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14. ABSTRACT This essay argues that China's new foreign policy initiatives launched between 2021 and 2023—the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative—are synchronized parts of a unified strategy to advance the Chinese Communist Party's long-term aim of supplanting the US as the world's leading power. The initiatives are each oriented toward a separate issue or sector of the existing US-led international system, but they are all aimed primarily at audiences in the Global South, as Beijing seeks to win the allegiance of these governments and populations.					
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Making a Multipolar World with China on Top

Beijing's New Foreign Policy Initiatives Advance its Long-Term Ambitions

Introduction

As General Secretary Xi Jinping begins his third term as China's premier leader, he is aiming Beijing's sites ever-more fixedly at one international goal: replacing the United States as the world's leading superpower. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders are careful not to voice this ambition publicly—to preserve the façade that China's rise is benign and forestall international backlash—but evidence of Beijing's ultimate ends abounds. In key Party documents and speeches over the last decade, CCP leaders have repeatedly articulated their conviction that history is moving toward a final vindication of socialism over capitalism¹ and their belief that China is destined to be a world leader with growing comprehensive national power, positioned to win the technological and economic competitions of the coming decades.² The Party castigates “imperialism,” “hegemonism,” and the “Cold-War mentality” of “certain nations” in every forum and information medium, and highlights Beijing's doctrinaire view that the world is experiencing “changes unseen in a century” and rapidly transitioning from a unipolar order to a multi-polar system.^{3,4} These are Party formulas employed to vilify the United States and the global system Washington leads, and to communicate Beijing's determination to make the decline of the West—long-prophesied by Marxists—into a reality by the middle of this century. China's increasingly assertive foreign policy is central to Beijing's aim to supplant Washington as the global hegemon. In the last two years, Beijing has launched a number of new foreign policy initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). While these policies each employ different mechanisms of influence, they are all aimed at the same primary audience—the governments and peoples of the global South—and each of these initiatives is in fact a concerted part of a unified strategy to achieve Xi Jinping's highest ambition: to prevail in a new great-power competition over the United States.

Reshaping World Development

China's Global Development Initiative (GDI)—first announced by Xi at the United Nations in 2021⁶—is an effort by Beijing to appeal to a broad swath of countries and populations

¹ “Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century,” The State Council of the People's Republic of China, accessed April 18, 2023, https://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latestreleases/202111/16/content_WS6193a935c6d0df57f98e50b0.html.

² “Full Text of the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed March 25, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/en/zxxx_662805/202210/t20221025_10791908.html.

³ Chinese Communist Party Central Propaganda Department, *Study of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, trans. Center for Security and Emerging Technology (Beijing: Study Press and People's Publishing House, 2021), 42-46.

⁴ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game; China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3-6, 19-44.

⁵ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, “China's National Defense in the New Era,” (Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd., Beijing, China, 2019).

⁶ “Xi Jinping Attends the General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and Delivers and Important Speech,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, September 22, 2021,

across the global south to increase China's current and future growth, economic leverage, and people-to-people ties. It is also designed to re-shape the global development landscape to make China central to the system while diluting the influence of the United States and de-linking key Western values from future global development activities. As Yunnan Chen of *Nikkei Asia* notes, Beijing launched the initiative at an opportune moment—when the global pandemic had resulted in a decrease in the traditionally dominant, Western sources of development funding, leaving a gap just when the world's less-developed countries were desperate for aid.⁷ Although Xi announced GDI with great fanfare, the exact nature of the initiative—what projects and activities GDI will actually include—remains vague 18 months after its launch. According to a number of experts on China's aid and development policies who participated in a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the GDI is best characterized as a statement of principles, including support for the UN's development agenda and a statement of China's "responsibilities" to the world as a developing country.⁸ China's plan to administer GDI through its national development agency—as opposed to the policy banks it employs in financing the less transparent infrastructure-oriented projects of China's older Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—and the diplomatic language Beijing has used in building support for GDI, suggest it will be a genuinely new, people-centered effort oriented toward small-scale development projects. As one analyst put it, if the BRI is the economic growth "hardware" of China's overseas outreach, GDI will be the public livelihood "software."

Despite the pomp with which Xi launched the initiative, however, China's actual development budget remains only \$3Billion, a fraction of the development funds provided through existing Western-led aid and development mechanisms.^{9,10} While this funding will almost certainly grow as GDI projects are launched and the initiative builds momentum, the mismatch between the fanfare with which GDI was launched and the level at which Beijing has funded and pursued it to date suggests that the initiative was created in part based on ulterior motives. One of Beijing's ulterior aims is to use GDI to position China as the "champion" of aid and development for the global south in opposition to Western development efforts which Beijing hopes to paint as unresponsive, parochial and patronizing. As the Party has calculated, since key countries in the global south—and the southern grouping of countries collectively—are projected to increasingly displace Western countries in terms of population over the coming decades, if Beijing can establish a leading role through its development efforts now, it will be positioned to displace the US as the leading economic partner of choice and can expect to reap

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjsxw_665172/202109/t20210923_9580159.html.

⁷ Yunnan Chen, China's Global Development Initiative is not the BRI Reborn," *Nikkei Asia*, March 8, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/China-s-Global-Development-Initiative-is-not-the-BRI-reborn>.

⁸ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Xi's New Global Development Initiative," September 12, 2022, video, 1:09:08, <https://www.csis.org/events/xis-new-global-development-initiative>.

⁹ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Xi's New Global Development Initiative."

¹⁰ This also means that GDI funding to date is a fraction of BRI funding, which has run into the hundreds of \$US billions. One China-development analyst asserted that BRI is effectively a re-branding of China's entire overseas globalization effort, which is itself an overflow of excess capacities from China's decades-long domestic boom. This partially explains why BRI has come to include such a dizzying array of geographically and economically dissimilar projects; it does not have a coherent focus because it is effectively a loose branding umbrella.

the attendant global power and influence rewards in the future.¹¹¹² This strategy in part explains Beijing's insistence that it is still a developing country—a nation “of” the global south—a claim that drives China to constantly reference its modest per-capita GDP to the exclusion of other metrics of China's rising national power.¹³

Beijing also hopes to use the GDI to effectively divorce normative Western values from standard development and aid practices and organizational priorities. As analysts at the *Economist* have noted, when confronted with the issue of its abysmal human rights record, Beijing has consistently asserted that “freedom from poverty is itself a human right.”¹⁴ This tactic seeks to create a moral equivalency between Beijing's suppression of individual human rights—including political crackdowns and Beijing's draconian repressions in Tibet and Xinjiang—and the perception of the West's inequitable or inadequate development support for the developing world. Beijing hopes this bait-and-switch will resonate with leaders in the global south who are weary of having their economies held hostage to their compliance with Western values and populations who are genuinely underserved by Western development aid and frustrated with North-South wealth disparities.

Finally, for Beijing, the GDI is a mechanism for advancing China's prestige while displacing US and Western leadership. For ground-truth on the CCP's preference to re-make the international development system, it is useful to turn to the Party's own publications, which are more akin to the CCP's “inside voice” than Beijing's official professions in public speeches at international forums or the language it employs in UN documents. In his report to the 20th Party Congress in the Fall of 2022, Xi bluntly asserted that there is a growing “deficit in peace, development, security, and governance,” in the world, caused by “hegemonic, high-handed, and bullying acts of using strength to intimidate the weak, taking from others by force and subterfuge, and playing zero-sum games.” After this broadside against the US-led order, Xi goes on to assert that China has put forward the GDI because Beijing is committed to “promoting common development” for a “human community with a shared future.” China, Xi says, will “safeguard the common interests of the developing world” and “narrow the North-South gap.”¹⁵ At the UN this effort to undermine the existing order is manifested in China's creation of a group it calls the “Friends of the Global Development Initiative,” now comprising around 100 countries.¹⁶ While nations may sign onto this list for a range of reasons—including to express support for the UN's development goals or to show interest in partnering with Beijing on future projects—Beijing uses the list to foster the impression of an anti-Western bloc aligned against the status quo. As Anthea Mulakala of the Asia Foundation asserts, while China's statements

¹¹ Chinese Communist Party Central Propaganda Department, *Study of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*.

¹² John Gramlich, “For World Population Day, a look at the countries with the biggest projected gains—and losses—by 2100,” Pew Research Center, July 10, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/for-world-population-day-a-look-at-the-countries-with-the-biggest-projected-gains-and-losses-by-2100/>.

¹³ “GDP per capita (current US\$) – China,” The World Bank, accessed April 23, 2023 [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2021&locations=CN&most recent value desc=false&start=1960&view=map](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2021&locations=CN&most%20recent%20value%20desc=false&start=1960&view=map).

¹⁴ “China's Global Development Initiative is not as Innocent as it Sounds,” *The Economist*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/06/09/chinas-global-development-initiative-is-not-as-innocent-as-it-sounds>.

¹⁵ “Full Text of the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” 52-55.

¹⁶ “Press Statement of the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, September 21, 2022, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/en/zxxx_662805/202209/t20220921_10769142.html.

about the purpose of GDI generally mirror mainstream global development priorities, China “prefers to raise its own tent and invite others in.”¹⁷

Fragmenting the Global Security Order

China has consistently paired the GDI with its Global Security Initiative (GSI)—announced in April 2022—to drive home the point that there can be no global development without global security. The CCP is using the GSI to try to delegitimize the United States as the leader in global security affairs, assert the need for an alternative security order in which many of the world’s security solutions would come from China, and to shape the external security environment to bolster the Party’s domestic regime security. As Manoj Kewalramani, a China security expert at the Takshashila Institution in India has noted, the GSI is explicitly framed in opposition to the postwar US-led security order. It seeks to create space for China to advance its own profile by asserting that the US and the West are in terminal decline and by making a moral argument that there is something fundamentally diseased about the Western order itself.¹⁸ In his speech announcing GSI, Xi argued that the deteriorating global security environment is caused by US interference in the affairs of other countries, unilateralism, “group politics and bloc confrontation,” zero-sum approaches to security, double-standards, and “long-arm jurisdiction.”¹⁹ The CCP’s sanctioned academic commentaries on the GSI include one by a professor at Renmin University, who argues that the “...war-loving United States has increasingly become the greatest threat to world peace,” and that the US “unipolar moment” after the fall of the USSR was a disaster for global security as Washington started one conflict after another.²⁰ The author argues that the Ukraine war was caused by US pursuit of absolute security—a point that China’s new foreign minister Qin Gang also made at a press conference in March, asserting that the US is not interested in peace in Ukraine, but is protracting the conflict to advance its own selfish agenda.²¹ In fact, Beijing has consistently sought to exploit the Ukraine conflict to highlight to countries in the global south that the war has many spillover effects in their nations and regions—and that these problems are Washington’s fault.

The GSI asserts that—since global instability is caused almost exclusively by the failures of the US and its system—the solution is to reframe the international security architecture around a more suitable “common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security concept.”²² In

¹⁷ Anthea Mulakala, “China Global Development Initiative: soft power play or serious commitment?” DEVPOLICYBLOG, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://devpolicy.org/chinas-gdi-soft-power-play-or-serious-commitment-20221018/>.

¹⁸ Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Xi’s New Global Security Initiative,” July 14, 2022, video, 1:17:22, <https://www.csis.org/events/xis-new-global-security-initiative>.

¹⁹ “Xi Jinping Delivers a Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 21, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202204/t20220421_10671083.html.

²⁰ Tian Wenlin, “The Epochal Value of the Global Security Initiative Surpasses the Traditional Western Security Outlook,” *Contemporary World*, May 16, 2022, trans. Center for Strategic and International Studies Interpret China project, <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/the-epochal-value-of-the-global-security-initiative-surpasses-the-traditional-western-security-outlook/>.

²¹ “Foreign Minister Qin Gang Meets the Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, March 7, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/202303/t20230307_11037190.html?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

²² “Xi Jinping Delivers a Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China.

practical terms, Beijing has given notice that it intends to pursue a more activist foreign policy and is seeking to gather global support for its emergence as a more consequential global security actor. This year, China has brokered a peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia that could have major implications for the Middle East, and put forward a peace proposal for Ukraine that has not impacted the conflict in Europe. While this is a mixed bag, time may demonstrate the China has reached a departure point in its willingness to operate in the background of security affairs. As John Van Oudenaren of the Jamestown Foundation's China Brief points out—in its February 2023 GSI white paper—Beijing identifies a number of global hotspots where it may pursue a role in security solutions, and asserts that it may act through groups and regional forums outside the United Nations.²³²⁴ Of all the policy actions China has taken in pursuit of its new foreign policy initiatives, this new diplomacy may prove the most significant because it is an actual departure from Beijing's past practice rather than a repackaging or reemphasis of long-pursued strategies.

Finally, as both Chinese and American security scholars have pointed out, Beijing seeks to mold a global security environment that poses no threat to its exclusive hold on power inside China itself. Sheena Greitens, a China expert based at the University of Texas in Austin, has pointed out that many of the ideas in the GSI, such as strictly protecting China's state sovereignty from outside interference—or outside ideas about governance—can be found in China's earlier domestically-oriented "Comprehensive National Security Concept."²⁵ Greitens describes GSI as an external manifestation and projection of the CCP's political security programs to ensure Party security in general and Xi Jinping's security in particular. CCP scholars make this point themselves; as one academic from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences noted, GSI seeks to shape global discourse about the inviolability of nations' sovereignty so that China will not only be objectively more secure, but that CCP leaders can feel subjectively more comfortable that world opinion is not hostile to their ideology or rule.²⁶ Thus, GSI reflects the CCP's perception that international security and China's domestic stability are flip sides of the same coin.

Taking the West out of Modernization

Beijing's most-recent addition to its growing raft of foreign policy initiatives is the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). The GCI is a public diplomacy and media blitz that China launched in March to dilute the global dominance of Western cultural influence—especially the centrality of liberal political and economic ideas of state modernization—and increase the influence of China's own Western values-free "model" for national development. The actual content of Chinese state media publications and speeches by CCP leaders touting GCI has focused more on vilifying the United States and the Western order than on promoting concrete

²³ John S. Van Oudenaren, "The Global Security Initiative: China Outlines a New Security Architecture," *The Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, March 3, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-global-security-initiative-china-outlines-a-new-security-architecture/>.

²⁴ "The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 21, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html.

²⁵ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Xi's New Global Security Initiative."

²⁶ Feng Weijiang, "The Theoretical Foundation of the Global Security Initiative—The Holistic View of National Security," Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, June 16, 2022, trans. Center for Strategic and International Studies Interpret China project, <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/the-theoretical-foundation-of-the-global-security-initiative-the-holistic-view-of-national-security/>.

approaches that developing countries can use to modernize, suggesting the initiative is primarily designed as a narrative-building attack campaign against Washington. In a March press conference just before the launch of GCI, China's new foreign minister Qin Gang asserted that "Chinese modernization" has five features: independence, putting people first, peaceful development, openness and unity. Gang offered little expansion on these platitudes, asserting instead that Chinese modernization "busts the myth that modernization is Westernization," and that "Chinese modernization is not pursued through war, colonization, or plundering." While China's modernization offers a path to success—according to Gang—the "partisan rift, empty talk and frequent policy flip-flop as seen in a certain country will only make even the best [modernization] blueprint an illusion and a castle in the air."²⁷

Xi Jinping expounded on this theme in his speech launching GCI, saying "Chinese-style modernization does not follow the old path of colonial plunder, nor the crooked path of hegemony after a strong country, but the right path of peaceful development in the world." Xi went on—in another echo of Beijing's attack on Washington's defense of Ukraine—to say "provoking secession and confrontation under the banner of democracy is in itself a trample on the spirit of democracy, which is unpopular and harmful."²⁸ Beijing has employed every domestic and international mouthpiece it controls to promulgate these themes—in April the head of China's premier government think tank and ideology-generation academy penned a journal article claiming that "Some Western countries, taking advantage of their economic, technological, and military advantages since modern times, have promoted the superiority of Western races, cultures, and civilizations, portraying Western civilization as the endpoint of human history. This view of civilization, characterized by a distinct capitalist ideology, not only renders Western culture increasingly narrow and closed, but also exacerbates conflicts among civilizations and incited hatred and unrest."²⁹

A further plank of China's GCI approach is its effort to stoke global appreciation of current and historical non-Western cultures, in an evident attempt to lower world appreciation of Western culture as "superior." This has taken the form of state-generated media content celebrating the uniqueness of cultures ranging from the ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Khmer civilizations, to contemporary Indonesian, Arab, and African peoples. Beijing omits modern Western "civilizations" from this globe-trotting celebration, infuses its media push with references to its own ancient and enduring culture, and continually mixes in denigrations of the West.³⁰³¹ The purpose of this vein of GCI messaging is to illustrate what Beijing sees as the wrongness of the dominance of Western culture and of nations reflexively ascribing superiority to US or Western ideas about governance or development. As Qin Gang put it in his press

²⁷ "Foreign Minister Qin Gang Meets the Press," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

²⁸ "Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the High-Level Dialogue Between the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jwtt/16209573.html?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

²⁹ Gao Xiang, "Revealing the Law of the Rise and Fall of Civilizations and Drawing the Path of Civilization Development—Theoretical Implications and Practical Values of the Global Civilization Initiative," *Contemporary World*, April 2023, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/142182.html>.

³⁰ "Global Civilization Initiative—another gift from China to World: Global Times editorial," *Global Times*, March 17, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202303/1287448.shtml>.

³¹ Xu Liuliu, Li Qian and Hu Yuwei, "The Global Civilization Initiative full of Chinese wisdom, injects fresh momentum into bright shared future," *Global Times*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289306.shtml>.

conference while speaking about how Chinese youth can push back against US narrative-dominance, "...some [nations] are still hogging the microphone."³²

Finally, Beijing is also using GCI to highlight its own historic road to modernization as a course that other countries can follow rather than choosing to modernize on the Western model. This is most clearly evident in the GCI theme of "independent modernization." As Xi said in his GCI launch speech, "a country's path toward modernization should not only follow general rules but also take into account its own national conditions and distinctive characteristics. The people of each country have the most say in what kind of modernization is most suitable for themselves."³³ While this certainly sounds reasonable—as it is designed to—Beijing's message is that nations now have a way to accelerate modernization using Western-style market-approaches, technical and managerial know-how and foreign capital, without having to accept Western liberal ideas into their own societies and political orders. In fact, Beijing is communicating that the critical support of a modern benefactor that rising nations need to succeed no longer must come from the West at all, because China has arrived to shepherd rising countries into modernity with no strings attached.

While many observers of China's rise have expressed concern that Beijing will export some sort of political model, based on the technology-infused state monitoring and social control mechanisms it has developed domestically during the Xi era, it is this idea of state modernization under China's auspices and outside of Western norms that may prove most appealing to governments of the global South and most damaging to long-term US interests. Beijing's ideal outcome would be a world in which the US no longer controls the narrative and resources that form the path to modernity for rising nations, because countries instead choose the Eastern path. This is GCI's real aim. As Katja Drinhausen of the Berlin-based Mercator Institute for China studies notes, "GCI is a direct dig at the universal values system that underlies the United Nations core treaties, especially in regard to human rights... [China's message of non-interference] appeals to a lot of countries around the world."³⁴

The Argument for China's Peaceful Rise

Some analysts and observers argue that alarmist interpretations of Beijing's ultimate international aims are over-inflated. They point to what they see as China threat-hyping as stemming from Americans' own fear of national decline, and ascribe the hardening attitude toward China in US government and political discourse as proceeding from US domestic political dynamics rather than from an objective assessment of China's foreign policy pursuits. Certainly, China's development activities under BRI and the new GDI will offer many countries an opportunity to advance their economic growth and public services. As the director of the research and survey organization Afrobarometer noted,³⁵ China is very popular in the global south because its infrastructure and aid development projects have real and visible impacts on the lives of people. Beijing's largesse bolsters the popularity and legitimacy of politicians in the global south on a regular basis. China's efforts are not exclusively some sort of cynical soft-

³² "Foreign Minister Qin Gang Meets the Press," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

³³ "Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the High-Level Dialogue Between the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties," *Xinhua News Agency*.

³⁴ Phelim Kine, "New Oz ambassador sees 'increasingly dangerous' U.S.-China tensions," *Politico*, March 23, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher>.

³⁵ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Xi's New Global Development Initiative."

power ploy. Similarly, Beijing's narrative about the failures of the West to oversee an equitable share of global resources and enduring disparities between the developing and developed world—as packaged in the GCI and elements of GSI messaging—contain some hard truths.

But Beijing is not pointing out Western failures or supporting development in the global south out of altruism. The CCP's strategic, long-term, great-power aims are discernable from an objective observation of its policy actions, a simple reading of its voluminous and hyperbolic rhetoric, and its growing fixation on attacking the US at every turn, in every forum, on any pretext. While these messages, and even the vitriolic tone of the attacks, are not new in US-China relations, the tempo and amplitude of the rhetorical offensive is at an all-time high, reflecting China's growing "discourse power" in the international arena and revealing the true aim of its initiatives—to get ahead in an increasingly intense great-power contest.

Conclusion

The speed and concentration of Beijing's campaign to push China's new foreign policy initiatives attacking the United States and the Western system suggest that CCP has given up on meaningful diplomacy with Washington and Europe for now, and is instead placing its bets on the global South. The principal aim of the GDI, GSI, and GCI—making inroads with nations in the developing world—reflects the CCP's recognition that the allegiance and international alignment preferences of these governments and populations are the "prize" for which Beijing and Washington are competing; the victor will be best-positioned to shape the international system of the second half of this century. But China's actual record of aiding global south countries to advance economically is mixed, and its real extant capacity to match its promises with aid resources for developing countries is likely to fall far short of its grandiose claims.³⁶ This fact—that Beijing is likely over-reaching and over-promising—suggests that the US should not itself overreact out of fear of China's apparently growing influence or allow itself to be dragged into a rhetorical struggle with Beijing's propagandists. Doing so could harm Washington's own interests or inadvertently validate China's narratives about the US in the eyes of audiences in the developing world. Rather, the United States can best respond to current and future CCP foreign policy attacks by demonstrating substantive leadership on global development, security, and cultural issues.

³⁶ Francois Godement, "China's Diplomacy: A Triumph of Cost-Benefit Analysis," *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/chinas-diplomacy-a-triumph-of-cost-benefit-analysis/>.