

Explore China's prominent initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Northern Initiative, as we uncover their true intentions—funding and support or genuine global development. Our esteemed guests shed light on the Chinese Communist Party's approach and practical implementation. We examine progress support, capacity building, and knowledge-sharing efforts, including global development centers and vocational training programs. Join us to understand China's aspirations in shaping global governance. Addressing challenges and skepticism, this episode offers valuable insights for those intrigued by international relations and global development.

Takeaways

China's Promotion of Initiatives and Slogans

Skepticism around Funding and Support from State-Owned Banks

Implementation of Belt and Road Initiative and Northern Initiative

Xi Jinping's 32 Deliverables and Action Plans

Capacity Building through Vocational Training Programs

China's Aim to Mediate Conflicts and Increase Military Presence in the Middle East

Importance of Monitoring China's Initiatives and Developments

China's Foreign Policy Shift towards the Global South

Quotes

"Embracing multilateralism allows us to foster multiple partnerships and engagements, resulting in a balanced world with diverse sources of strength."-Tuvia Gering

"Amidst the shortcomings of US governance, China endeavors to reform global governance, striving for democracy, multipolarity, fairness, and justice." - Michael Schuman

"Beijing remains steadfast, doubling down on their initiatives with unwavering momentum."- Michael Schuman

Featured in the Episode

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Transcript:

Jonathan Fulton:

Welcome to the China MENA podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlanta Council, and a political scientist at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Belt and Road Initiative has become ubiquitous in international affairs, but when it was rolled out in 2013, very few people outside China paid attention. It wasn't until 2015 when the Chinese government published a white paper on the BRI that the implications started to become more clear to the wider world. In 2021 and 2022, China introduced two other initiatives, the global development initiative or the GDI and the global security initiative or GSI.

Earlier this year, a third was unveiled, the global civilization initiative. And so far, the international response has followed the same pattern with the BRI. Relative silence. To discuss the GSI and the GDI's broader international implications, I'm delighted to be joined by my two coauthors of a recent Atlantic Council issue brief, *How Beijing's Newest Global Initiative Seeks to Remake the World Order*. Michael Schuman and Tuvia Gering are both nonresident senior fellows with the Atlantic Council's Global China hub. Michael is a journalist who's been reporting from Asia for over 25 years, and the author most recently of *Superpower Interrupted: The Chinese History of the World*. Tuvia is a researcher at the Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation Israel China Policy Center at INSS in Israel, and author of the excellent Discourse Power on substack. Gentlemen, welcome to the show.

Michael Schuman:

Thank you, Jonathan. Thanks. Yeah. Thanks for having us on.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. Great to have you both here. So, Tuvia, can you get us started? Can you please tell us what the GSI and GDI are and what are they meant to accomplish?

Tuvia Gering:

Yeah. So, I think we need to take a step back and understand the context of China's thinking about these new initiatives. So, Xi Jinping believes that the world is undergoing great changes unseen in the century. And all experts in China, they'll add that the east is rising, and the west is declining. That's what it means. Beyond propaganda, if you look at the economic data, you know, there's some substance to it. Look at the IMF report recently that said that 70% of world growth is responsible for Asia. I mean, Asia is responsible. Right. And the global economic and population demographic center of gravity is shifting eastward with China being at the center. And China believes that it's not enough to just govern itself, because it's a fifth of humanity. And as COVID showed us, whatever happens in China can affect the world and vice versa. And because of that, because their fates are intertwined, this also means that the Chinese dream of Xi Jinping is intertwined with the global dreams of everyone else. And there is a problem in all that story, is global governance used to be controlled by the US led western hegemony since the end of the Cold War, but they've been failing miserably in their job. And someone else needs to step up and take control and reform global governance to democratize it to make it more multi polar and fair and just. And China is able to do that role. And if everything goes right, the 3 new initiatives, the GDI, GSI, GCI, together with the Belt and Road Initiative, they will create the future where you will see both the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as well as realization of Xi Jinping's vision, creating a community with a shared destiny for mankind. So that's just an idea. What it actually means, the GDI development officially means to expedite the realization of the UN sustainable development goals, or 17 of them. The GSI security is introducing a new security concept, a new way of thinking about global security. It has what they call 6 commitments. The most important of which I think is indivisible security. Again, the same

idea. My fate is intertwined with yours. Also the UN Charter is important, and there's no group that is more important than others. And, merging between traditional and nontraditional security concerns, like, biosecurity and terrorism and so on. As for the GCI, that's the most recent one in March. So it's important where he unveiled it. It was during the high-level dialogue between political parties between the Chinese Communist Party and other global parties. And it advocates the 4 shared proposals, which calls for diversity of civilizations, the common values of all mankind, not common, not universal. We can talk about that. The importance of civilizational heritage and innovation, and finally, international exchanges corporation in humanities, in the humanities. And that's about it. But beyond all this propaganda, and I think we'll talk about this in more detail, all of these new initiatives have strong anti-western, post-western wishes from China to create this new world order that the US plays a much less significant role. So that's the basics, I think.

Jonathan Fulton:

Okay. Thank you. That's a good overview. So Michael, turning to you, Tuvia kind of touched on it, but just to give a little more detail, why did Beijing feel the need to roll out these initiatives? What gap was there in the international system that China thought it had the job to fill?

Michael Schuman:

Well, I think from Beijing's perspective, the current, you know, US led world order, with the US being called the rules-based world order, is kind of a hostile place. Right? This is a world system that's based on the liberal values and universal values. And those have been defined by the United States and the democratic partners. And that's created a world system that has elevated democracy to the, the only form of government that actually has legitimacy so if you're sitting in Beijing and you're in a kind of a proud authoritarian state, you're looking around the world. You're getting more powerful. And I think the leaders of Beijing have come to realize that they need to alter this world order. They need to gain more influence within it. They need to reshape it and make it a place that's let that from their perspective is less hostile to their ideas, to their growing power, and, to promote, a different ideological foundation to the way countries interact, to the way governments see each other, and also a different foundation of ideals behind the world system, to make it a place that's basically friendlier to autocracy. And as Tuvia has said, these initiatives that Beijing has put out, you know, they don't directly mention the United States per se. But, there is a very, very clear element within them that these are directed against the United States, directed against the west, and directed against the ideas about democracy and human rights that the US and its allies have been pushing for decades and in many ways have been quite successful at it. So, what I think these initiatives are part of, are important efforts to try to change the way global governance works. They're trying to change the way people think about how global governance should work and what ideas and values should and should not be behind that system.

Jonathan Fulton:

That's great. Thanks Michael.

Tuvia Gering:

If I could jump in Jonathan. There's one example just to show what Michael just described. When Xi Jinping unveiled the GCI, he said at the beginning, the Chinese model is proof that modernization is not equal to westernization. And then the president and party secretary of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Gaussian, he wrote about this as a long piece, translated by China and he says the GCI is quintessentially, China showing that the capitalist model has failed and we have a superior model, which is a new form of human civilization created by the CCP and the public good for the greater of humanity.

Jonathan Fulton:

Thanks Tuvia. You know, Michael, when you were talking about the contrast, I kept thinking about the timing of when these were unveiled. You know, if you think back to 2021 and early 2022, the world looked a little different than it does today. Right. 2021 you know, there was this very common narrative around a lot of the global south, a lot of authoritarian countries that you know, that democracy didn't solve COVID properly. That the response didn't work. There's all this division within these countries. The west is fragmented. And China looked like it was on top of things. Right. And, you see the GDI's introduced, and it seems like China's got answers for everybody. And then the GSI was rolled out just a few weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, again, with this idea that the west was fragmented, NATO wasn't going to be unified anymore. I wonder if they would roll out those two things the same way if they were, if they had a do over, because right now, I think, it doesn't look as efficient as it did.

Michael Schuman:

Well, yes, the world has changed quite a bit. I mean, what part of this is, as Tuvia mentioned, a big part of the motivation behind these initiatives is the idea, that I think it was, and I think still is widely held in Beijing that the US is in inexorable and inevitable decline. And this is basically China's moment, to rise to the top of the world order. But recently, I think, kind of reading the tea leaves, I think the leaders in Beijing are somewhat taken aback by, kind of the resilience and resurgence in the United States, in the post COVID period both within the United States itself with the economic recovery with the success the Biden administration has had, but also in terms of the resurgence of American global standing under the Biden Administration, the way that it's been able to revitalize its alliances and to get greater coordination and cooperation among the allies and other partners and then to a great degree, in regard to issues relating to China. But what I think has happened because of that is rather than backing off I think what you see is Beijing somewhat doubling down on these initiatives. And, as Tuvia even mentioned, a new one in March, in this very, very new kind of global political environment. So I think rather than rethinking what they're doing, I think I feel that they almost need to cut a slam on the gas pedal to try to push some of these ideas and initiatives even harder than they were before to keep what they see, I think the momentum is going in their favor.

Jonathan Fulton:

Right. So, Tuvia, I want to come back to you. I mean, when I think of the way these have been introduced, it reminds me a lot of the Belt and Road 2013. We heard a lot of platitudes. We heard a lot of speeches. People talked about the, you know, the Belt, what was it? The one belt one road, was in everybody's speech, but nobody really knew what it was. There wasn't a lot of substance. And then you saw this period of about maybe 20 months when all of the ministries had to kind of catch up to the platitudes and kind of figure out how they're going to incorporate the belt and road into their various charges. Do you think it'll be similar to the GSI and GDI? We're going to see them start to put some meat on the bones and what shape do you expect they're going to take over the next couple of years?

Tuvia Gering:

Yeah. Certainly. There's a lot of similarities here. And all the cynics will come and say, you know, this is just China being China giving all these slogans and then anyone who wants to promote his own initiative, he just slaps the name of the slogan into his own brand. And there you go. You have the blessing of Xi Jinping, so give me funding from state owned banks and so on. But the Chinese analysts will tell you that this is just the way the Chinese role under the Chinese Communist Party. They give up the general directive up top. And then bottom up, they build what you call the meat on the bones. And we will see this fleshed up. And remember, the Belt and Road Initiative, now it's a household name. These two, they are promoted in each and every single, each and every single interaction that China now has with foreign actors, whether bilateral or multilateral. So, we will hear a lot more about what they mean in essence. So, we saw a bit of progress on the GDI. So last year, during the dialogue, Xi Jinping unveiled 32 deliverables, they call it. These are basically action plans of policy targets I guess. A few weeks ago, they released a progress report, like, 32 pages. And there you can see they divide the different, 32 deliverables into these categories, and I'll give you one category and a few examples just to get an idea what it means to flush it out. So, on platform building, that's one. So, they built an NGO network, which is ironic since NGOs are illegal in China, but whatever. Global Development Center, also probably based in China, a Global Vaccine Center, there is one! There's a couple, actually, the UN, but the People's Republic of Redundancy here, partnerships, Chinese led conferences for agriculture, for data, for youth development, funding support. That's another one. For example, the South Wales Corporation Fund that had existed long before, the last decade. So they added another \$1,000,000,000 for it. We need to follow how much, and how this money is spent. Capacity building, this, I think, is important because we do see some progress on that, for example, in Luban conference, Luban on workshops. Sorry. This is a new program that, a really good Washington report came out last week, I think, about these Luban workshops. Basically, this means vocational training made by China, in China for Chinese products and Chinese technologies. They're planning on training 20,000 people this year, the next few years, and 100,000 eventually by the end of the decade or something like that. And then you have knowledge sharing, which is also interesting. They provide satellite sharing and data sharing plans, again, with China, at the center. And on security, we saw some progress in March when China was able to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia, right? So, they came and said, look, this is a model example of the success of the GSI, but, we all know this is not really the case. This is something that had existed prior and

was mediated by Iraq, Oman, and the US even. However, what we will see is more and much more of the same, and we might see an inflection point. So, one thing we're going to see China being taken more seriously is, mediators in conflicts. We will see more Chinese weapons in the Middle East, for example, in the last few decades, it's 80% increase, versus 30% decrease for the US according to Karila, the commander of Semco. And we'll see more military diplomacy, which China was already pretty active there and perhaps more bases. That's also very likely. Finally, with civilization, and here I am, we will see more people-to-people ties. Again, these are things that existed. This is just slapping a new brand to it, but you'll see more of the same. For example, last week, there was a 4th dialogue between China and Arab Countries and Xi Jinping said that they're going to invite every single year 200 Arab political leaders to China in addition to a dozen other programs that they plan on holding. So, they will flash these out. We need to pay attention. They will develop.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. For sure. I'm going to come back to the Middle East in a second, but Michael, I just want to look more broadly at the international scene. You know, the two of you kept saying for China, by China, in China. This seems a very China centered set of initiatives. Beyond the domestic audience who's the target for these? I mean, they seem to, not they seem to, they clearly represent an alternative to these western preferred norms and institutions. Do you think there's an appetite for these projects in the rest of the world beyond the west?

Michael Schuman:

Well, I think a lot of the messaging surrounding the GSI and the GDI, especially the GDI, are directed at the global south. I think that the leaders in Beijing, I'm not going to say that they've written off the west as... in the sense that they won't have any dialogue with the US and Europe and their partners entirely, but I think they've come to see the US and its allies as somewhat implacably hostile. So, I think the direction of Chinese foreign policy overall is headed, being shifted towards the global south. Economic energies are being redirected there. And a lot of the messaging of the GSI and GDI, as you said, because there has been of an anti-western tone to it, the idea is to present China as an alternative to the US, as an alternative to the US, to the US system, and an alternative to the ideas the US have been pushing on the world. And I think there is an audience for this, especially, obviously other authoritarian states around the world will find some of these ideas very appealing. But I also think in a situation where you have, you know, since the end of the cold war, you basically had one global superpower. I think many countries and many governments are looking for alternatives to this and China is presenting itself in that way. I don't necessarily think that that means, the global south will automatically kind of flock to China's banner, but I do think it means that governments and leaders, I mean, of the global south will kind of be happy to have, you know, more than one option in terms of where they get their development finance, including who to partner with economically, what political programs they may want to engage in; and a lot of the countries in global south want it being, to be better represented in international institutions and international forums and this may be a way of achieving, trying to give you a way of achieving that. So, I think there is an audience

out there. I mean, we can talk about this more. I mean, I think there's also some, some serious, serious hurdles and issues that China will face in really gaining adherence to these initiatives in a way; the amount of kind of buy in that China will need from the rest of the world to back these initiatives in a way that they really influence global governance. That's another story, but there is at least an appetite for it.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. I mean, that's a good point. I think the idea that China appeals to this mass block of countries in the global south, you know, and that they want what China has to offer, I think, is really over-stating it - not that that wasn't your point. Your point was the opposite. I agree completely. It's not that they want what China has to offer. They just want options. Right? They want alternatives.

Michael Schuman:

Right. And, you know China has done a tremendously good job of presenting itself as an alternative. I mean, that that was a whole idea behind building road initiative right, which was like, you know, the poor nations of the world need more financing, need more development, the existing institutions of the world order aren't providing it, aren't providing it in the way that developing countries need and want. So, China is going to present an alternative development program, that's finance in alternative ways and done an alternative ways. That has been not necessarily, I mean, we keep coming back to the BRIs and as a model for where the GSI and GDI may be going, but the BRI also, I think, presents some kind of warning signals to China. You know, the BRI has hardly been an unmitigated success and, you know, the Chinese themselves are in the process of rethinking the BRI and how they want to engage in development programs and finance in the future. Their development lending from their main state banks is, has, plunged dramatically in recent years. So, you know, it's trying to buy - proposing these programs by putting a lot of money and effort behind them doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to automatically be successful and they're going to bring the benefits that they're that they're supposed to bring. And then, of course, that undermines China's greater effort to build influence for itself and to influence the direction of global governance.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. I think the message for the US and its allies and partners is that it's just a more competitive playing field so you've got to step up your game in a lot of these countries because they're not naturally drawn to China. It's just some more competitive playing field. Right. Tuvia, I want to come back to a couple points you're making about the Middle East. I mean, the Middle East/North Africa, there's clearly a lot of justifiable frustration with the US in particular and the west in general in their approach to the region. There's this narrative that it can't be shaken that the US wants to leave, that the west is constantly lecturing them about liberal values and democratic values, and trying to force them into a direction that a lot of these countries aren't comfortable with and then China comes in and says, we have a different way of doing things.

Are these initiatives gaining traction in the Middle East/North Africa? You know, for Middle Eastern audiences, do they represent an attractive alternative do you think?

Tuvia Gering:

Yeah. So there's a couple of things to pick here. I totally agree that these ideas resonate here a lot. It's no secret the US is, you know, losing popularity in the region and the west in general suffering from hubris and hypocrisy and narcissism even. And of course, they carry a historical luggage of colonialism, and that doesn't give them extra credit. And, you know, the rules based international order for many people here died in Iraq, with a couple of 100,000, Iraqis. And, when you look at the World Trade Organization, the US has been also violating many of the rules. And, if you look a few years back and perhaps into the future, god forbid, when we get Trump again, it was the US, the isolationist, and you know, not a very, multi polar player or, global player, on that front. So that was a big goal. And then China steps in and says, we have alternatives. We have something better. We have a new form of human civilization. We have a new development model. And I think that for anyone going to China, especially if you visited 10 years ago and then visit again, and you see the progress, you see the skyscrapers as the cliché goes. China has achieved pretty tremendous growth. It's still, you know, albeit a developing country with many people still impoverished, but its growth model is attractive. If not wholesale, then at least parts of it, and they think they can learn from it. That's one thing. And another thing which Michael talked about is the authoritarian appeal. So, the elites listen to Xi. He tells him, look, I have a better model. And the Chinese model proves, you don't have to modernize, to westernize, if you want to modernize. Just be like us. And not only that. We're not exporting our model. Don't, don't even go that way, but we do this, you know, DIY, authoritarianism. You know, we just give you all these packages of techno authoritarianism tools. And, you know, just use them and control populations. Like, they do in Iran, for example. So, the elite, they find these ideas pretty appealing. And now for traction, that's a different story. So, the GSI security, I think, is a bit harder because development, it's pretty hard to say no to development. Right? That's something one of the Chinese diplomats we quote in our piece says. Like, how could we say no to development. Right? And that's, part of the kind of, sugar coating of these illiberal ideas is development. Right. But security here, it becomes a bit more contentious. So, they released a GSI concept paper, which, for the Middle East, calls to create a new security audit for the region. I published a paper about this for the Atlantic Council before the mediation happened in March. And it calls for creating a larger, more authoritative, more influential international peace conference. We know that China wants to hold security and dialogue here in the Gulf between Iran and the Gulf monarchies. And of course, needless to say none of these new frameworks include the US or Israel for that matter, as we speak, at least. The Israeli Palestinian conflict, that's a different story, but also part of the architecture. So, when you look at the GSI, that happened in March, I went around and asked some Israeli officials; So if you recall Qin Gang who's now a Qin Gang, unfortunately, missing in action. So, he talked with our foreign minister, Ellie Cohen, and he told them, have you heard the good news? We have a GSI. We're going to mediate between you and the Palestinians and that was in April. So the next month I called the different officials, and we also got to talk with them here at the INSS. And, you know, when I asked him, "What do you think of Qin Gang GSI? And they were like, who's Qin Gang and what the hell is a GSI? So I think that's kind of the approach you're going to hear from

people that are not involved in China research in the region. It's more of a branding thing. It will catch on eventually, but still, when it comes to security, the US is the main security provider. There's no question about it and regional countries say so themselves. As for civilization, I think this is the most pernicious one if you sit in more liberal countries because this undermines directly universal values. This undermines rationality. It undermines humanity and it undermines universal values that are universal. They're not western. They were even conceived with China. Chinese delegate. Before they proposed the GCI, they used to say that we were part of making universal values. But all of a sudden, we have common values and these common values, of development, security, fairness, justice, and let's see what are the two others? Democracy and freedom. Right? This is, you know, this is just making a joke, out of these things that are so important for humanity, and these are the illiberal values. So, unfortunately, if you're not sitting in Israel, in many countries here, either you're in elite and you think that these ideas sound kind of swell because you do see more authoritarian means of control, or you live in a poor country and you think that human rights are not the most important thing right now. You want development and you want more control because if you look, for example, at our neighbor, Lebanon, or you even in Jordan, right, doing a fair much better. You know what? They'd much rather live under authoritarian control but be as rich as the Saudis or the Emiratis. You know? And when you mix all these things together and you just wrap them in a nice gift wrap and promote them here, I think they will gain traction, and they repeat this all the time. So even European leaders like the Czech president, if I recall, he already praised the GCI. For the GDI, we have Antonio Guterres, from the UN who praises it. And there are 70 countries that joined the group of friends of the GDI that is headquartered in New York. Right? And this will survive the SDGs 2030. So after 2030, you're going to have China-centric development, for the world. And, for the GSI, we will have more frameworks. That's what they're saying, including here in the region. And little by little, they will gain traction. Absolutely. Because China wants them to gain traction and they're investing the resources to do so. And there is a chance, as Michael, said before that many of these things could backfire, as they did for the BRI. Again, this is not to say the BRI failed. I don't think it failed. I think it succeeded in many aspects. It tried. If you look at statistics of growth in BRI countries, so that's not necessarily a failure, and there's no such thing as a debt trap - that was completely disproved. However, there are real problems that this initiative calls for, and this gave China perhaps less appetite to overstretch. And if you look at the GDI, for example, just to give you an idea how, it is just an example, okay, for Jordan, right? There's a big report by ABC about this power plant. And right now, it's just a white elephant. And people in Jordan now took China to court, international court. And this is just one example from the region, there's a dozen others from Africa, you know, Kenya and Sudan, I think, that need to restructure the debt in Ghana too. And in Asia, that's Sri Lanka and so on. For the GSI, they talk about the UN charter, right, this is part of the 6 commitments. So let's see what the Chinese approach with the GSI, how much did they help a single Ukrainian right now in the war for the most flagrant violation of the UN charter and its values. And take the same thing for Iran and what it does here, which continues to proliferate, continues to spread extremism and terrorism. And their best buddies with China. The president Raisi becomes a professor, an honorary professor of Pecking University where most of these ideas came from, right, the Liberal University of Days York. And I think we will see more challenges, and we will see challenges even more from the west and from the rest of the world and from just facts on the ground and people

here that see what the high-sounding rhetoric and then compare it to actual reality. So these are all things to watch closely, I guess.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. There's a lot to think about. One thing though that you mentioned is just the attraction among elites. And then you've wrapped up by talking about Raisi's trip when he was, you know, vetted at Pecking University and given the honorary doctorate, they gave a speech, I believe, praising him for his contributions to security and peace and freedom around the region. And I keep thinking about the gap between elites and the publics, you know? Sure. There're a lot of authoritarian governments in the region but the people aren't necessarily happy with that. We've seen over the past, you know, decade plus, you know, this constant pushback against these authoritarian governments. And it kind of reminds me of when, you know, the last official to visit the Shah, you know, was Hua Kuo-Feng. Right? So the Chinese president at the time who stopped in Iran on his way back home and the people in Iran were outraged. You visit, who we saw as an illegitimate leader at a time when people are dying in the streets and we can't take it anymore. And you give them legitimacy and give them a little boost; and I kept thinking about that when Raisi went to Beijing and thinking, okay, government to government this is supporting a lot of what both of them want, but the people of Iran have to look at this and be really upset. And I think that's probably something China's got to watch out for with promoting some of this stuff with kind of, you know, heavy handed governments around the region. There's a big gap between what states want and what their people want. And I think that's something that we've got to think about going forward, but I guess that leads to a question I want to ask you, Michael. Just kind of looking beyond the Middle East is, you know, how does this mean for existing norms of practices around the world? You know, like, how should statis-co countries that like the so-called rules based or liberal international order or unipolarity or whatever we want to call it, you know, countries that, you know, enjoy the benefits of the system, how should they respond to this challenge from China?

Michael Schuman:

Well, I mean, you raised a really interesting point. Is that, you know, in some ways, the US led global order has been tremendously successful. And in one of those ways, has been elevating the idea of democracy. And when you look at polls around the world and even within the global south, you'll see extremely high rates of support for democracy in many parts of the world, including Africa and Latin America. So among the public, these ideas are still are so very appealing and here you have China coming in with an alternative set of ideas, but that gets into the problems they're facing, especially, I think, with the GSI, is, you know, this is, you're getting into the realm of ideas and ideologies. The BRI was about development and money and countries need money and the Chinese were dishing out money. So it was always going to get a certain amount of support. Now that the trend is you're going into the idea into the realm of ideas, they actually have to market their ideas as superior to the ones that are currently existing in the world order. And that's a very, very different task, not only because of public attitudes, but look, to a certain extent, China's becoming guilty of what they accuse the US of doing, which is

pushing their ideas on everybody else is you know, as Tuvia mentioned, there's no diplomatic interaction that China engages in these days where they don't trot out these initiatives expecting whoever's on the other side of the table to, to endorse or at least say nice things about them. So while the US isn't pushing a set of liberal economic and political ideas, now, the Chinese find themselves in the position of pushing an illiberal set of political ideas and not all that different a way; and the question is, how are other governments and people around the world going to respond to this. As you said, there's always going to be elites, especially in authoritarian countries who see this as a way of probably solidifying their control. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be popular on a wide scale. And also as China grows in power, and grows an influence around the world, they're going to run into problems with some of these ideas. The more active they become in global diplomacy, Tuvia was just mentioning their - the contradictions between their ideas and actions on Ukraine, they open themselves. They open themselves up to this kind of criticism that they're not following through on their own. They don't practice what they preach, so to speak; and also as they gain in power, their relationship with other countries is changing, especially within the global south, and that's changing the relationship between China and other developing countries. You know, when you look at, again, the effect of BRI, has been to turn China into the major creditor for a lot of developing countries, and that's changing the dynamic in their relationship. So there's all of these factors going on that I think is going to make them into GSI and GDI and some of these ideas a harder sell than they may appear at first glance.

Jonathan Fulton:

It's a great point. I mean, I think there seems to be an inevitability in the way a lot of people talk about this. And, you know, for every action, there's a reaction in global politics, right? It's not like China gets to do this stuff uncontested and everybody's just going to accept it. There's going to be a lot of pushback and -- right. -- I think that it's funny. The way I see it, especially in the Middle East is often being described as like a chess game where, you know, China supplies COVID, you know, vaccines and they say check. And then the US brings in the Abraham Accords and they say check. And everybody's waiting for a checkmate. The way I see it is just watching two really good tennis player hitting the ball back and forth at each other and it's just going to keep going until one of them - there's an unforced error or somebody comes up with, you know, it it's go there's going to be a lot of hitting it back and forth on this, I think.

Michael Schuman:

Look, I think what we've seen around the world is most countries really don't want to be on one side of the court or the other side of the court. I mean, there's always going to be some clear allies of the United States and clear partners of China. But I don't think they represent most of the world. I think most of the world is kind of happy to sit on the net and see what falls their way and to take what they think is best for their own interests, their own development, their own political development, from one side or the other side. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, I think we tend to see superpower competition as inherently negative. And in many ways, of course, it is. It potentially leads to conflict. It's bad for global prosperity. But, at the same time,

for a lot of countries around the world who are looking for more attention, looking for more development finance, looking to have a larger voice and what happens in world affairs. This competition between the US and China isn't necessarily a bad thing. And you can see that as how Washington and the Europeans have come back with their own alternatives to the Belt and Road program, decreasing their own development finance. So, I think it's not at all clear how issues are going to play out. I don't think it's going to be kind of a clear one on one contest. And, I think if there, you're going to see the world divide up in different ways on different issues at different times, depending on circumstances of their own interest.

Tuvia Gering:

The Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal Bin Farhan said last month, I think, that we don't subscribe to this zero-sum game. And I think we're all capable of having multiple partnerships and multiple engagements. And the US will, you know, it does the same. So just to reiterate what Michael said, I think, instead of thinking of it as a tennis match between two powers, you can think there's a huge gymnasium, and you have the 2 old guys playing tennis. And if people want, they can join the game, or they have their own court and they have a swimming pool too for the case. And it's not necessarily a bad thing. As Michael said, this is the upside of multilateralism that we may have more powers to help balance the two, well, at least for the region, two now offshore balances instead of one dominating hegemony.

Jonathan Fulton:

Guys, thanks so much. I could go on about this all day with you, but we've all got stuff to do, and we're all in different time zones. So I'm going to put links to our report or our issue be rather on the homepage. I'll put links to your book, Michael, to your great substack Tuvia. All great stuff. And look forward to more great work from both of you, coming up soon. To our listeners, thank you for joining us, follow us on social media, subscribe, review, and rate wherever you get your podcast, and we'll see you soon. Thank you.

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