

Uzbekistan–China Relations as A “Security Relations Model”

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary global transformations, the interrelationship between international security and development has become increasingly significant. In particular, security challenges emerging in the Central Asian region, contemporary threats, and approaches to addressing them are becoming increasingly complex.

Ensuring international cooperation in Central Asia, particularly the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and China, is examined as a significant factor, with particular emphasis on bilateral security relations and cooperation in combating the “three evils”—terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The article explores the convergence between China’s global initiatives and Uzbekistan’s national security concepts and substantiates their significance in the contemporary geopolitical environment.

The findings indicate that security and development are inextricably linked and must be ensured through a cooperative and comprehensive approach. From this perspective, the experience of the two countries represents an important model for promoting regional and global stability.

Keywords: International security, global governance, new security concept, China’s foreign policy, Uzbekistan’s security policy, strategic partnership, Central Asia, terrorism, extremism, separatism, the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), cooperative security, sustainable development.

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of ongoing global transformations, states must uphold the principles of peace, development, cooperation, and shared success. It is essential to coordinate domestic and international policy plans and integrate two fundamental objectives: peace and development. The central priority is to remain firmly committed to peace and development while advancing national rejuvenation and steadfastly safeguarding state

sovereignty, security, and development interests. Our country is striving to create a more favorable international environment for peaceful development, achieve the objectives set before us, and preserve and extend a period of important strategic opportunities.

The contemporary world is a world of transformation, in which new opportunities and threats emerge continuously. It is a world undergoing profound changes in the system of international relations and the

international order. It is also a world in which the balance of international power is undergoing significant shifts in favor of peace and development. At the same time, we must pay particular attention to the diverse risks and threats confronting us, learn to transform risks into favorable opportunities, and develop the capacity to overcome crises.

As is well known, the final decade of the twentieth century witnessed fundamental changes in the system of international relations. The newly sovereign states of Central Asia encountered complex military-political and socioeconomic challenges, primarily associated with the growing security concerns at both the national and regional levels.

The region's already delicate political balance was further undermined by the expansion of regional and international conflict zones, the proliferation of international terrorism, religious extremism and fundamentalism, separatism, drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime. These developments brought the search for effective mechanisms to ensure security and stability to the forefront of regional and international agendas.

Uzbekistan and China's initiatives in the field of security, particularly their joint efforts to combat the "three evils"—separatism, terrorism, and extremism—represented a highly significant and sensitive step in bilateral relations. In addition to bilateral international agreements, the two countries also concluded multilateral agreements. The process of consolidating independence in the newly established states was complicated not only by the relative weakness of market institutions and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions but also by the need to protect the constitutional order, strengthen sovereignty, and establish effective state institutions. Furthermore, in response to the emerging political realities, the newly independent states of the region faced the task of strengthening mutual trust and security along their borders with neighboring countries.

Bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and China have progressively deepened since the early years of Uzbekistan's independence, eventually reaching the level of a close strategic partnership. These relations encompass not only economic cooperation and trade but also security and strategic collaboration. These developments are closely interconnected with the national security concepts of both states and, under contemporary global geopolitical conditions, constitute

an interactive model of bilateral cooperation.

This model examines the convergence and cooperation between Uzbekistan's security concepts, which have evolved since independence, and China's approaches to security and global governance.

Following the end of the Cold War, the People's Republic of China gradually developed an evolutionary approach to international security and global governance. Beginning with regional security in the 1990s, this process evolved into a comprehensive conceptual framework encompassing global security, development, civilization, and governance by 2025.

An analysis of the formation and evolution of China's security, development, and global governance concepts between 1997 and 2025 reveals a gradual and systematic progression from the "New Security Concept" to the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the concept of global governance. It is therefore important to examine how China's foreign policy thinking has evolved from a regional security orientation toward a global governance model, as well as to analyze the fundamental principles, objectives, and mechanisms of these concepts.

Today, the international security system has undergone profound transformation, with complex and multidimensional security challenges replacing the bipolar confrontation that characterized the Cold War era. Under these conditions, the People's Republic of China embarked on a process of foreign policy adaptation, seeking to move beyond traditional military-centered approaches to security and progressively advance concepts characterized by cooperative, comprehensive, and global approaches.

A major milestone in the development of China's contemporary security thinking was the introduction of the "New Security Concept" at the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1997. This concept challenged the security model based on military blocs and confrontation that had characterized the Cold War. It emphasized equality among states and rejected confrontation grounded in military alliances and bloc politics.

The fundamental principles of the "New Security Concept" include mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation. The concept thus represented a transition in China's foreign policy thinking from a predominantly realist and military-oriented

understanding of security toward a cooperative security approach.

This approach advanced the idea that security should be ensured primarily through diplomacy and cooperation rather than through military power alone. From a theoretical perspective, the concept can be regarded as an initial stage in the evolution of China's security thinking from a predominantly realist framework toward a more cooperative and constructivist security paradigm[1]. This also demonstrates China's shift away from a military-bloc approach toward ensuring security through political and diplomatic means.

In the subsequent period, a phase of regional expansion and conceptual broadening emerged, during which a model based on new approaches to security was developed. The concept of a "Harmonious World," introduced during Hu Jintao's leadership, emphasized several fundamental principles:

1. Peaceful development;
2. Opposition to the use of force;
3. The expansion of global cooperation and the promotion of justice.

This concept played a significant role in transforming the earlier "New Security Concept" from a primarily regional framework into a broader global philosophy [2].

Under conditions of globalization, the growing interdependence of nation-states, together with the expanding range of contemporary threats and challenges in the region, compelled states to address issues of security and stability responsibly through both bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

China's foreign policy is oriented toward preserving global peace and promoting cooperation for shared development. China continues to advance its fundamental policy of opening up to the outside world while pursuing the construction of a socialist society under conditions of openness. In this context, the Belt and Road Initiative plays an important role in promoting international cooperation.

Although the Belt and Road Initiative is primarily an economic initiative, it also seeks to strengthen security through development. Its principal mechanisms include infrastructure development, the enhancement of trade and logistics networks, and the expansion of energy infrastructure through major projects [3].

Another significant framework is Xi Jinping's concept of the "Holistic Approach to National Security," which conceptualizes security as a multidimensional system encompassing military, political, economic, informational, and environmental dimensions. This approach constitutes a comprehensive model of security [4].

China's national defense in the new era is another important element of this conceptual framework. Published in 2019, the relevant document provides an official and systematic account of China's defense policy. It outlines China's defensive military strategy, the reform of its armed forces, and its role in global security. Its fundamental principles include a defensive orientation in defense policy and the strengthening of global security, while its principal objective is to contribute to global stability through the development of national defense capabilities. The implementation mechanisms include defense sector reforms and the strengthening of international cooperation frameworks [5].

A major achievement of this document was the institutionalization of previously articulated theoretical concepts and their formal consolidation into an official policy framework.

Certainly, the models discussed above have contributed significantly to ensuring security not only within China's domestic political and institutional processes but also in its external relations.

The subsequent period can be characterized as the Global Initiatives Phase (2021–2025). This period is particularly significant because China's policy discourse increasingly emphasized the principles of refraining from interfering with the rights and interests of other countries, avoiding efforts to undermine the development of others, and, at the same time, never relinquishing its own legitimate rights and interests.

An analysis of these initiatives reveals several key conceptual frameworks.

(1) The Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021) is based on the premise that security and development are interdependent. Economic equality and sustainable development are regarded as essential prerequisites for global stability.

(2) The Global Security Initiative (GSI, 2022), announced by Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum for Asia in

2022, represents one of China's most significant global conceptual frameworks on security. It is grounded in the principle of "indivisible security" and advances the following priorities:

- Respect for state sovereignty;
- Opposition to bloc confrontation;
- The peaceful, political settlement of conflicts;
- Strengthening the central role of the United Nations.

The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, published in 2023, established the institutional foundations of this initiative.

(3) The Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023) introduces a cultural and humanitarian dimension to the issues of security and development. Cultural diversity and intercivilizational dialogue are presented as important factors in promoting global stability.

(4) The Global Governance Initiative (GGI, 2025) represents the most recent stage in this conceptual evolution, bringing China's preceding initiatives together within a unified strategic framework. The initiative advocates a model of global governance that is fairer, multipolar, and centered on the United Nations.

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, China pursues an independent, autonomous, and peaceful diplomatic policy while developing friendly and cooperative relations with other states.

In this context, Uzbekistan has likewise developed its own security model for domestic governance and interstate relations, formulating national security concepts tailored to its strategic priorities.

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has progressively developed national concepts relating to security, foreign policy, and public administration. Similar to China, Uzbekistan has established a system of official policy frameworks that embody fundamental principles, including independence, sovereignty, peace, stability, and regional cooperation.

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