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CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: A SHIFT IN NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY OR STRATEGIC INFLUENCE?

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In 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a strategy advocating a broad approach to security that spans traditional and non-traditional domains, emphasising global cooperation, training, and conflict mediation.

The GSI concept paper recognises the increasingly interconnected nature of international and domestic security threats, as well as the importance of maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains. It also outlines a collaborative framework for global security engagements, providing opportunities for a range of bilateral security agreements with developing nations, police training, and mediation efforts in conflicts like those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as peace proposals for Ukraine.

Global Security Initiative: A Growing Focus on Non-Traditional Security Threats

As China expands its global presence, it increasingly confronts non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, political instability, and transnational crime. These threats extend beyond the realm of conventional military conflicts, necessitating a comprehensive security strategy that addresses both domestic stability and international risks.

Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), introduced in 2013, has amplified China's exposure to vulnerabilities beyond its borders, particularly in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and parts of Africa. In these regions, China engages in non-traditional security cooperation with regional states, addressing issues such as piracy, illegal trafficking, and organised crime, while also contributing to peacebuilding and post-conflict

reconstruction efforts. China's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions and support for fragile states underscores its aim to be recognised as a responsible global power, actively contributing to international non-traditional security initiatives.

China's Geopolitical Ambitions under the GSI

A key debate on China's evolving approach to non-traditional security under the GSI centres on the implications and reach of its broadening focus on global stability, particularly in areas like counterterrorism, transnational crime, and cyber threats. Advocates argue that the GSI enhances regional cooperation and mutual security by offering frameworks for addressing shared challenges, especially through capacity-building programs, intelligence sharing, and agreements in the Global South, with a marked focus on regions like Africa and Southeast Asia. Proponents view this as a stabilising force that encourages countries to enhance their internal security in line with non-traditional, modern security needs.

A key concern surrounding the GSI is that China's expanded non-traditional security focus may primarily serve its geopolitical objectives—securing overseas interests, such as BRI projects, and maintaining domestic stability by extending influence over perceived regime security threats abroad. There is also a potential risk of dependency on Chinese security frameworks for developing countries and concerns about surveillance and state control measures that could accompany Chinese assistance, especially given its track record in handling domestic non-traditional security issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

The GSI could also potentially impact the traditional concept of sovereignty and non-interference. China's involvement in other nations' security structures, particularly in Asia and Africa, can be seen as a subtle shift from its traditional stance of non-intervention, a move some interpret as paving the way for greater influence over the domestic policies of partner nations.

Challenges and Strategic Flexibility

For Beijing, significant challenges remain in its own efforts to engage with host countries globally through the GSI. These challenges are particularly pronounced in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Chinese interests—including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—face threats from militant groups such as the Islamic State, the Taliban, and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The complex militant landscapes in these regions complicate direct Chinese interventions, often leading to a reliance on humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts rather than overt counter-terrorism operations.

In regions with lower stakes and more manageable security risks, China's approach has been to establish cooperative frameworks focused on non-traditional security issues, offering police training, security assistance, and material support. For instance, China

has strengthened security engagements with Central Asian countries through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Conclusion

The GSI's broad focus on comprehensive security allows Beijing to integrate counterterrorism within a wider framework that addresses non-traditional security challenges such as extremism, cyber threats, and transnational crime. Unlike traditional military strategies, China's non-traditional focus relies on law enforcement training and development projects as tools for influence rather than direct military presence, aligning with its stance on sovereignty and multilateralism.

China's growing focus on non-traditional security through the GSI underscores its comprehensive approach to security while reflecting China's ongoing efforts to shape the security environment to align with its own strategic interests. Understanding China's distinct perspective on security will be essential as its global influence continues to expand.

The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.

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