

The University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Institute for Advanced
International Studies

IAIS Policy Compass

Volume 1. Issue 40

CHINA'S GLOBAL GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract

This article examines the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2025, as well as the State Council of the People's Republic of China's White Paper, 'Building a More Just and Rational Global Governance System: Concepts, Initiatives and Actions', published in June 2026. It analyses the key principles of China's approach to reforming global governance, the role of the United Nations, the significance of the Global South, the relationship between the GGI and China's other global initiatives, and its potential impact on the formation of a multipolar international order. Particular attention is paid to the assessments of Chinese and foreign experts, including both the positive reception of the initiative by developing countries and critical arguments regarding Beijing's normative and geopolitical objectives. The conclusion is drawn that the GGI reflects China's transition from a predominantly adaptive role within the existing system of global governance to a more active participation in shaping international norms, institutions and mechanisms.

Keywords: *China, Global Governance Initiative, Global South, UN, multipolarity, international order*

Introduction

The modern system of global governance is evolving against a backdrop of intensifying geopolitical competition, a rise in the number of armed conflicts, a slowdown in global economic development and a crisis of confidence in existing international institutions. Against this backdrop, China is increasingly putting forward its own conceptual approaches to reforming the international order.

An important milestone in this process was Xi Jinping's launch of the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) in 2025. Since its launch, the GGI has rapidly gained the support of nearly 160 countries and international organisations, and more than 60 countries have joined the Group of Friends of Global Governance [1]. In June 2025, the State Council of the People's Republic of China published a White Paper entitled 'Building a More Just and Rational Global Governance System: Concepts, Initiatives and Actions', in which the conceptual provisions of the GGI were set out in the form of specific principles, proposals and practical measures [2].

The publication of the document pursues several interrelated objectives: to present China's vision of global governance, to build international consensus around the proposed approaches, to enhance the effectiveness of the international response to global challenges, and to promote the formation of what China considers to be a more just and rational system of global governance.

Key provisions of China's concept of global governance

The Chinese side takes the view that the contemporary international system is undergoing a profound transformation. According to Beijing, the rise in the number of conflicts, the crisis of multilateralism, trade and economic tensions, and insufficient progress in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals all point to the need to reform existing mechanisms of global governance.

In this regard, China emphasises the need to uphold the central role of the UN, to respect the principle of sovereign equality of states, to refrain from the use of force, and to resolve international and regional conflicts primarily through diplomatic means. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in characterising the current international situation, noted the return of the 'law of the jungle' and the erosion of the UN's authority. In his view, overcoming these trends requires strengthening the UN Charter and its founding principles[3].

Another central element of the Chinese approach is the strengthening of the role of the Global South. Beijing advocates expanding the representation of developing countries in international institutions and increasing their participation in the formulation of global rules. At the same time, China declares its support for the multilateral trading system, at the heart of which lies the World Trade Organisation.

[1] В Китае опубликована Белая книга о глобальном управлении. Агентство Синьхуа. 17/06/2026. <https://russian.people.com.cn/n3/2026/0617/c31521-20468401.html>

[2] Zhongguo zhengfu fabu guanyu quanqiu zhili de baipishu (中国政府发布关于全球治理的白皮书-Китайское правительство опубликовало Белую книгу по вопросам глобального управления.) // <https://www.news.cn/20260617/528c00be2b074591b9368ba79affc504/c.html>

[3] Zhongbang bai pishu zhanxian gaige wanshan quanqiu zhili de daguo dandang (重磅白皮书展现改革完善全球治理的大国担当-Белая книга наглядно демонстрирует ответственность Китая как великой державы в деле реформирования и совершенствования системы глобального управления)// <https://www.news.cn/world/20260618/22829f78f91e44cc8280e173299574c2/c.html>

GGI is therefore built around several interrelated principles: strengthening multilateralism, the central role of the UN, the sovereign equality of states, increasing the participation of the Global South, and reforming international institutions to reflect the changing global balance of power.

GGI and China's transition from participant to architect of global governance

One of the most significant features of GGI is the changing nature of China's participation in global governance. Whilst in previous stages Chinese diplomacy largely adapted to existing international institutions, today Beijing is increasingly seeking to play an active role in shaping international norms, rules and institutions.

This trend has been noted by a number of researchers. According to Liu Hongwu, dean of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, the White Paper reflects not only China's assessment of existing problems in global governance, but also new policy guidelines for the next stage of its development [4].

Zhu Feng, Director of the Institute of International Relations at Nanjing University, emphasises the practical focus of the GGI. In his view, the key task lies in transforming the initiative into concrete mechanisms for international cooperation. China thus seeks not only to promote the principles of multilateralism, but also to take a more active part in the practical management of global processes [5].

Examples of such institutional activity include the establishment of the International Institute of Mediation, the promotion of cooperation in the fields of data and artificial intelligence, and the organisation of international forums on global governance. These steps suggest that China is gradually transitioning from being primarily a participant in international institutions to a state that aspires to shape certain elements of the global institutional architecture.

The Significance of the GGI for countries of the Global South

The Global South occupies a special place in the Chinese concept. The appeal of the GGI to developing countries lies primarily in its emphasis on equal participation, the right to development and greater representation in international institutions.

Experts from countries of the Global South emphasise that the existing system of international governance was largely shaped at a time when the global balance of power differed significantly from today's. Its continued legitimacy therefore depends on its ability to take account of the growing economic and political influence of developing countries [6]. V. Saraswati, Director of the Centre for Global Development Studies in Indonesia, notes that the GGI meets the expectations of many developing countries, as it links the reform of global governance to the principles of equality and the right to development.

[4] The white paper making China's case for new rules for the world's new frontiers// <https://www.bastillepost.com/global/article/5944855-white-paper-on-global-governance-provides-favorable-response-to-global-south-suggestions>

[5] Zhongguo fabu guanyu quanqiu zhili de baipishu, zhuanjia: qingxi chanming Zhongguo zai duobian zhili lingyu lichang (中國發布關於全球治理的白皮書，專家：清晰闡明中國在多邊治理領域立場-Китай опубликовал Белую книгу по вопросам глобального управления. По мнению экспертов, документ ясно излагает позицию Китая в сфере многостороннего глобального управления)// <https://www.flamingwheels.online/html/20260618/150047.htm>

[6] Wei wanshan quanqiu zhili zhuru bujie dongle (为完善全球治理注入不竭动力 (Внести неиссякаемый импульс в совершенствование глобального управления)// <https://world.people.com.cn/n1/2026/0619/c1002-40743522.html>



In her view, China seeks not only to put forward concepts but also to implement them through mechanisms such as the 'Belt and Road Initiative', the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI) and the GGI [7].

In this context, the Chinese model, which links development, interconnectivity and security, may be perceived by a number of countries in the Global South as an alternative to traditional models of international cooperation.

Vicente Ortún, a professor at Pompeu Fabra University, also points out that the contemporary international system is no longer unipolar. Given the increasing complexity of global challenges, he argues that broader coalitions are needed, taking into account the specific national circumstances of different states.

Thus, the GGI has the potential to strengthen China's diplomatic standing amongst developing countries by offering them not only economic cooperation but also a role in the debate on reforming the international order.

GGI within China's system of global initiatives

GGI should be viewed not as an isolated foreign policy concept, but as part of a broader system of initiatives put forward by Xi Jinping. Taken together, GDI, GSI, GCI and GGI form an interconnected conceptual framework for Chinese foreign policy.

GDI focuses on development and economic cooperation, GSI on security, GCI on dialogue amongst civilisations, whilst GGI is directed specifically at issues of international institutions and global governance. The 'Belt and Road' initiative provides the vital economic and infrastructural foundation for the implementation of these concepts.

It is precisely this combination of normative initiatives with practical mechanisms for cooperation that is one of the defining features of China's contemporary foreign policy. Beijing seeks to demonstrate that its concepts can be translated into concrete projects in the fields of infrastructure, development, security, digital technologies and international cooperation.

Critical assessments of the Chinese initiative

Despite the positive reaction from a number of developing countries, the GGI has attracted serious criticism. The main question is to what extent Beijing's stated concept of equitable and inclusive global governance corresponds to China's actual behaviour [8].

The harshest assessment comes from Rahul Pandey, a research fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation. In his view, the rhetoric of sovereign equality and multilateralism may conceal China's desire to shape an international system that better serves its own political and strategic interests [9].

[7] Why the Global Governance Initiative Resonates Across the Globe // <http://www.cnfocus.com/why-the-global-governance-initiative-resonates-across-the/> \\\ Wei wanshan quanqiu zhili zhuru bujie dongle (为完善全球治理注入不竭动力 -Внести неиссякаемый импульс в совершенствование глобального управления)// <https://world.people.com.cn/n1/2026/0619/c1002-40743522.html>

[8] China sets out its vision for a new global order – but will it commit the resources to match its ambition?// <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/06/china-sets-out-its-vision-new-global-order-will-it-commit-resources-match-its-ambition>

[9] Xi Jinping's Push for the Global Governance Initiative and Critical Evaluation// <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2026/june/25/Xi-Jinping-s-Push-for-the-Global-Governance-Initiative-and-Critical-Evaluation>



From this perspective, the GGI represents not merely a proposal to reform the existing order, but a tool for expanding China's normative influence. Areas such as digital governance, artificial intelligence, international trade and cyberspace take on particular significance in this regard, as Beijing seeks to play a role in shaping new rules and standards.

Critics also point to the contradictions between China's rhetoric on fair global trade and certain aspects of its economic policy. Shoumitro Chatterjee and Arvind Subramanian, in particular, argue that China's industrial policy may limit the opportunities for developing countries in traditional labour-intensive sectors, which have historically been a key element of their industrialisation [10].

Another issue is China's use of economic instruments as a means of exerting political pressure. Critics point to the use of export controls and the dependence of a number of international supply chains on Chinese supplies of critical minerals and technologies. In their view, such practices are somewhat at odds with Beijing's stated commitment to free competition and multilateralism.

Conclusion

The global governance initiative is a key element of China's current foreign policy strategy. Its emergence signals a further broadening of China's diplomatic agenda: Beijing seeks not only to participate in resolving specific international issues, but also to help shape the principles, norms and institutions of global governance.

For countries of the Global South, the initiative may be of considerable interest due to its emphasis on representation, the right to development and the broader participation of developing states in shaping international rules. At the same time, critics point to the gap between China's normative statements and certain aspects of its economic, regional and foreign policy practices.

Thus, the GGI should be viewed both as a conceptual proposal for reforming global governance and as a tool for expanding China's international influence. Its distinctive feature lies in Beijing's aim to combine existing institutions—primarily the UN—with the promotion of new mechanisms and norms of international cooperation.

[10] Xi Jinping's Push for the Global Governance Initiative and Critical Evaluation// <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2026/june/25/Xi-Jinping-s-Push-for-the-Global-Governance-Initiative-and-Critical-Evaluation>



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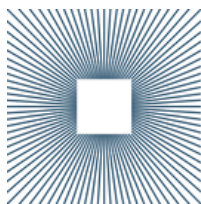
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