisages the spread of Chinese geopolitical influence, across the world, to an extent that surpasses current American influence.

China has figuratively, thrown down the gauntlet. If left to its machinations, China may well end up with a series of regional multilateral security agreements, which could harmonise into a semi-formal or formal, global security arrangement. This construct could challenge the existing rules-based world order, may be within the next decade or so. As an analyst put it, "Governments from Europe to Japan and Australia should take Mr. Xi's speech seriously, for it is China's latest bid to delegitimise the American led defence alliances and treaties that have guaranteed their security for decades."<sup>61</sup> The world must be prepared to take up China's challenge, or accept the new world order, with its concomitant security framework, in all its manifestations.

## Notes

1. Boao Forum for Asia, *Chinese President Xi Jinping's Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of BFA Annual Conference 2022*, 23 April 2022, available at <https://english.boaforum.org/newsDetail.html?navId=3&itemId=0&permissionId=114&detailId=16834>, accessed on 23 May 2022.



2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Website, *Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation, Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, At the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia, Annual Conference 2022*, 21 April 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202204/t20220421\\_10671081.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202204/t20220421_10671081.html), accessed on 23 May 2022.
3. Shannon Tiezzi, 'At CICA, Xi Calls for New Regional Security Architecture', *The Diplomat*, 22 May 2014, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/at-cica-xi-calls-for-new-regional-security-architecture/>, accessed on 7 June 2022.
4. *Global Times*, 'Xi Proposes Global Development Initiative', 22 September 2021, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234780.shtml>, accessed on 25 May 2022.
5. Office of the Historian, Department of State, Government of USA, *Helsinki Final Act, 1975*, available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/helsinki>, accessed on 7 June 2022.
6. Patrick Wintour, 'Why Does Russia Focus On 'Indivisible Security' In Ukraine Standoff?', *The Guardian*, 3 February 2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/03/why-does-russia-focus-on-indivisible-security-in-ukraine-standoff>, accessed on 25 May 2022.
7. Polina Ivanova and John Paul Rathbone, 'What is 'Indivisible Security'? The Principle at the Heart of Russia's Ire Against NATO', *Financial Times*, 7 February 2022, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/84a43896-2dfd-4be4-8d2a-c68a5a68547a>, accessed on 25 May 2022.
8. Alexander Graef and Ulrich Kühn, 'A Letter From Moscow: (In)Divisible Security And Helsinki 2.0', *War On The Rocks*, 14 February 2022, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/a-letter-from-moscow-indivisible-security-and-helsinki-2-0/>, accessed on 25 May 2022.
9. *Global Times*, 'Indivisible Security Principle' Established by the OSCE Should be Put into Practice: Chinese Envoy to the UN Concerning Ukraine', 15 March 2022, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1254890.shtml>, accessed on 28 May 2022.
10. Yang Sheng, China Encourages Europe to Build 'Indivisible Security' Mechanism with Russia', *Global Times*, 15 March 2022, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1254947.shtml>, accessed on 30 May 2022.
11. Independent News Service, *China Encourages Europe to Build 'Indivisible Security' Mechanism With Russia*, 18 March 2022, available at <https://theins.news/postview/1100-china-encourages-europe-to-build-indivisible-security-mechanism-with-russia>, accessed on 31 May 2022.
12. SCO website, *The Moscow Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, 10 November 2020, available at <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20201110/690356.html>, accessed on 26 May 2022.
13. ANI, *China Attempts to Extend its Global Security Reach*, 16 May 2022, available at <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/china-attempts-to-extend-its-global-security-reach20220516160740/>, accessed on 29 May 2022.
14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference*, 21 April 2022, available

- at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202204/t20220421\\_10671466.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202204/t20220421_10671466.html), accessed on 27 May 2022.
15. *Global Times*, 'Chinese FM Elaborates on China-Proposed Global Security Initiative, Stresses Nation Will Always be the Backbone of Guarding World Peace, 24 April 2022, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1260149.shtml>, accessed on 30 May 2022.
  16. Kevin Yao and Yew Lun Tian, 'China's Xi Proposes 'Global Security Initiative', Without Giving Details', *Reuters.com*, 22 April 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-unilateral-sanctions-will-not-work-2022-04-21/>, accessed on 24 May 2022.
  17. Nayanima Basu, 'China's Global Security Initiative - What It Is, What Xi Hopes To Gain & What It Means For India', *The Print*, 10 May 2022, available at <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/chinas-global-security-initiative-what-it-is-what-xi-hopes-to-gain-what-it-means-for-india/949312/>, accessed on 26 May 2022.
  18. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China (2022), *Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng Delivers a Keynote Speech at "Seeking Peace and Promoting Development: An Online Dialogue of Global Think Tanks of 20 Countries"*, 06 May 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/202205/t20220507\\_10683086.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202205/t20220507_10683086.html), accessed on 30 May 2022.
  19. Bobby Naderi, *China's Global Security Initiative: The Need for a New Beginning*, CGTN. Com, 20 May 2022, available at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-05-20/China-s-Global-Security-Initiative-The-need-for-a-new-beginning-labp01t1muY/index.html>, accessed on 24 May 2022.
  20. Jack Lau, 'China Drums Up Support for Global Security Push in Latin America as US Looks To Asia', *South China Morning Post*, 22 May 2022, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3178717/china-drums-support-global-security-push-latin-america-us>, accessed on 26 May 2022.
  21. Reuters, 'China is Pursuing a Pacific-Wide Pact With 10 Island Nations on Security, Policing and Data – Report', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/china-is-pursuing-a-pacific-wide-pact-with-10-island-nations-on-security-policing-and-data-report>, accessed on 22 May 2022.
  22. CNBC, *China Wants 10 Small Pacific Nations to Sign on to 'Game-Changing' Security Agreement*, 25 May 2022, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/26/china-wants-10-pacific-nations-to-endorse-sweeping-agreement.html>, accessed on 29 May 2022.
  23. *Business Standard*, 'China Signs Deal With Samoa As Australia Vows Pacific Islands Plan, 28 May 2022, available at [https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/china-signs-deal-with-samoa-as-australia-vows-pacific-islands-plan-122052800420\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/china-signs-deal-with-samoa-as-australia-vows-pacific-islands-plan-122052800420_1.html), accessed on 25 May 2022.
  24. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Wang Yi on [the] consensus reached at second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, 30 May 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202205/t20220531\\_10694997.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202205/t20220531_10694997.html), accessed on 29 May 2022.
  25. Council on Foreign Relations, *China's Approach To Global Governance*, available at <https://www.cfr.org/china-global-governance/>, accessed on 1 June 2022.



26. Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, *China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative*, Council on Foreign Relations, 28 January 2020, available at <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>, accessed on 24 May 2022.
27. Peter Cai, *Understanding China's Belt And Road Initiative*, Lowy Institute, 22 March 2017, available at <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative>, accessed on 23 May 2022.
28. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India website, *Official Spokesperson's response to a query on participation of India in OBOR/BRI Forum*, 13 May 2017, available at <https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/28463/Official+Spokespersons+response+to+a+query+on+participation+of+India+in+OBORBRI+Forum>, accessed on 2 June 2022.
29. Reuters Staff, *China Unveils Global Data Security Initiative, Says Some Countries Bullying Others*, Reuters.com, 8 September 2020, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-security-data-idUSKBN25Z06L>, accessed on 26 May 2022.
30. Chun Han Wong, 'China Launches Initiative To Set Global Data-Security Rules', *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 September 2020, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-to-launch-initiative-to-set-global-data-security-rules-11599502974>, accessed on 28 May 2022.
31. Shannon Tiezzi, 'China's Bid To Write The Global Rules On Data Security', *The Diplomat*, 10 September 2020, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/chinas-bid-to-write-the-global-rules-on-data-security/>, accessed on 27 May 2022.
32. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Global Initiative On Data Security*, 8 September 2020, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/zgyw/t1812951.htm>, accessed on 27 May 2022.
33. Łukasz Kobierski, *Digital Cooperation between China and the Arab League*, Warsaw Institute, 8 April 2021, available at <https://warsawinstitute.org/digital-cooperation-china-arab-league/>, accessed on 24 May 2022.
34. *Global Times*, *Xi Proposes Global Development Initiative*, 22 September 2021, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234780.shtml>, accessed on 28 May 2022.
35. CGTN, *Wang Yi: Over 100 Countries Support Global Development Initiative*, 25 April 2022, available at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-04-25/Wang-Yi-Over-100-countries-support-Global-Development-Initiative-19wleAdg1d6/index.html>, accessed on 23 May 2022.
36. Arjun Kharpal, *China Accuses U.S. of 'Bullying' as it Touts New Global Data Security Push*, CNBC.com, 7 September 2020, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/08/china-launches-global-data-security-initiative-to-counter-us-pressure.html>, accessed on 29 May 2022.
37. Song Zhongping, 'With Nearly 600 Overseas Military Bases, US Falsely Claims China Is 'Building A New String Of Pearls'', *Global Times*, 4 January 2022, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1245047.shtml>, accessed on 24 May 2022.
38. Department of Defense, USA, *Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC 2021, Annual Report to Congress*, 2021, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>, accessed on 30 April 2022.
39. Bonny Lin, Jude Blanchette, Joseph S. Bermudez Jr, and MvembaPhezo, *Is China Building A New String of Pearls in the Atlantic Ocean?*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS Commentary, 20 December 2021, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-building-new-string-pearls-atlantic-ocean>, accessed on 27 May 2022.

40. C Raja Mohan, 'Why China is Acquiring Foreign Military Bases', *The Indian Express*, 24 November 2021, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/united-states-united-arab-emirates-china-military-facility-abu-dhabi-port-7636394/>, accessed on 1 June 2022.
41. Ananth Krishnan, 'Eye on Afghanistan, China to Build Military Base in Tajikistan', *The Hindu*, 28 October 2021, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/eye-on-afghanistan-china-to-build-military-base-in-tajikistan/article37221418.ece>, accessed on 2 June 2022.
42. Jeremy Page, Gordon Lubold and Rob Taylor, 'Deal For Naval Outpost In Cambodia Furthers China's Quest For Military Network', *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 July 2019, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/secret-deal-for-chinese-naval-outpost-in-cambodia-raises-u-s-fears-of-beijings-ambitions-11563732482>, accessed on 1 June 2022.
43. Brent Sadler, *China's Bid for Global Hegemony: One Base At A Time*, The Heritage Foundation, 4 April 2022, available at <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/chinas-bid-global-hegemony-one-base-time>, accessed on 2 June 2022.
44. Ananth Krishnan, 'China, Solomon Islands Sign Landmark Security Pact', *The Hindu*, 19 April 2022, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-solomon-islands-sign-landmark-security-pact/article65335863.ece>, accessed on 7 June 2022.
45. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, *China's Xi Proposes Global Security Initiative*, Observer Research Foundation, 13 May 2022, available at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-xi-proposes-global-security-initiative/>, accessed on 20 May 2022.
46. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, 24 July 2019, available at [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html), accessed on 5 June 2022.
47. John S. Van Oudenaren, *China's New Global Security Initiative: Power Play?*, The Jamestown Foundation, 13 May 2022, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-global-security-initiative-power-play/>, accessed on 25 May 2022.
48. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *op. cit.* (46).
49. Charles Edel, *A Fault Line in the Pacific*, Foreign Affairs, 3 June 2022, available at [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-06-03/fault-line-pacific?utm\\_medium=newsletters&utm\\_source=fatoday&utm\\_campaign=A%20Fault%20Line%20in%20the%20Pacific&utm\\_content=20220603&utm\\_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-06-03/fault-line-pacific?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=fatoday&utm_campaign=A%20Fault%20Line%20in%20the%20Pacific&utm_content=20220603&utm_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017), accessed on 3 June 2022.
50. Patricia M. Kim, *China's Search For Allies*, Foreign Affairs, 15 November 2021, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-11-15/chinas-search-allies>, accessed on 2 June 2022.
51. Kathrin Hille, 'China Builds Coalition to Counter America's "Barbaric and Bloody" Leadership', *Financial Times Taipei*, 27 May 2022, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/377cdb02-8a45-4ba2-b6ee-88620eb48f0b>, accessed on 3 June 2022.
52. Council on Foreign Relations, *op. cit.* (25).
53. Sheila A. Smith, *The Quad Is Getting More Ambitious in the Indo-Pacific*, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 May 2022, available at [https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quadgettingmoreambitiousindopacific?utm\\_source=twtw&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_](https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quadgettingmoreambitiousindopacific?utm_source=twtw&utm_medium=email&utm_)

campaign=TWTW%202022June3&utm\_term=TWTW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20, accessed on 4 June 2022.

54. *India Today*, 'India, China are partners rather than rivals, says Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, PTI', 29 March 2022, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-china-partners-rather-than-rivals-chinese-foreign-minister-wang-yi-1931119-2022-03-29>, accessed on 6 June 2022.
55. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India website, *Transcript of Special Briefing by External Affairs Minister on Meeting with Foreign Minister of China* (March 25, 2022), 25 March 2022, available at [https://www.mea.gov.in/media\\_briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript\\_of\\_Special\\_Briefing\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_on\\_Meeting\\_with\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_of\\_China\\_March\\_25\\_2022](https://www.mea.gov.in/media_briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_by_External_Affairs_Minister_on_Meeting_with_Foreign_Minister_of_China_March_25_2022), accessed on 6 June 2022.
56. Darshana M. Baruah, *What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 March 2021, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/03/what-is-happening-in-indian-ocean-pub-83948>, accessed on 28 April 2022.
57. Joshua T. White, *China's Indian Ocean Ambitions: Investment, Influence, and Military Advantage*, Brookings Institution, June 2020, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chinas-indian-ocean-ambitions/>, accessed on 28 April 2022.
58. Ian Johnson, *Biden's Grand China Strategy: Eloquent But Inadequate*, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 May 2022, available at <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/biden-china-blinken-speech-policy-grand-strategy>, accessed on 4 June 2022.
59. Cheng Li, *Biden's China Strategy: Coalition-driven Competition or Cold War-style Confrontation?*, Brookings, May 2021, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/bidens-china-strategy-coalition-driven-competition-or-cold-war-style-confrontation/>, accessed on 7 June 2022.
60. Department of Defense, USA (2021), *op. cit.* (38).
61. Chaguan, 'China Unveils Its Vision Of A Global Security Order', *The Economist*, 5 May 2022, available at <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/05/05/china-unveils-its-vision-of-a-global-security-order>, accessed on 2 June 2022.



**Brigadier Anil Jain** was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in 1991. He has attended Staff Course at DSSC Wellington and Higher Command Course at Army War College Mhow. The officer has operational experience in Jammu & Kashmir and the North-East. Currently, the officer is a Senior Research Fellow with the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

### About the Paper

On April 21, 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered the keynote address during the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2022. In his address, Xi announced China's proposal for a Global Security Initiative (GSI), to "promote security for all in the world".

The initiative's core concept is supposedly that of "shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security", taking into account "security concerns of all countries". It was later clarified by China that the proposal is aimed at "improving the global security governance system" and building regional security to "maintain peace and stability in Asia". Post the announcement, China appears to be promoting this initiative vigorously, which is probably indicative of the importance accorded to it in its strategic vision.

The international response to the initiative has, so far, been surprisingly muted. However, it is considered that this latest global initiative by China needs deliberate examination, since, if perused earnestly by China, it could well have serious and long-term ramifications for global geopolitics in general, and Asian and Indian security, in particular. Accordingly, this paper examines critical elements of Xi Jinping's keynote address, the concept of indivisible security, inextricably linked as it appears to be to the GSI, previous "global" initiatives by China, and a preliminary assessment of the GSI. Finally, the paper examines the implications of the GSI and possible response options for India.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent Think Tank dealing with contemporary issues of national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional & sub-conventional conflicts and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy oriented in approach.

**CLAWS Vision:** To establish CLAWS as a leading Think Tank in policy formulation on Land Warfare, National Security and Strategic Issues.

Website: [www.claws.in](http://www.claws.in)

Contact us: [landwarfare@gmail.com](mailto:landwarfare@gmail.com)