

TI Observer

June 2023

Vol. 33

by Taihe Institute

Global Diplomatic Shift

G7 and China-Central Asia Summits
Under Scrutiny



中国—中亚峰会
Саммит «Китай – Центральная Азия»



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A Tale of Two Summits

Mushahid Hussain



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The contrasting visions and policy priorities between the Global South and the Global North are most exemplified in the context, venue, and outcomes of the recent G7 Summit in Hiroshima and China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an. The G7 Summit, a yearly gathering of the Western super-rich alongside Japan, took place on May 19-21. In contrast, the China-Central Asia Summit occurred between May 18-19, marking the inaugural meeting of its kind since the five Central Asian Republics achieved independence.

The two summits occurred amidst a context of global transformation and turbulence, as the balance of economic and political power shifts slowly, but inexorably, from a declining West to a resurgent East, with the 21st Century being heralded as the "Asian Century." China's peaceful rise is a pillar of this resurgent East.

The G7 is essentially a "White Man's Club," with Japan being granted the status of "honorary White" even during the days of racist apartheid South Africa. It is seen as a remnant of the bygone era when Western hegemony was predominant. To compensate for their economic decline, the G7 countries are increasingly resorting to a Cold War-style outlook that resembles the rhetoric and worldview of a time when the United States was confronting the Soviet Union.

The China-Central Asia Summit was forward-looking, while the G7 Summit was backward-looking, still nostalgic about a non-existent past and seeking relevance in a changing world by resorting to the old Cold War playbook.

The symbolism of the two summit venues is also significant. While the China-Central Asia Summit was convened in historic Xi'an, the Chinese city that gave

birth to the Silk Road two thousand years ago, symbolizing the creation of commercial and cultural connectivity in what was actually the first practical example of globalization. Conversely, the G7 Summit took place in Hiroshima, a city whose name is synonymous with the destruction of the first atomic bomb used by the U.S. during World War II. Thus, the two summit venues evoke a contrasting symbolism: creation versus destruction, reflecting the differences in policy priorities between the Global South and Global North.

The underlying purposes of the two summits could not be more dissimilar. The China-Central Asia Summit was about promoting connectivity among Asian neighbors with cooperation on economy and energy, roads, railways, and pipelines, buttressed by an already robust US\$70 billion trade deal between the Central Asian Republics and China.

On the other hand, the G7 Summit, which is fast becoming the diplomatic wing of NATO and an extension of American foreign policy, was more about promoting confrontation against China and Russia, with belligerent rhetoric, coinciding with the opening of the first-ever NATO office in Asia. The office to be situated in Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is an alarming expansion of NATO beyond the shores of the Atlantic.

Given these contexts, it is not surprising that the respective outcomes and results of the two summits have vastly different consequences. The Xi'an Summit was about building bridges, while the Hiroshima gathering was more about building barriers. The growing divisions between the Global North and Global South are rooted in ideological differences, such as the dichotomy between democracy and autocracy, as well as protectionist measures and penalties including trade restrictions and sanctions targeting China and Russia. These divisions contribute to the development of a new Cold War infrastructure, exemplified by initiatives like AUKUS, QUAD, and the concept of the "Asian NATO," alongside the pursuit of military bases in parts of Asia and stoking tensions over Taiwan. Moreover, these developments produce double standards, such as sanctioning the Defense Minister of China while seeking a dialogue with him or expanding NATO to Ukraine on Russia's borders while accusing Moscow of ill-intentions toward Ukraine.

Ironically, while deriding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global North is simultaneously seeking to push poorly-planned copycat programs like President Biden's B3W (Build Back Better World), which is now renamed as the Program for Growth in Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), or the European Union's "Global

Gateway," though neither has yielded any concrete projects.

The contrasts in worldviews and values are clear and present: China has an economic-driven vision of geoeconomics while the U.S.-led G7 remains security-centric and military driven. More than four decades after the G7 was launched in mid-1970s and 10 years after BRI was launched in 2013, their respective worldviews, policies, and approaches are rooted in "Strategic Cultures," based on differing historical evolution. Thus, analysis is necessary to understand these strategic divergences.

Key components of China's Strategic Culture include: the Silk Road, connectivity and cooperation amongst countries, cultures, and civilizations; the Great Wall, which manifests China's defensive and protective approach against outside intruders and aggressors; the Long March, an epic of the Chinese Revolution which was a long and costly struggle for survival which demonstrates patience, perseverance, and persistence, and a "Never Give Up" Spirit; the "Century of Humiliation" from 1840-1949, a determination of "never again" for violations of China's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and dignity...

Hence, it is no accident that China is the only global power in history to rise peacefully without any invasion, conquest, colonization, or aggression.

Conversely, the American Strategic Culture has key ingredients that are reflected in the US approach and worldview of the present-day: an obsession with Pax Americana since the Monroe Doctrine, a desire for an unending quest for hegemony; a glorified self-image of "American Exceptionalism"; a "we-are-unique" expression of moral superiority over others; a modern day post-colonial version of the "White Man's Burden"; an international do-gooder that invades and occupies countries or brings "regime change" for "the greater good" of countries at the receiving end; a trigger-happy "might is right" "shock & awe" approach in foreign affairs which can rightly be termed as "John Wayne style" of diplomacy which shoots first, asks questions later; and a powerful Military-Industrial-Complex that is a permanent war machine which requires constant refueling via bulging military budgets and a quest for an "Enemy." The enemy in the 20th Century was the Soviet Union, followed by the fomented fear of "Islamic radicalism," now it's the "China Threat" being conjured up by the same country that in 1882 passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, a truly racist law.

In May 2019, Kiron Skinner, former Director of Policy Planning at the United States Department of State and a key policymaker of the US Administration, openly

described the conflict with China as a “fight with a different civilization,” even providing a racial context to the emerging U.S.-China competition saying “it’s the first time we will have a great power competitor that is NOT Caucasian.” Such racism is reinforced by outright bullying or even threats to dismember China. I still recall when the Soviet Union was disintegrating and the U.S. had spawned what they grandiosely proclaimed as the “New World Order,” an Op-ed appeared in The New York Times by the influential columnist, Leslie Gelb, who had also served in the State Department. On November 13, 1991, Gelb authored a piece, which matter-of-factly discussed the United States resorting to the “ultimate sanction - a threat to the territorial integrity of the Middle Kingdom - if Beijing leaders continue to defy new standards of world behavior.” Gelb’s column, which was audaciously titled “Breaking China Apart,” went on to threaten China by saying that “Americans may take extraordinary measures, including kindling separatism”!

At the China-Central Asia Summit, China gave a new blueprint for broad based development of economic and cultural ties, with President Xi Jinping saying “We will jointly foster a new paradigm of deeply complementary and high-level win-win cooperation.” At the G7 Summit, President Biden used this Western platform to play up the bogey of the “China threat,” using the occasion for negativism against China and Russia without any positive or substantive vision for the future.

No wonder even CNN commented that “China is nothing short of a foreign policy fixation in Washington.” The prominent American commentator, Fareed Zakaria, was even more candid: “The rest of the world doesn’t see China the same way we do.” Moreover, former American administration official Fiona Hill’s cryptic comment was a clincher as to what all is wrong with the US China policy: “The Global South sees the U.S. as full of hubris and hypocrisy” when it comes to the conduct of Washington’s foreign policy.

Ultimately, the G7 Summit showed a mindset that is disconnected from prevailing trends and persists in pursuing an outdated and ineffective approach, reflecting the inability to resolve pressing global issues such as climate change, food security, and poverty alleviation. Even the COVID-19 pandemic was distorted into an obsession with Vaccine Nationalism. The aging aristocrats of the West may try to act like Good Samaritans, but in today’s world they are part of the problem, exposing a stark chasm between their proclamations and their actions.

China, on the other hand, is a proactive leader in global diplomacy, actively engaging with nations from the Solomon Islands to Saudi Arabia. China is the top trade partner for 130 out of the 193 countries in the United Nations. China

is also a bridge-builder brokering peace between Iran and Saudi Arabia, further solidifying its diplomatic influence. Building on the success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), President Xi Jinping has launched far-reaching, multifaceted initiatives including the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative.

Western policymakers need to learn from their own history. They must recalibrate their policies, abandoning the zero-sum-game mindset, shedding pieces of the Cold War mentality, and refraining from pursuing outdated strategies that have proven to be ineffective. By aligning themselves with the progressive course of history, they can then pave the way for positive change.

Western policymakers must acknowledge and adapt to the emerging realities. As recently written by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of Germany, “there’s an epochal tectonic change” taking place in the world today. Similarly, French President Emmanuel Macron aptly remarked at a gathering of France’s diplomats in Paris in September 2022: “We should learn to accept the fact that 300 years of Western hegemony is coming to an end.”

Developed Countries Can Hardly Expect the Global South to Dance to Their Tune

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In May 2023, the China-Central Asia Summit and the Group of Seven (G7) Summit took place successively in Xi'an, China, and Hiroshima, Japan. The close temporal proximity of these two summits inevitably created a sense of competition, highlighting two distinct diplomatic philosophies. It is worth noting that the G7 Summit, led by Japan, extensively emphasized the "China threat theory" during discussions on geopolitics, economy, and climate issues. Furthermore, it laid considerable stress on strengthening ties with the Global South, attempting to broaden the international coalition while exerting pressure on Russia and curtailing China's growing influence.

1. G7 member states do not have a unified China policy

Japan invited leaders from countries outside the G7 to Hiroshima, including those from India, Brazil, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Australia, Comoros (Rotating Chair of the African Union), Cook Islands (Rotating Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum), Indonesia (Rotating Chair of ASEAN), and Ukraine. This ultra-long guest list, amidst the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and tense relations between China and the U.S., was interpreted as a blatant attempt to contain Russia and China.

The joint communiqué issued in Hiroshima covered various topics, but its notable emphasis was on China. According to Reuters, China was mentioned as many as 20 times in the communiqué, surpassing last year's G7 Summit in Germany, which had 14 mentions. The communiqué not only reiterated previous concerns

regarding the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, and China's nuclear development transparency, but also introduced new terms such as "economic coercion" and "de-risking" in relation to China. Furthermore, it called upon China to exert pressure on Russia for an "immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of its military forces from Ukraine."

The communiqué clearly demonstrates a broad consensus among G7 member states regarding China-related topics. The G7 leaders are attempting to showcase a unified stance in their dealings with China and have established a shared framework of discourse. Nevertheless, while those leaders appeared to have acknowledged China's "systemic challenge" to their values and interests, their respective policies towards China still reveal discrepancies and do not exhibit the same level of unity observed in their approach to Russia.

Take the "Big Three" European countries—France, Germany, and the UK—as examples. France and Germany are adopting a more rational and pragmatic approach towards China, which encompasses both concerns and a willingness to engage in cooperation. Following his visit to China in April 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that Europe should not become "America's followers." He advocated for reducing dependence on the U.S. to "avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between China and the U.S. over Taiwan" and avoid "getting caught up in crises that are not ours." The French president urged Europe to assert its strategic autonomy and position itself as a third force separate from both China and the U.S.

Macron's stance undeniably represents a continuation of "Gaullism" and has found some resonance across Europe. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, clearly acknowledged that President Macron's views are not isolated among EU member state leaders. "Some European leaders wouldn't say things the same way that Emmanuel Macron did... I think quite a few really think like Emmanuel Macron," he said.

Germany's policy towards China is apparently more complex due to the influence of the three-party coalition government with diverse ideologies. The Greens and the Free Democratic Party take a tough stance towards China, and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has openly criticized China on several occasions. Bilateral relations are strained from time to time by the attempts to decrease dependency, human rights concerns, and the Taiwan question. Moreover, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has been enhancing

risk management for German businesses operating in China, trying to reduce German investments in China while limiting Chinese investments in Germany.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has adopted a relatively moderate position. Recognizing China as “a partner, competitor and systematic rival,” the German government pursues a pragmatic foreign policy that prioritizes national interests and compromises in resolving conflicts. It advocates for decreasing dependency on China while maintaining commercial relations and seeking cooperation in areas that align with mutual interests. Scholz has emphasized that China’s rise “does not warrant isolating Beijing or curbing cooperation,” and that pursuing diversified foreign trade should not be mistaken for “decoupling from China.”

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, known for his critical approach towards China, once said that China “poses the greatest challenge to global security and prosperity.” However, he has also recognized China’s undeniable importance in global affairs. In a recent development, he has reversed his campaign commitment and declared that he would not shut down 30 Confucius Institutes, signaling a potential shift in the UK government’s stance towards re-engaging with China.

The U.S. has been urging its allies to adopt a more assertive strategy to deter China, yet the G7 Summit in Hiroshima also highlighted the significance of engaging in dialogue with China. The G7 member states “stand prepared to build constructive and stable relations with China,” with the aim of “de-risking” rather than “decoupling.” Such a statement reflected the Biden administration’s acknowledgment of the viewpoints held by certain G7 members and the need to make concessions in order to develop a cohesive policy towards China.

2. The Global South is reluctant to stand in line against China

The G7 Summit in Hiroshima prioritized “upholding a rules-based international order” and “forging stronger connections with the Global South.” This entailed a specific focus on exploring tangible measures to expand cooperation with Global South countries. In recent times, the rising population and economic influence of the Global South have played a progressively substantial role in shaping a new multipolar world. Given China’s extending global reach, the G7 aims to divide the Global South and garner support from some of its members, utilizing group politics and economic alliances as a means to safeguard their own global influence

against what they believed to be the potential threats from China and Russia.

Nonetheless, the G7 would face notable challenges in trying to attain this objective. The vast majority of Global South countries believe that getting embroiled in disputes between “democratic” and “authoritarian” nations is not worth the cost, and they are unwilling to take sides. Furthermore, the Chinese government has been augmenting its investments to narrow the gap between the Global North and the Global South. Meanwhile, some Global South nations are concerned that their local economies might suffer if the Sino-U.S. relations were to spiral out of control. But as up to now, China’s trade with the Global South has continued to thrive, despite various attempts by the U.S. to hinder such developments.

Take Africa as an example. Over the past decade, the total trade volume between China and Africa has surpassed USD 2 trillion, which establishes China as the continent’s primary trading partner. In the meantime, China’s direct investments in Africa have exceeded USD 30 billion, which positions China as the fourth largest source of investment for the continent. In the first four months of this year alone, China’s new direct investments in Africa reached USD 1.38 billion, up 24% year-on-year. The Chinese government holds the African people in high regard and perceives African countries as equal partners. It is now stepping up efforts to implement the “Nine Programs” in medical, poverty reduction and agricultural development, trade promotion, investment promotion, digital innovation, green development, capacity building, cultural exchange, and peace and security areas, aiming to foster a high-level Sino-African community with a shared future. So far, China has earned high praise from African countries for successfully completing a number of infrastructure and livelihood projects.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that tackling the challenges encountered by the Global South is more complex than merely recognizing them. Regrettably, despite frequent visits by G7 leaders to the Global South and their endeavors to enhance development conditions and compete for influence with China, their aid programs often lack flexibility and fail to align with the realities on the ground. They have been subject to criticism for their condescending and paternalistic approach. Many Global South countries find themselves in a dilemma due to the stringent conditions attached to aid from G7 member states. Consequently, they are increasingly inclined to opt for a global development partnership with China that is founded on the basis of solidarity, equality, well-balanced approach, and mutual benefit.

3. The reviving influence of the G7

When the G7 was established in the 1970s, its member states represented over 60% of the global GDP, leading to its characterization as the “rich man’s club.” However, with the rise of developing countries such as China and India, the G7’s share in the global GDP has gradually declined. According to IMF data, it has decreased from 50.7% in 1980 to a projected 29.9% for 2023. What is more, internal divisions concerning trade and climate policies within the G7 have become more prominent. Many have noted that the G7 often fails to follow through with actions and excludes emerging powers like China and India in dealing with some key world issues. Consequently, there is a growing sentiment that the G7, in its current form, lacks a valid justification for its existence and should be replaced by a more representative group of nations.

The establishment of the G20 marked a shift from “Western governance” to “global co-governance.” Many believe that the G20 has surpassed the G7 in terms of power and prestige. However, not everyone disregards the significance of the G7. Supporters argue that the small size and the relative like-mindedness of G7 member states is conducive to collective decision-making. In fact, in recent years, the “rich man’s club” has experienced a resurgence in strength and solidarity. This trend is particularly evident through the agreement achieved by member states in 2021 regarding global tax reform. Additionally, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has, to some extent, bridged the divide among the West, as their shared objective of imposing sanctions on Russia has fostered greater unity among member states.

Furthermore, in response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, the G7 has launched the “Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment,” the “Five-Point Plan for Critical Mineral Security,” and the “Coordination Platform on Economic Coercion.” These initiatives aim to enhance supply chain security through strategies like “friend-shoring” and “near-shoring.” Participating countries are expected to provide early warnings and share information concerning instances of economic coercion, so as to prevent the weaponization of trade and supply chains. Perceived threats from both China and Russia are no doubt conducive to the G7’s cohesion and influence.

Notably, the G7 still holds over two-fifths of the voting power in both the World Bank and the IMF. Additionally, the group is playing a greater role in financing international humanitarian efforts. Together with the European Commission, the G7 contributes up to 70% of the budget for the World Food Programme. In the coming years, the G7 will further strengthen its cooperation with international

organizations such as the African Union, with a focus on helping the Global South nations tackle their development challenges. Such cooperation will particularly extend to nations that possess rich resources and hold strategic importance, even if they are not core allies. In particular, against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the G7 recognizes the opportunity to address issues that have proven challenging for the UN and the G20.

The Global South will be a central theme of the G7 Summit in Italy next year. By then, the G7's stature is likely to experience further elevation, although this outcome is not guaranteed. After all, the future of the G7 is tied to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the evolving dynamics in its relations with China. Today, countries in the Global South are aspiring to strike a pragmatic balance between the concerns of both Washington and Beijing. They hold their own perspectives, even on such sensitive matters as the Russia-Ukraine conflict. If the G7 misinterprets the needs of the Global South, ignores the Global South's concerns on inflation, commodity price shock and debt dilemma, and positions itself as an anti-China or anti-Russia alliance, more Global South countries may hesitate to take the olive branch the G7 holds out. Such an outcome would not serve the interests of any party, including those of the G7.

It is worth noting that the long-standing Achilles' heel of the G7 has been its grand narratives and lack of follow-up actions. As Max Lawson, Head of Inequality Policy at Oxfam International, put it, "G7 countries have failed the Global South here in Hiroshima. They failed to cancel debts, and they failed to find what is really required to end the huge increase in hunger worldwide. They can find untold billions for fighting the war but can't even provide half of what is needed by the UN for the most critical humanitarian crises."

Considering such a reputation, if the G7 intends to enhance its influence, it must appropriately exempt middle- and low-income countries from debt burdens, diligently fulfill aid targets, resolve outstanding payments, and uphold climate commitments towards impoverished nations. The question here and now is whether the G7 leaders will demonstrate necessary political will to accomplish all these objectives.

Two Summits Show Two Contrasting Geopolitical Visions of Today's World

Tom Fowdy



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The month of May has seen two summits held in close proximity to each other. On the one hand, there was the G7 summit, led by the United States, comprised of its partners Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, which was held in Hiroshima. On the other, China held its first-ever “China-Central Asia Summit” comprised of the countries to its immediate west, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Beijing’s Foreign Ministry described the summit as a “critical historical juncture” following the trend of win-win cooperation that it “reflected” the “people’s aspirations for everlasting friendship.”

While the China-Central Asia Summit focused on matters such as national sovereignty, counter-terrorism, infrastructure development and economic integration, trade, and energy, the G7 summit in notable contrast, focused on overt geopolitical goals which sought to target China across a range of issues. This included Taiwan, but also the matter of so-called “economic coercion,” a term which has been widely criticized as hypocritical for inventing a criterion to describe China’s own retaliatory measures against countermeasures, yet being blind to the offensive sanctions policy of the U.S. and its allies.

It has been said as such that the two summits represent two distinct geopolitical priorities and worldviews, that of the “Global North” against the “Global South.” On the one hand, there is a group of nations, who long constituted the established world order and the bulk of its wealth, striving to maintain their existing privileges against the rise of competitors. Whereas on the other, there are nations who,

having been disadvantaged, are striving to find new breakthroughs in their own development outside of the Western political model. This subsequently paints a message about the state of the world today, as well as the underlying motivations of the so-called “China Challenge.”

G7: The Old Guard

The G7 group, formed in the Cold War era, is sometimes described as constituting the world’s “richest major economies.” Although it is increasingly out of touch with the global reality, the group’s mantra is more so elitist and ideological, as opposed to being practical, and is essentially a coalition of former Empires which is being led by the United States. In other words, the incorporation of the “Old World Order” (Pre-1945) into a new model. Within the G7 group, you have two former hegemonic European colonial Empires, Britain and France, who after World War II, submitted the baton of global leadership to the United States.

In conjunction with them, there are then the three defeated Axis powers, Italy, Germany, and Japan. Although these three states once sought to challenge the dominance of the allies, they were ultimately reincorporated into the American domain following the war and became champions of the order Washington built. Then, finally, you have Canada, a country which was a dominion of the British Empire, but is now under the hegemony of the U.S. The underlying theme is that all these countries, through imperialism, established an underlying sense of economic privilege which came at the expense of the Global South. In other words, a permanent distortion of global wealth and resources.

The rise of the Global South

What we understand as the “Global South” on the other hand, constitutes countries who have been subject to the nations above, and because of colonialism, have not been able to attain equal economic development or sovereign privilege, placing them at a permanent disadvantage. These countries emerged during the Cold War, as the former Imperial domains of Britain and France gained independence in the new system of sovereign states. These countries have often, as a legacy of their history, faced poverty, instability and often war and conflict as the result of illegitimate state structures being imposed on them, or economically

motivated borders which have generated ethno-sectarian conflict.

The economic system led by the U.S., and its financial institutions, known as “Bretton Woods,” have also made obstacles for development in Global South countries extremely difficult, exacerbating the gulf in global wealth disparity. Prior to China, the only meaningful sized country that has made it completely from “Global South status” to the “first world” standing is the Republic of Korea (South Korea), but that itself illustrates another point, that Global South countries are only able to truly develop if they subject themselves to the geopolitical goals and preferences of the United States, thus making development politically conditional.

However, the rise of China has constituted a gamechanger to global development dynamics, because it is the largest country in history, not under the political control of the West, that has descended from “third world” status to rapid development. The economic ascendancy of China is remarkable. In 1949, the country’s average life expectancy was just 36 years of age, but it is now 77.4 years. In 1960, the average GDP per capita was just \$60 annually, but now it is \$12,556. China has comprehensively transformed from once being an agrarian peasant nation, wrecked with instability, strife, poverty and death, to becoming a global economic superpower. This may be encapsulated by the story of Shenzhen, which transformed from a small fishing village into one of the largest industrial and technology centers in the world.

In pursuing this path, which accelerated rapidly with the adoption of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in 1978, China has positioned itself as a model and exemplary to other Global South countries as a pathway for their own development. This has formed the underlying philosophy of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), wherein China has sought to lean its infrastructure development and expertise to countries throughout the world, promoting connectivity, integration and what it describes as a “community with a shared future for mankind.” This has included the construction of airports, railways, sea ports, subways, and telecommunications infrastructure, amongst many things.

One of the most successful examples of the BRI projects is the China-Laos railway, which connected the landlocked, war-torn Southeast Asian country’s railways to Yunnan Province, giving it a new commercial outlet it never had before. Or, alternatively, the China-Europe railway, an intercontinental freight route which has made it possible to ship cargo across land all the way from Shanghai to Portugal. The BRI has been a global gamechanger, but in doing so, it has attracted disdain and opposition from the aforementioned “Global North” countries who

fear the erosion of their long-established global dominance by the rise of China and the empowerment it brings to the Global South.

The new great game

While the United States once believed that engagement and business with China acted as a transformative force that would herald a transition of its political system to Washington's own vision, the rise of Beijing on its own terms has led the U.S. to increasingly perceive China as an ideological, political, economic, and strategic competitor which threatens its unipolar hegemony over the world. The U.S. does not look at China's contributions to global governance or development with praise, but rather constantly sees global affairs as a zero-sum competition wherein its primacy is the only thing that matters. Thus, beginning with the Trump administration in 2017-2018, the U.S. has pursued a series of increasingly hostile measures against Beijing which strives to block its rise and preserve its own technological, economic, and military advantages.

Key to this is the perception that China is moving "up" the global value chain in terms of critical technologies and global goods, which subsequently stands to erode the privileges attained by the U.S. and its allies in these fields. So, the U.S. has sought to blacklist thousands of technology companies on its commerce department "entity list," while also getting allies to agree to these coercive measures, such as for example restrictions on Japanese and the Netherlands companies selling semiconductor fabrication machinery to Beijing. This has coincided with an inward turn to protectionism in the U.S., which has undermined and torn up the liberal, free market system it once championed.

U.S.-China competition is extremely consequential for the Global South at large, because it demonstrates the challenges these countries face to develop "on their own terms," or in other words, not subject to the political, economic, and military dominance of the United States. With the war in Ukraine also being a seismic geopolitical event which has changed the world, there has been a wider rallying effect amongst Global South countries to show more solidarity with each other and achieve a more robust pathway to common development while sustaining their political autonomy.

This has been most evident in the rush to join groups such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

It has also given the chance for Beijing to exert more leadership in assisting these countries on matters of common interest, in particular norms such as “support for national sovereignty” and “non-interference in internal affairs,” both aspects which, for the Global South, have been repeatedly violated and challenged by the West at large. As this has happened, as mentioned, groups such as the G7 have sought to double down on their attempts to solidify their traditional dominance and privileges, to assure they are always “elite” in shaping what they describe as the “rules-based order,” in other words, the West above the rest.

The China-Central Asia Summit thus stands as one example of this emerging dichotomy. While the West preaches to other countries and seeks to build a global order revolving exclusively around them, China wants to frame itself as a comprehensive partner of development for less advantaged countries to help address the fundamental inequalities of the “established” world order of such, thus ensuring its own development is ultimately preserved amidst the US attempt to contain it.

China Is Winning the Heartland of the World

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Since 1976 when Canada joined the former Group of Six nations to make it the Group of Seven (G7), the international community has looked to it acting as a driving force of peace and development. There was no question that the G7 had aimed to “lead the world” as they possessed all the key elements of national power as Hans Morgenthau defined, e.g., “industrial capacity, quantity and quality of armed forces, economic efficiency and technological innovation.”¹

However, it is now arguable that the world’s richest countries have lost their economic leadership edge, both in terms of GDP growth and soft power influence. For example, the total GDP of the G7 countries has dropped from 70% of the world total three decades ago to 45% in 2021. As for the GDP increase, G7 only counts for 25.7% of the world total in 2022, compared to China’s 38.6%. In addition, fractions within the G7 have grown on the global agenda since the Trump administration in 2017. So, the question arises if the “rich club” is still qualified to guide the path of development for the Global South even if the G7 has most of the key technologies and overall financial clout to leverage world affairs.

On May 19-21, the annual Summit of the G7 was held in Hiroshima, Japan, to discuss global challenges and potential security issues. In the wake of the meeting, the joint statement revealed their intention to “keep G7 together, Russia down, and China far away” in a competitive world since the United States has championed a “new Cold War” approach that aims to use all necessary means to bring “block

¹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (1985), pp. 127-142.

confrontation” in the Asia-Pacific.² On the issue of the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. and its allies insisted on adding fuel to the fire, claiming “to support Ukraine ‘as long as it takes’ in the face of Russia’s illegal war of aggression.”³ In fact, China and most of Asian countries along with other Global South member nations have made all earnest efforts to call for peace talks between the two Slavic siblings.

As one of the most dynamic countries of the day, China prefers leaning to economic development and people-to-people diplomacy to achieve its geostrategic ends in its neighborhood and beyond. On May 18-19, Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted the first-ever China-Central Asia Summit in Xi’an, China, which was also termed as the “C+C5 format.” President Xi said that the inaugural China-Central Asia summit was part of China’s long-term design to strengthen economic and political partnerships “of great minds and by engaging in full exchanges of views.”⁴ Over the past decade, China has worked along with Central Asian countries to advance the Belt and Road Initiative with a view to benefiting people in the region and beyond.

Interestingly enough, the C+C5 summit kicked off on the eve of the annual G7 summit in Japan. Thus, it was widely opined that China aimed to challenge the dominance of the U.S.-led rich club in the world order which has been seen to thwart China’s economic progress while trespassing on its legitimate interests. At their Hiroshima summit, the G7 members claimed to stand together “to call on China to press Russia to hold its military aggression, and immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw its troops from Ukraine,” disregarding the fact that China has been committed to advancing its peace proposal to both Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, the G7 vowed to invest \$600 billion by 2027 in the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), which was widely believed to be a counterweight to China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Asia and the world.

If we look into the joint statement issued by the C+C5 summit, China and its partners of Central Asia announced many regional cooperation plans and projects regarding infrastructure connection and regional green development, etc. By reading the common historical legacy over 2,000 years ago, Chinese pioneers along with their central Asian neighbors overcame countless ordeals and obstacles to open the transcontinental passage connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa, known as

2 Jana Puglierin, Pawel Zerka, “Keeping America close, Russia down and China far away: how Europeans navigate a competitive world”, *European Council on Foreign Relations-Policy Brief*, June 2023, pp. 1-3.
3 “G-7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communique”, May 20, 2023, p. 1.
4 “President Xi Jinping chairs the inaugural China-Central Asia summit and delivers a key-note speech”, *CGTN*, May 19, 2023.

the Silk Road. Since then, the ancient routes had embodied the spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and reciprocal benefits while promoting the great heritage of human civilization.⁵ In the new era of a globalized world, China and Central Asian partners have vowed to further advance what the international community of a shared future needs such as win-win cooperation in terms of mutual security, common prosperity and social-cultural harmonies. For all these objectives, the six countries have agreed to support each other on the issues concerning their respective core security interests such as sovereignty, independence, security and territorial integrity, respect for the development path chosen based on each other's national realities, and rejection of any attempt or claim to have right to sow discord or stoke confrontation in the region, let alone seeking selfish political interests.

Differing from the G7 approach to economic security based on their deepening partnership with the "small camp" and also arguing for "de-risking, de-coupling" from China, Beijing has once again endorsed the Belt and Road Initiative to complement the development strategies of countries involved by leveraging their comparative strengths. Accordingly, China and its partners in Central Asia have consented to coordinate with the policy initiatives of relevant countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, the Bright Road Initiative of Kazakhstan, the Middle Corridor Initiative of Turkey, etc. Particularly, China will support the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor project, enhance the traffic capacity of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan highway and the China-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan highway. In addition, China will seek to modernize existing border ports, facilitate the air transportation market, and enhance a regional logistics network, including the advancement of the China-Europe Railway Express assembly centers. Thus, a multi-tiered Belt and Road Initiative cooperation network has taken an initial shape.⁶

China is aware of the geostrategic value of Central Asia and its pivotal role in Eurasia. As the region has the largest population, the multi-sized countries, and the most diverse civilizations in the world, it is noteworthy that how to proceed with Asia-Europe cooperation not only concerns the well-being of the Central Asian peoples, but also has a profound significance on the development of the world. In geography,

5 Ibid.

6 Xi's keynote speech "Working Together for a China-Central Asia Community with a Shared Future Featuring Mutual Assistance, Common Development, Universal Security, and Everlasting Friendship" https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202305/t20230519_11079941.html

Central Asia is located in what is termed as the center of Eurasia. In geopolitics, Eurasia also refers to the “Heartland” of the world stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic Ocean.⁷ Considering this, since the end of WWII, the U.S. has looked to Eurasia as the key to its global strategy. Even after the end of the Cold War, US strategists like Kissinger and Brzezinski openly argued that “no matter which power, either of Europe or Asia, dominates Eurasia, that danger inevitably leads to the U.S. to see it as a structural threat to its primacy in the world.”⁸ Unfortunately, this has been the geostrategic legacy of the policy-making elite in Washington since they are committed to pursuing a unilateral hegemonic world order.

Still, there is more than one major power like the U.S. to watch the geostrategic leverage of Eurasia and the Middle East, especially after China mediated the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement last March. China has also had initial success in expanding the use of its currency by Arab Gulf countries for select transactions, such as energy purchases. In terms of geography and geopolitics, Russia, India, Iran, and Turkey are equally watchful on what will happen next in the region. So is the EU which has traditionally relied on natural resources and strategic hubs in the Eurasian area. Theresa Fallon, Director of the Center for Russia-Europe-Asia Studies in Brussels, observed that China was engaged in a “tough diplomatic tap dance” of trying to gain an edge with Central Asian countries without angering Mr. Putin.⁹ It is logical that China and Russia work together to oppose to the US hegemony since the U.S.-led geopolitical bloc has targeted China and Russia as the challengers and even rivals to the status quo. However, history shows that there are always some areas of potential consultation, cooperation, and frictions among major powers. Contrasting the scenario that Central Asia was once Russia’s own privileged sphere of influence, the C+C5 format demonstrated that the countries involved were aiming to “jointly foster a new paradigm of deeply complementary and high-level win-win cooperation.”

In fact, China has been working closely with countries in the region for decades in various developmental areas, while a growing number of Western states and their NGOs were, and still are trying to woo Central Asia. China has confirmed to the Central Asian countries that China would always be there as it is able to provide for the region’s practical needs. To that end, China has reiterated in the first place that the

7 Hans Morgenthau & Kenneth Thompson, *Politics among Nations – the struggle for power and peace*, pp. 127-79.

8 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (1994), p. 813; Also see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (1997), p. 27.

9 Nicole Hong, “As the U.S. attends the G7, China hosts a summit of its own”, *The New York Times*, 5-18, 2023.

pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative requires a peaceful and stable environment to foster a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation. Secondly, China calls for the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security environment shared by all countries in the region and beyond. And thirdly, to pursue the Belt and Road Initiative, China appeals to the Central Asian countries to focus on the fundamental issues of development and long-term economic integration of the region and across the world.

China has possessed multi-capacities to launch major projects ranging from relatively modernized industries to highly-competitive infrastructure projects, and not to mention its huge investment capacity. So, hopefully China would be trying to succeed in establishing a fair, equitable, inclusive, and transparent framework of industries, trade, and investment through working with the C+C5 format. Taking the momentum of the Xi'an Summit, the six countries have officially inaugurated the C+C5 format as a regular mechanism. In the long run, the C+C5 format will provide the advantage of opportunity for the six countries to consult with each other directly, as the format is more dynamic and of geostrategic significance.

More important, China has pledged that it would never seek to take the C+C5 as a politicalized tool to pursue its own interests like a dominant player in Central Asia, nor would it try to fill a power vacuum now or in the future. Instead, China's diplomatic and economic priorities are more focused on stability in its western periphery so as to effectively concentrate on its persistent security challenges to the east and in the Asia-Pacific region. What China wants essentially is that the U.S.-led West respects China's legitimate rights and its core interests. This is the only prospect possible for recreating a new concert of major countries along with many others and the Global South to rebuild a multipolar world order based on the UN Charter.

Youth

Voices



Two Visions for the Future? The G7 and China-Central Asia Summits

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Introduction

The G7 and China-Central Asia Summits held in May 2023 were significant events that highlighted the contrasting approaches taken by developed and developing countries in addressing global challenges. While the G7 summit focused on various issues, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Chinese economic coercion, nuclear non-proliferation, AI governance, and sustainable development¹, the China-Central Asia Summit aimed to foster regional high-level communication mechanisms and promote economic and social advancements². Thus, while the G7 summit appeared to be disconnected from more down-to-earth global challenges, the China-Central Asia Summit announced several regional cooperation and coordination plans and agreements pertaining to security and development which showed a more pragmatic approach. In this context, a comparison between these two summits can offer insights into the roles that developed and developing countries are currently having for the world³, and something particularly special is that some of the concerns currently expressed by the Global North and the Global South have begun to diverge more drastically.

The 49th G7 Summit

The G7 leaders met from May 19 to 21, 2023 in Hiroshima for the

1 The White House, May 21. Fact Sheet: The 2023 G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, 2023.

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, President Xi Jinping Chairs the Inaugural China-Central Asia Summit and Delivers a Keynote Speech, 2023, May 19.

3 The New York Times, Your Friday Briefing: Dueling Summits, 2023, May 18.

annual G7 summit, which presented an opportunity for the world's largest advanced democracies to coordinate geopolitical, economic, and security issues.⁴ This year's summit tried to reinforce the notion that the G7 is regaining its prominence after being overshadowed by the emergence of the G20 just a few years ago while suggesting that the G20 may have lost relevance due to its remaining inclusion of Russia and China. In this sense, adherents of the G7 have suggested that it has once again emerged as the primary forum for major global economies to coordinate policies on critical issues, maybe without considering its bias towards the Western-style developed countries despite the efforts the summit has made to invite leaders from Australia, Brazil, Comoros, Cook Islands, India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Vietnam. However, something particular about this year's G7 summit, as it occurs every seven years when takes place in Japan, is that it has offered G7 countries a rare opportunity to focus on what they referred to as Indo-Pacific-specific issues⁵, in addition to the more regular focus on traditional security, technology, and economic concerns, the Ukraine war, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Indeed, there were four overarching themes that characterized this year's G7 summit.⁶ Firstly, there was significant support for Ukraine, emphasizing the link between security in Europe and security in the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, an overwhelming focus on China, which is featured both explicitly and implicitly, with an endorsement for "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," something praised by some but also raised criticism by others who are concerned with the dangerous intromission in internal issues of another country. Thirdly, there was a pretending outreach to the Global South, with an aim to a more robust engagement with developing economies. Finally, there was a focus on nuclear disarmament, with the Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida hailing from Hiroshima and utilizing this event to highlight the dangers of nuclear weapons, emphasizing the continued need for a world without them, despite Japan's recent defense spending increase in accordance to its new National Security Strategy. In addition to these major four themes, the G7 leaders reaffirmed their commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. Moreover, they also emphasized the need to unlock investments and policy reforms to accelerate progress toward the SDGs⁷, including by investing in more resilient food and health systems, and by addressing the effects of climate change. However, in spite of

4 International Crisis Group, Seven Priorities for the G7 in 2023, 2023, May 15.

5 CSIS, What's Happening with the G7 Summit? Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2023, May 18.

6 Ibid.

7 BBC News, G7 summit: Leaders pledge climate action but disappoint activists, 2021, June 13.

the intentions, the discourses that emerged from the summit have not been free of criticism and have been seen as confrontational towards both Russia and China, pushing a path of further distance between the Global North and these two countries, limiting the possibility of reconciliations, and simplifying the complexities of the current world order by suggesting that each country may need to take a side, something that can be out of the reality of most Global South countries, which benefit from having good relations with all major economies in the world.

In this context, China was also a protagonist in many of the discussions of the G7 summit, in topics such as:

- “China’s increasingly assertive posture in the Asia Pacific”: This led the summit to focus on strategies to deal with the “assertive advance” of China in the region.
- “Chinese economic coercion”: A discussion in which the G7 leaders made clear their stance on what they alleged were “economic coercion strategies” used by China towards some of its trading partners.
- “Warning against China’s threat to global supply chains and economic security”: A discussion in which G7 countries grappled with how to warn against what they see as China’s threat to global economic security without completely alienating a powerful and important trade partner.
- “Building constructive and stable relations with China”: G7 members discussed how to build constructive and stable relations with China while keeping their actions in their national interests.
- “Unified approach to dealing with China based on shared values”: A consensus based on how the G7 summit tried to show that its leaders unified behind a common approach to dealing with China based on shared values, even while recognizing each country manages its own relationship with Beijing independently.

In this sense, while the G7 summit in Hiroshima presented an opportunity for the world’s largest advanced democracies to coordinate

geopolitical, economic, and security issues⁸ that could be pragmatic in its approach to support developing countries, the summit's agenda rather reflected the priorities of Japan and the U.S. by focusing on global traditional security and economic issues with the paradigm of a more confrontational world. The leaders made notable commitments on most, but not all, the nowadays relevant issues. As the discourses that emerged from the summit have been seen as confrontational towards Russia and China, pushing further distance between the Global North and these two countries, it may be important to think that whether the G7 leaders consider of relevance the highly anticipated G20 summit that will happen in September 2023. Moreover, while the G7 summit showed leaders pretending to look unified behind a common approach to dealing with China and Russia, as long as each country will manage its own relationship with Beijing, there will always be an important space for further developments and strategic alignment coming from each side in the following years.

The 1st China-Central Asia Summit

The China-Central Asia Summit took place on May 18 and 19, 2023, in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. As opposed to the more global-business-oriented G7, its scope was geographically more specific, but its purpose was also more pragmatic and down-to-earth. It aimed to review the development of China-Central Asia relations, by discussing the establishment of mechanisms and exploring the possibility of cooperation in various areas, while addressing major international and regional issues of mutual interest.⁹ Xi Jinping, along with the presidents of the five Central Asian countries that took part in the summit: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, signed the Xi'an Declaration of the China-Central Asia Summit, ushering in a new era of cooperation and providing a fresh platform for their relations. China also presented an extensive plan for Central Asia's development, encompassing infrastructure projects, trade enhancements, and increased investment. In this sense, the summit is expected to initiate a new generation of opportunities for China-Central Asia cooperation and contribute to regional stability.¹⁰

In this context, some outcomes of the 1st China-Central Asia Summit

8 European Council, G7 summit, Hiroshima, Japan, 19-21 May 2023, 2023, May 19.

9 Global Times, China-Central Asia Summit kicks off; high-level summit demonstrates Central Asia's growing importance on China's diplomatic agenda, 2023, May 20.

10 Xinhua, China, Central Asian countries pledge to build closer community with shared future, 2023, May 19.

with important implications were:

- The heads of state reviewed the development of China-Central Asia relations and discussed mechanisms building, cooperation in various fields, and major international and regional issues.
- China expressed its willingness to align development strategies with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and work together to promote the modernization of all six nations.
- Xi Jinping unveiled an ambitious plan for Central Asia's development, encompassing infrastructure construction, trade promotion, and investment facilitation.
- China and Central Asian countries emphasized the need for deepened strategic trust and committed to providing unwavering support to each other on core interest issues such as sovereignty, independence, national dignity, and long-term development.
- Plans were made to increase mutual trade to reach \$100 billion by 2030.
- The aim of fostering Chinese cooperation with Central Asian countries is something perceived as a regional strategy by the U.S., which may trigger its response some time ahead (Freeman et al., 2023).¹¹

In contrast to the agreements of the recent 49th G7 Summit, the China-Central Asia Summit aimed to foster more pragmatic cooperation among some countries in the Global South. While the G7 summit focused on controversial issues like what they labeled as Chinese economic coercion, the China-Central Asia Summit sought to establish high-level communication mechanisms to promote economic and social progress. The summit's emphasis on win-win cooperation and the vision of building a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future reflected the spirit of cooperation and the aspiration for enduring friendship. However, whether the outcomes of the summit are going to contribute to regional stability, or signaling a departure from the paradigm of confrontation, may be something yet to be seen,

11 Freeman, C., Helf, G., & McFarland, A, China looks to fill a void in Central Asia. United States Institute of Peace, 2023.

as some US analysts have labeled this as a regional Chinese strategy, that may demand a strategic response from the U.S. in Central Asia sometime in the future.¹² Time will tell.

Reflections on the diverging concerns of the Global North and the Global South

Among these summits, something important to consider is the rising influence that the Global South is having in terms of defining the agenda and the roles of a post-unipolar order, especially in contrast to the Global North which has been looking for more representation from the South to guarantee its legitimacy. Furthermore, some non-western nations may consider twice after having witnessed the prioritization of self-interest by the West over some real urgent global issues such as health and climate change. Consequently, the non-aligned movement has seen a resurgence as these countries perceive an opportunity to leverage both the United States and China against each other and challenge the prevailing global order established in 1945.¹³

The upcoming BRICS Summit, consisting of Russia, China, Brazil, India, and South Africa, with potential new members including Iran, seeks to address a range of these objectives. Additionally, the forthcoming G20 Summit in India could be more significant than ever in terms of defining the roles that the most relevant developing countries in the Global South will play in the coming future. Recently, some of these developing nations' leaders have renewed their calls for objectives such as restructuring the United Nations Security Council to reflect the most recent world dynamics, reevaluating the Bretton Woods Institutions, questioning the supremacy of the US dollar as the global reserve currency, and resisting the American-led system of economic sanctions, among others.¹⁴

Although the composition of the BRICS and G20 groups is diverse, encompassing developed countries and emerging economies, their collective goals could demonstrate a shared desire to reshape the global order in a more Global South-oriented approach. In this regard, developed Global North nations may need to demonstrate a more genuine commitment to contributing to global development

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Financial Times, China-Central Asia Summit kicks off; high-level summit demonstrates Central Asia's growing importance on China's diplomatic agenda, 2023, May 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

while being mindful of their rhetoric to avoid patronization or imperialistic appearances. In this context, the Biden administration is forging tailored regional alliances to counterbalance China's growing influence¹⁵, whereas China has been actively convening summits, potentially enhancing its global influence. In the meantime, the non-aligned nations have been raising voices to be considered in this new and reshaped world, that instead of confrontation, countries should foster greater cooperation.

¹⁵ Center for Strategic & International Studies, What's Happening with the G7 Summit?, 2023, May 18.

G7 and China-Central Asia Summits: Diverging Concerns Between the North and the South

Christian John Hayward



TI Youth Observer

A declining G7 and the Chinese olive branch

Ever since the middle of the 1970s, the Group of Seven (G7) nations had started to meet annually to discuss economic direction, curb inflation, and originally to combat the oil shock left by the OPEC embargo, which had forced up fuel prices across the Western world. These days, relevancy of the G7 often comes into question. For example, at the time of its founding, the group's combined GDP accounted for 70% of the entire world's economic activity. However, following the exclusion of Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014, when it was briefly known as the G8, that figure now sits at roughly 44% - a very noticeable decrease.¹ Although the global economy waxes and wanes through times of recession, war, and most recently the pandemic, the G7 has attracted the ire of critics who have questioned just how effective its policy has been. The United Kingdom has underperformed along with Japan when it comes to GDP and it is noticeable that they are two similar nations that have ageing populations and have been hit by waves of economic crises.

On the other side of the Eurasian continent, China has been trying to develop its own post-pandemic economic strategy. Although, the G7 is not NATO, the two groups share membership and discuss security and geopolitical issues. China has been working hard to cultivate its

¹ CFR.org Editors, "What Does the G7 Do?", Council on Foreign Relations, May 17 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-does-g7-do>

neighbors to the immediate west, who in the wake of the collapse of the USSR were left drifting both economically and in security matters. For example, from 1992 to 1997, Tajikistan suffered a bloody civil war between the post-Soviet government and the Islamic Renaissance Party who were backed by the later infamous al-Qaeda.² China was also a target of this threat due to its close proximity and also to joint exercises being undertaken by the similar “Shanghai Co-operation Organisation” in 2022 to combat Islamic terrorism.³

So is the China-Central Asia summit (CCAS) an answer to the G7, a pushback against NATO and this group, or is China using its local influence to help a developing Central Asia curb its carbon, methane and greenhouse emissions along with safeguarding this vulnerable region from terrorism and discord?

“China’s economic coercion” or just filling the vacuum?

China once again has become a target of the West when it comes to the G7, which has hawkish members such as the United States and Japan pointing to the rise of China and accusing China of long term “Economic Coercion” – a charge that China has had to reject many times.⁴ In the G7’s 2023 Joint Communiqué, it should be noted that there is a renewed focus on addressing Africa and Micronesia (including the Cook Islands)⁵, which were long forgotten by the West and are susceptible to issues such as climate change. Although they call out China and feel that they are “held hostage”⁶ by the PRC, in reality the West has only turned its gaze towards these forgotten regions since China’s rise and involvement. For example, the most recent joint statement mentions “a shared commitment to the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and to work together and aim to mobilize up to \$600 billion by 2027” for Africa. Why this scale of aid wasn’t offered during the colonial pullout of Africa or during the past 40 years is questionable, and as in the case of Central Asia, this was a gap China successfully filled and now the West sounds the alarm about.

Meanwhile, as the war in Ukraine rages on (military support for Ukraine has also been mentioned in the Communiqué), Russia has had to turn its attention away from the CIS (Commonwealth of

2 Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*. Columbia University Press, 2002. p69 <https://doi.org/10.7312/guna12692>.

3 Editors of Eurasianet, “China stepping up military cooperation with Tajikistan”, Eurasianet, November 22, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/china-stepping-up-military-cooperation-with-tajikistan>

4 French, “Are China and Russia Bad for Africa? That’s the Wrong Question.”, Foreign Policy, May 1, 2023. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/01/china-russia-africa-economy-loans-wagner-group-development/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=FP%20This%20Week%2005082023&utm_term=fp_this_week

5 The G7, “The G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué”, The G7 Hiroshima 2023, May 20, 2023, p2. https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/Leaders_Communique_01_en.pdf

6 Wong, “G7 takes stand against China’s “economic coercion”, BBC, May 21, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-65662720>

Independent States) project, members of which will be looking for new avenues of investment and trade opportunities. Even before Xi Jinping's commencement of the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) in 2013⁷, the region had obviously traded with the Chinese for thousands of years, and grand cities such as Samarkand in Uzbekistan were built as testaments to pre-modern international trade. Uzbekistan will be another important spoke in the wheel of the new China-Central Asia Summit and although paused during the Sino-Soviet split, the history of trade between China and Central Asian states is well-documented since at least the days of the Roman Empire.

The Green transition, can China make changes where the West can't?

Although the East and West have been at loggerheads now for a substantial period of time over a variety of issues, climate change has been an extremely concerning cause for powerful nations to unite around. However, due to the remote geographic location of the Central Asian states and their abundant resources, there is a great concern about their CO₂ output.

For example, the United Kingdom has done an excellent job on reducing its carbon footprint. Although during the 1980s, the closing of the mines with no replacement industry hurt many Welsh and Northern British communities, the reduction in coal use has given the UK a head-start on reducing its climate footprint by turning to wind, solar, and nuclear energy use, resulting in nine out of the past ten years recorded falling carbon emissions. This means that from 1990 to 2022, CO₂ output was cut by 49% while the economy grew by 75%.⁸ It is providing a good example to the world of how to decarbonize. Even if the UK is still scarred by the social impacts of the exit from coal, it's a great case study for nations to follow while avoiding the same mistakes. If the UK stays on track, the country will be carbon neutral by 2050 with transport moving to EVs (electric vehicles) and other carbon offsetting schemes such as re-wilding, on which China has done a great deal of work too. In fact, the UK and China have advanced plans to share green initiatives via the exchange of hydrogen technology⁹ even at a time of strained relations.

7 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "President Xi Jinping Chairs the Inaugural China-Central Asia Summit and Delivers a Keynote Speech", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, May 19, 2023.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202305/t20230519_11080116.html

8 Evans, "Analysis: UK emissions fall 3.4% in 2022 as coal use drops to lowest level since 1757", Carbon Brief, March 6, 2023. <https://www.carbon-brief.org/analysis-uk-emissions-fall-3-4-in-2022-as-coal-use-drops-to-lowest-level-since-1757/>

9 Editors of the UK National Committee on China website, "UK China Hydrogen Energy Cooperation Dialogue 2022-2025", UK National Committee on China, 28 April, 2022. <https://ukncc.org/climate-change>

However, Central Asia is a different story. Being landlocked and with Uzbekistan, for instance, boasting an average elevation of 450m, rising sea levels might not be at the top of some governments' priorities. Turkmenistan has recently signed the "Global Methane Pledge," a key deal to keep the Earth from reaching 1.5°C¹⁰, but the problem is that it is now only just plugging leaks from its leaky gas infrastructure. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan did make the pledge to reduce their emissions at COP26 in Glasgow¹¹, little change has been made. Methane leaks alone from Turkmenistan's two main fossil fuel fields amounted to the entire of the UK's output in 2022¹², due to poorly maintained Soviet piping and infrastructure following the USSR's collapse.

If China could set up an annual G7-style summit to take up these concerns with Turkmenistan and provide industrial investment into dilapidated gas fields, the country could potentially bring down methane levels, export more gas to China, put the gas that was previously being lost to use, and generally contribute to the world initiative to save our planet from environmental disasters. Furthermore, using the BRI style policy, efforts could be made to pump gas to Europe¹³ and help with growing demand as Europe tries to wean itself off Russian fuel exports, at the same time being careful not to spark further tension between Russia and its former satellite states by undercutting its larger neighbor to the north.

10 The Editors of the Global Methane Pledge website, "Fast action on methane to keep a 1.5°C future within reach," The Global Methane Pledge, November 2021. <https://www.globalmethanepledge.org/>

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "The important steps of Turkmenistan in the field of climate change were underlined", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 3 November 2021 <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/2869>

12 Carrington, "Turkmenistan moves towards plugging massive methane leaks", The Guardian, 13 June, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/13/turkmenistan-moves-towards-plugging-massive-methane-leaks>

13 Frankopan, "The Silk Roads: A New History of the World", Bloomsbury, 2016. p 514.

Security concerns

If dialogue between nations on climate change is on the top of the agenda, security is never far behind. Just like the G7 which discusses far-reaching topics such as Ukraine, so should summits between China and Central Asian states tackle issues such as terrorism, or potential sovereignty questions. Border and other disputes between Russia, India, and China, as we can see from the recent Ladakh incident high in the mountainous region between China and India, can flare up at any time. More dialogue will only reduce the chance of these tensions potentially rising in the future, and in turn let states focus more on issues such as climate change and development for their people.

The direction of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the future of Putin in power, and various spin-off effects will heavily involve the CIS which may, in an effort to push back Western sanctions or influence, turn to China for security. As previously mentioned, terrorism, the fallout from IS (Islamic State), and other issues would be on the agenda. In 2018 American and European cyclists were killed in Tajikistan in an act claimed by IS militants.¹⁴ The Wilson Center notes that although many Western media outlets make out that Central Asia is a hotbed of terrorism, attacks have remained fairly limited. On the other hand, the fact the region has experienced such high-level defections shows that Sovietologists were correct that the Muslim regions of the USSR had been the “soft underbelly” of the USSR after all¹⁵. One could argue that this set of circumstances provides a fertile proving ground for China to test out the GSI (Global Security Initiative) proposed by Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum in 2022¹⁶, which is meant to promote internal security and promote China abroad. ASEAN would be another proving ground for China to try the GSI, but the United States’ activity in the region could curb its effectiveness if China tries to roll out the program across Southeast Asia.

Central Asia, watch this space

Central Asia will inevitably play an important world role in the years to come. While the G7’s relevancy is questionable GDP wise, it will have a lasting influence for years to come. While the China-Central Asia Summit is vital for a region forgotten by the West, it will take many years to gather the same momentum as the G7, let alone other China-led organizations such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Although the CCAS might be vital for BRI trade into Europe, one historical issue may remain. Around the fall of the Roman Empire and the chaos of the 7th Century and subsequent dark ages, Central Asia stemmed the flow of trade, which was not re-ignited until *Pax Mongolica* in the 13th and 14th centuries. Central Asian countries could in theory form an OPEC-style bloc to crank up energy prices, damaging trade between East and West. Superpowers have an unfortunate record of intervening in Central Asia and must take care not to damage sensitive

14 Lemon, “Talking Up Terrorism in Central Asia”, Kennan Cable Publication, Wilson Centre. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-38-talking-terrorism-central-asia>

15 Lemon, “Talking Up Terrorism in Central Asia”, Kennan Cable Publication, Wilson Centre. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-38-talking-terrorism-central-asia>

16 Greitens, “Xi Jinping’s Quest for Order”, Foreign Affairs, 3 October 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/xi-jinping-quest-order>

relations between the nations. Another example would be the warming relations between China and Afghanistan with the potential of re-opening the long-closed Wakhan Corridor¹⁷, although the possibility of admitting Afghanistan into the CCAS in the future is currently unknown.

While the G7's concerns are far different from those of the CCAS, mankind is united on climate change. With China's backing, the CCAS can push forward and keep the climate pledges that it signed up to, trade in all directions without being under the thumb of an Eastern or Western superpower, and the five Central Asian countries can develop their infrastructure and economy with China, and technology via the BRI. Hawkish voices in Washington will without doubt cry foul play, or like the G7 shout of "Economic Coercion," but it may be up to the "forgotten" Central Asian states to decide for themselves, and considering how distant they are from the West and the shared Silk Road based history they have with China, the connections between Central Asian countries and China are closer, and the CCAS is in all its member countries favor. One should take their decision seriously when deciding the path they are to take in the future, whether that be environmentally, economically, or from a security perspective.

¹⁷ Devonshire-Ellis, "Afghanistan in Talks With China to Re-Establish Old Silk Road Trade Routes", Silk Road Briefing, 30 November, 2022. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/11/30/afghanistan-in-talks-with-china-to-re-establish-old-silk-road-trade-routes/>

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