

GGI is not just principles, but practical methods of collaborating: Global Times

Beijing, China Sep 17, 2025 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - Editor's Note:

In a turbulent world characterized by frequent regional conflicts, stalled economic development, the rise of de-globalization and a fragile international order, how can effective governance rise to meet the urgent challenges of our era? At the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus" Meeting held in North China's Tianjin on September 1, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), offering China's wisdom on the questions confronting the world today. In the latest episode of the Global Times (GT) Global Minds Roundtable, Xu Feibiao (Xu), director of the Center for BRICS and G20 Studies with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, Vijay Prashad (Prashad), an Indian Marxist scholar and executive director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, and Warwick Powell (Powell), an adjunct professor at the Queensland University of Technology and former policy advisor to Kevin Rudd, share their insights on the spirit, contemporary relevance and global significance of the GGI.

GT: How would you introduce the GGI in just one sentence?

Prashad: It's a reaffirmation of the UN Charter, but going one step further - it emphasizes the people-centered approach.

Powell: The GGI is a method by which countries can work together on the basis of equality and respect, with decisions made through consensus rather than dictated by one big country telling everyone else what to do.

Xu: I think the soul of the GGI is the idea of a community with a shared future for humanity.

GT: The key term of this initiative is "global governance." What do you think is the greatest challenge to today's global governance?

Prashad: The greatest challenge is when you have a set of principles, laws or treaties, people don't follow them.

For example, the US is the most powerful country in the world, both in terms of its military strength and its ability to exert control over other nations through sanctions. But the US hasn't ratified a large number of important UN treaties. And the UN treaties, or its charter, are frequently violated by the US and other NATO countries.

The invasion of Iraq was a violation of the UN Charter. The destruction of Libya in 2011 was a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. The resolution just authorized "a no-fly zone;" it didn't say "go and bomb the country."

You can't have governance if powerful actors are regularly violating the terms of governance. You can't be both the keeper of global law and the main violator of global law.

Powell: The greatest barriers at the moment are the ongoing insistence by the US and the Western powers on their own primacy, and their reluctance to respect other countries' abilities to participate in

the world without being bullied by the big powers.

Xu: A few countries want to maintain the old, unjust global order. They want to be the dominant powers while controlling others. We don't need that kind of order. It is at this critical juncture that the GGI was proposed by President Xi. Many challenges are being faced by every country, and they need to come together, unite and create a just and reasonable global governance system.

GT: Do you think the GGI is addressing what's missing in global governance?

Powell: Absolutely. The Western rules-based world is, in some ways, quite misleading. It's a very effective marketing slogan because it creates the impression that it's a system with legitimacy at a global level, and this legitimacy is somehow linked to the UN. But in fact, it is quite different from the UN. It's not a framework that countries around the world have agreed to.

The rules-based international order is also used to justify American military intervention in other countries - in the name of order, peace, democracy, liberalism and Western ideas.

The GGI, which draws on China's own experiences but in many ways reflects the spirit of the UN and its charter, is fundamentally different. It is about respecting the fact that the world is made up of many different countries, each with its own identity. And when we can embrace these differences, we can find ways to appreciate them, maybe even learn from them, while also identifying common paths and shared interests. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as multilateral institutions - such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, BRICS, the UN, the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization - illustrate this.

As China has become stronger, I think it's trying to be an enabling great power, not an expropriating great power. China played a pivotal role in normalizing the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran. You can't force people. You have to listen, talk and create the conditions where maybe people can at least have a little dialogue and make progress. I think China has shown that these principles are not just principles, but also practical methods of working with each other.

Xu: It is the US and some Western countries that always say we should govern the world based on rules. But the question is: Which rules? Whose rules? Who defines them, and who interprets them? That makes a big difference. China does not uphold the rules defined by just a few countries' laws. Instead, it upholds multilateralism and sovereign equality. That is different.

If we look at the content of the GGI, you will find that China calls for a governance in which every country is respected, and can have its voice heard in the international community, aiming to improve the existing system by reforming it and transforming it into a more reasonable, just and applicable global system.

Take a look at the tariff war. The US set very high tariffs, and European countries accepted them. That shows that the US and other Western countries are either unwilling or unable to uphold the existing system. Meanwhile, Global South countries are standing firm against the bullying of the US. This means they have both the will and the capability to uphold justice and international rules.

The Global South is rising quickly. They have enough capability and they want a reasonable and just global governance system.

From the demand side, the world needs a stable, reasonable, and just global governance system. From the supply side, we now have the GGI.

GT: Among the five core concepts of the GGI - namely staying committed to sovereign equality, staying committed to international rule of law, staying committed to multilateralism, staying committed to the people-centered approach, and staying committed to real results - which one impresses you the most?

Xu: The one that impresses me the most is the first concept, sovereign equality. For many years, this has not been easy to achieve.

If global governance is really based on sovereign equality, it means that dominant actors should be willing to sacrifice something. That is not easy. But only when sovereignty is fully respected can there be true cooperation and true multilateralism. It is the foundation for the other concepts.

Prashad: People-centered is important. We are now in an age where we believe in the equality of all people. It's not just about doing whatever you want in your territory. It's also about improving the living conditions of people around the world - putting the people first.

The GGI is putting something on the table. It says that people's sense of fulfillment must be inspired.

Powell: Real results. Only by delivering real results can we demonstrate that the other principles are meaningful. Real results are also about the outcomes of sovereign equality. It's about why international law works - why should countries accept international law, if it doesn't deliver results?

Anchoring global governance in a commitment to real results is a powerful reminder that we must always turn words into actions. For those actions to be embraced by others, they must deliver on the aspirations people have - economic development, cultural exchanges and ecological improvement. We have to see results.

GT: Some Western media claim China is pushing to reform global governance in order to create a new, alternative world order. How do you respond to this claim?

Prashad: First, I would say maybe three out of the five core concepts of the GGI are also in the UN Charter. I don't see what the complaint is. I would recommend that they go and read the UN Charter again.

The GGI is an affirmation of the UN Charter. The additional aspect is the "people-centered" part. But that's the promise of the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the decolonization movement, the promise of Bandung, the promise of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In fact, this is something that most liberal intellectuals in the West would agree with: We should put people before money. They need not be Marxists; they could agree with that from the standpoint of social welfare. The abolition of poverty is as important as ending war. That means peace plus development, not war plus austerity - which is what the West is promising.

What I think this initiative and others like it - it's not the only one - are saying is: Don't spend so much on war; instead, spend more money on getting rid of poverty in your country.

Powell: The GGI rejects the idea that a small number of countries can arbitrarily impose their views while ignoring their own rules. That rejection is intentional and necessary - but it is not about placing China at the center. True multilateralism makes that impossible.

Fundamentally, it is a rejuvenation of postwar multilateralism. A consensus was already achieved in the

UN Charter. That's a really hard thing to do - getting over 190 different countries to all agree on something. What we now have to do is turn that agreement into real results.

Xu: One of the core elements of the GGI is commitment to multilateralism. Some in the West are concerned that China will become the next hegemon. What kind of hegemony would truly uphold multilateralism? If a hegemon genuinely upheld multilateralism, then it would not be a hegemon.

The GGI is not about overthrowing or building another system. The initiative was put forward by China, but it represents the Global South. For the first time in human history, it is up to the Global South to uphold and maintain the global governance system, and to build a more equitable and reasonable global governance system.

GT: Looking ahead, how do you envision the GGI in practice?

Xu: I personally feel quite optimistic about it, because this is not an initiative proposed by China for its own interests, but for the interests of the world, aiming for a more just and reasonable order. The need for good governance is real.

Of course, some countries see this as a threat to their own interests because they want to maintain their dominant role and hegemonic status. So, there will be contradictions, and I expect challenges ahead, mainly from the US and some European countries.

I think the GGI will first move forward step by step through smaller multilateral platforms, such as BRICS or the SCO, and then expand from there, eventually being accepted more broadly by other countries. I am quite optimistic.

Powell: I expect it to evolve, actually, not in a hurried way, because in part the underlying philosophical foundation of the GGI is multilateralism, and multilateralism takes time and requires patience.

As more countries gain the confidence to express themselves, I think we will see multilateralism take practical forms with real results in economic outcomes, infrastructure, education, literacy and health.

The GGI will provide pathways for many countries to embrace, but the challenge will be how the legacy of unilateralism continues to assert itself. There is a contradiction that needs to be resolved, but I think it will be resolved - you can't stop more than 190 countries from choosing multilateralism.

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Source : Global Times

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