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Mapping China's Global Governance Ambitions

Democracies Still Have Leverage to Shape Beijing's Reform Agenda

By Melanie Hart and Blaine Johnson February 2019

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Chinese leaders are ramping up their ambitions for the global order. Chinese President Xi Jinping is calling for his nation to “lead the reform of the global governance system,” which is the set of international rules, institutions, and enforcement mechanisms the global community uses to solve common problems.¹ As the largest global economy—China has surpassed the United States in purchasing power parity—it is natural for China to seek a stronger voice on global governance issues. However, the problem is that, within China, President Xi is rolling out new systems to strengthen authoritarian control, raising concerns that Beijing seeks to make the international system more authoritarian as well.

The United States and other democratic nations need to understand Beijing’s vision for the global governance system and how that vision differs from the prevailing liberal democratic order, which recognizes limits to state authority, such as binding international law and unalienable individual rights. It is difficult to map China’s true intentions based on Xi Jinping’s international speeches, which make fuzzy promises that can be spun many different ways, such as his frequent claim that China aims to make the global governance system more democratic in order to “build a community of shared future for mankind.”² Yet when viewed through President Xi’s domestic messaging and the actions Beijing has taken thus far to implement its global agenda, a clearer picture emerges. The current global governance system is rules-based, and it privileges liberal democratic values and standards; Beijing’s alternative vision is a system based on authoritarian governance principles in which nations negotiate issues bilaterally instead of following common rules and standards. From a liberal democratic perspective, if Beijing succeeds in bringing about that vision, the world will be less free, less prosperous, and less safe.

This report aims to provide a deeper and more nuanced perspective on China’s real global governance intentions by mapping what President Xi and other Chinese leaders are saying to their domestic audience and how Chinese foreign policy scholars interpret those statements. In the Chinese political system, internal leadership statements are particularly revealing because they convey Beijing’s intentions to

officials throughout the Chinese Communist Party and government hierarchy. This report will analyze that internal messaging alongside the empirical pattern of actions Beijing has taken thus far in order to assess the risks and opportunities that China's new activism presents for the current liberal order.

Deeper analysis indicates that there is ample reason for concern. China's stated goals include watering down liberal democratic principles and either replacing or augmenting them with authoritarian ones. At the same time, this analysis also reveals that liberal democracies have powerful levers for shaping China's actions in the global governance space. Using those levers, however, will require liberal democracies to figure out what they stand for, what they want the global order to look like over the coming decades, and how to create more space within the international governance system for China and other developing nations without ceding ground on fundamental principles. China's reform ambitions may actually provide the impetus democracies have been waiting for to kick-start that process.

Putting China's ambitions in context: U.S. retreat provides a strategic opportunity

Chinese analysts view the global governance system as a direct outcome of the distribution of power among nations. According to the Chinese view, powerful nations design global institutions, rules, and norms to reflect and further their own national interests. Since the United States and other Western developed nations designed many of today's institutions in an era when China was a much weaker power, Beijing assumes that the current system benefits Western nations at China's expense. Now that China is becoming a rival power center, Beijing expects the global governance system to increasingly reflect Chinese interests. That expectation is a legitimate one, but as this report will illustrate, some of China's national interests conflict with broader global interests, particularly liberal democratic interests.

Chinese observers view the 2008–2009 global financial crisis as the first major shift in global power from the United States to China. China's state-directed economy weathered that crisis better than market economies in the United States and Europe, convincing many in Beijing that the Chinese model is superior to the Western one. When the dust settled, the predominant Chinese view was that the United States was declining, China was ascendant, and the global power balance had just passed a major tipping point. In a 2016 article for a leading Chinese foreign policy journal affiliated with the Ministry of State Security, Cui Liru, senior adviser to the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations, noted the shift in the international power dynamic. He described the post-crisis era as a new world order in which the United States was “no longer able to easily exercise hegemonic authority like it did in the post-Cold War era” and power was more evenly distributed among nations with “different power centers competing and cooperating at different levels according to their own superiority and characteristics.”³ At the time, Chinese leaders were more cautious; they still viewed the world as a unipolar one with the United States at its center, but they saw it shifting toward a new multipolar configuration at an accelerating rate.

After the financial crisis, Chinese leaders began to lean in and play a stronger role on global governance issues—particularly transnational issues such as global climate change—but they were careful to avoid leaning in too far. In Beijing’s view, it was time for China to have a louder voice, but that voice should be part of a broader international chorus.⁴ In 2009, at the 11th Ambassadorial Conference, then-President Hu Jintao and other senior Chinese leaders called on the Chinese foreign policy establishment to increase the nation’s influence on global governance issues, but also stated that China should not take the lead.⁵ President Xi Jinping followed a similar script after he came to power in 2012. In his November 2014 speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, Xi stated that China would “work to reform the international system and global governance” but carefully avoided calling for China to play a leading role.⁶

Beijing perceived another major power shift in 2016 and 2017 when the United Kingdom voted to exit the European Union (EU) and Donald Trump became the U.S. president. Chinese observers viewed both the Brexit referendum and the Trump administration’s isolationist foreign policy as evidence that the world’s oldest and most powerful democracies were beginning to stumble, creating an opening for China to play a stronger role on global governance issues. President Trump’s first two years in office provided ample evidence to support that conclusion. He pulled the United States out of the Iran deal, the U.N. Human Rights Council, and negotiations for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. Furthermore, Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement and the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).⁷ Chinese scholars began to argue that U.S. withdrawal was creating a shortfall in global governance, making it harder to address common challenges and generating rising demand for China to step up and fill the gap. Chen Xiangyang, deputy director of the Institute of World Politics at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, described the new dynamic as one in which “US selfishness has caused the world to turn to China to play a greater role,” saying: “US withdrawal has led to greater confidence in and respect for China’s role, enabling China to move closer to the center of the world stage through participating in global governance and expanding its clout and voice in the world.”⁸

In June 2018—immediately following Trump administration withdrawals from the Iran nuclear deal and the U.N. Human Rights Council—President Xi delivered a major foreign policy speech in which he stated that China would “lead the reform of the global governance system.”⁹ That speech marked Beijing’s first official deviation

from the “never claim leadership” principle Deng Xiaoping established in 1989 when laying out the regime’s post-Tiananmen survival strategy.¹⁰ The global governance actions China has taken thus far—which are outlined in this report—largely predate Xi’s June 2018 speech. Going forward, the international community should expect China’s ambitions and activities to increase substantially, particularly if the United States continues to disengage from the multilateral arena and provide maximum maneuvering room.

China's strategic intent: Discerning Beijing's ultimate aim

When President Xi and other Chinese leaders outline their global governance vision for an international audience, they do not provide much detail. That is partly to avoid triggering international concern and partly because there are divergent views in Beijing regarding where the current system benefits China, where it disadvantages China, and how and where Beijing should push for reform. Although debates continue at the margins, three key macro-level themes are emerging in China's internal discussions, and those themes are increasingly reflected in Chinese foreign policy.

Beijing intends to weaken liberal democratic principles and augment or replace them with authoritarian governance principles

Chinese leaders recognize that in order to continue advancing economically, they cannot wall off China's economy or society from the global community. However, integrating with a global system that values liberal principles over authoritarian ones brings sizable risk, because it exposes Chinese citizens to a set of ideals, standards, and benefits their current leaders do not intend to meet or provide. To address this risk, Chinese leaders are seeking to make the international system more like China. This is the opposite of what Western nations intended when they brought China into that system.

In the United States and other Western nations, there is a tendency to avoid framing disputes with China in ideological terms, which is generally viewed as veering toward dangerous Cold War thinking. On the Chinese side, however, Chinese leaders frequently claim that their nation is fighting an ideological battle against Western values—particularly freedom, democracy, and human rights—which, from a Western perspective, are universal values that should apply equally to all citizens. As a repressive authoritarian regime, Beijing does not want Chinese citizens to judge their own leaders using those standards. Where those standards exist in the global governance system, Beijing views them as a fundamental security threat.

President Xi outlined those fears at the 2013 National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference in Beijing when he described Western nations as “hanging up a sheep’s head while selling dog meat.”¹¹ By that, he was intimating that Western nations were engaging in false advertisement, making self-righteous claims about promoting universal values for the sake of humanity when their real purpose was, in his words, “to fight with us for positions, fight over the will of the people, fight over the masses, and ultimately overthrow the leadership of the Communist Party of China.”¹² A few years later, at a 2015 work conference at the Chinese Communist Party Central Party School, President Xi warned that among nations who fall for the universal values trap, “some have been tormented beyond recognition, some have split up into pieces, some have been enveloped in flames of war, some are noisy and in disarray all day.”¹³ He pointed to Syria, Libya, and Iraq as prime examples.

To avoid that fate, President Xi has called, and continues to call, on China to use its own “discourse power” to push back against universal values in the global governance space.¹⁴ Still, at first glance, some of President Xi’s international statements appear to support liberal values. For example, in a 2017 speech to the United Nations, Xi claimed that China’s aim is to “build an open and inclusive world” and that Beijing believes “diversity of human civilizations ... drives progress of mankind.”¹⁵ What Western observers need to understand, however, is that when Chinese foreign policy experts unpack that statement, they view it as a call for political diversity where authoritarian systems and values have global status equal to liberal democratic ones.¹⁶ For example, writing on internet freedom, People’s Liberation Army Major General Hao Yeli writes that the global system should “avoid the excessive pursuit of unregulated openness, in order not to cross a tipping point beyond which global cultural diversity is subordinated to a single dominant culture.”¹⁷ Similarly, Han Zhen, secretary of the Beijing Foreign Studies University Chinese Communist Party Committee, calls for a global pivot away from “Western centrism,” which he defines as a form of “cultural absolutism” that seeks to hold China and other nations accountable to Western liberal democratic standards.¹⁸ Echoing President Xi’s call for diversity, Han writes: “It is imperative to make more people realize the ‘universal values’ that have long been lauded by Western societies are actually a duplication of Western political, economic, social, and cultural models ... human society should extricate itself from the vicious circle of Western-centrism and build a system of values that is characterized by mutual learning and mixing between diverse groups.”¹⁹

Xi's oft-stated call for a "community of common destiny for mankind" is part of this effort to give authoritarian principles more sway in the global governance system.²⁰ In a liberal democratic order, individuals have inalienable rights that the state cannot take away. In China's preferred authoritarian order, collective rights and interests—so-called mankind—are more important than individual rights and interests, and the state speaks on the collective's behalf to determine its interests. Beijing is trying to convince the global community that authoritarian systems are better than democracies in this regard. Zhang Weiwei, dean of the China Institute at Fudan University, lays out that argument in the Chinese Communist Party political journal *Qiushi*, writing:

The biggest difference between the institutional arrangements of China and Western countries is that the former has a political force representing the people's collective interest and the latter do not. In the West, different political parties represent the interest of different social groups. As a result, national policies are constantly wavering, political parties and interest groups are frequently engaged in bigger conflict with each other, and national development easily loses direction. In contrast, the CPC is a political party dedicated to serving the people wholeheartedly, and one that has played the role of leader, regulator, and coordinator throughout China's modernization drive.²¹

Moreover, Zhang argues that the same dynamic applies at a global level: The Chinese model can effectively address complex problems that a democratic policy-making process cannot. Since he views the Chinese model as superior, Zhang calls on China to put forward "a series of Chinese solutions to difficult issues in global governance."²² When President Xi calls for a "community of common destiny for mankind," he is pushing a new vision for global governance in which the state, not the individual, is always the ultimate authority.

Beijing aims to reduce U.S. dominance and give developing nations a stronger voice

Beijing's primary complaint about the prevailing global governance system is the fact that, in its view, the system was designed by and for the United States. In a 2017 article in *The Diplomat*, Fu Ying, China's former vice minister of foreign affairs, lays out that perspective, stating, "After emerging victorious at the end of the Cold War, the United States crowned itself as the world leader and has tried to extend the Western order to be the new world order."²³ She describes the U.S.-led global order as one in which the United States "seeks to transform non-Western countries

to a Western political system and set of values with evangelical zeal” and is solely “focused on pursuing their own interests.” Fu continues, saying that when the U.S.-dominated approach was used to address global challenges, it sometimes resulted in unilateral military action, which “led to a succession of blunders, leaving ensuing turbulence for the rest of the world to deal with.”²⁴

In contrast, Chinese officials and scholars claim that China will take a more egalitarian and benevolent approach, using its rise to bring about a more balanced system in which no single nation’s interests predominate. Beijing describes its approach as U.N.-centric: avoiding unilateral action, giving all nations a seat at the table regardless of their size, and making decisions by consensus.²⁵

In his speech to a Chinese Communist Party convening of political parties in December 2017, President Xi promised that China will move the global governance system “in a more just and reasonable direction.”²⁶ Similarly, in his report to the 19th Party Congress, he stated that Beijing “supports the efforts of other developing countries to increase and strengthen their voice.”²⁷ He used similar language in his 2017 speech to the United Nations, stating: “All countries should jointly shape the future of the world, write international rules, [and] manage global affairs. ... Big countries should treat smaller ones as equals instead of acting as a hegemon imposing their will on others.”²⁸

Chen Xiangyang contrasts China’s egalitarian approach with the U.S. model, stating that “China will not follow the example of some Western powers that have flaunted their wealth but not shown benevolence or generosity.”²⁹ Similarly, Fu Ying describes Beijing’s aim as a system that “respects the legitimate interests and values of nations, regardless of their social systems or their levels of development.”³⁰

Yet despite these lofty promises, in practice—as the empirical examples in this report will demonstrate—China’s behavior often leans more dictatorial than egalitarian, reflecting the same hegemonic behavior China’s scholars associate with U.S. leadership.

Beijing wants the global governance system to effectively address global challenges

As the largest global economy, China is heavily dependent on the global system. Therefore, it is in China's national interest to work collaboratively with other nations to address challenges that threaten global safety and prosperity. On issues such as climate change, terrorism, pandemic disease, nuclear proliferation and global financial crises, China shares common interests with other nations, and that is something Western nations should not forget as they assess China's global governance ambitions. Where there are common interests, China's growing capabilities can present more opportunity than risk.

On global climate change, for example, China's National Development and Reform Commission describes the nation as "a country vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change," citing domestic risks, including "economic security, energy security, ecological security, food security, and people's lives and property."³¹ To be sure, when negotiating in multilateral forums, Chinese diplomats will try to find solutions that are particularly good for China. That is to say, they will try to make commitments that do not exceed what other nations put forward and will be relatively easy for Beijing to meet. However, Beijing understands that no global action would be worse for China than action that requires it to move beyond its comfort zone.³²

China's empirical record in the global governance arena

China's economic might is its primary lever for global governance reform. Other nations want access to China's domestic market or outbound investment, and Beijing can provide or withhold that access to exert leverage over other nations. China's development success provides additional political capital. Leaders in other developing nations—particularly those that do not want to pursue liberal reform—seek to emulate the China model. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China is augmenting those positive drivers with coercive power: extending its military and security services overseas to apply targeted pressure against nations or individuals who, in Beijing's view, undermine Chinese interests.³³ Beijing mixes these capabilities—economic, political, and coercive—to pursue its national interests in the global governance space. Those actions cover six key categories: (1) shaping multilateral action; (2) disrupting international legal regimes; (3) shifting international norms; (4) co-opting international organizations; (5) creating new international institutions; and (6) building a China-centric platform for international cooperation.

1. Shaping multilateral action on global challenges

From a U.S. perspective, China has a mixed record on global challenges. On transnational challenges that do not emerge within a single nation, China often plays a positive role. When the global financial crisis struck in 2008, China worked collaboratively with the United States and other G-20 nations to take coordinated action that prevented global economic collapse. From 2014 to 2015, China worked collaboratively with the United States to forge a new global climate agreement for the post-2020 era.³⁴ As Ebola outbreaks continue in Africa, China is sending medical personnel and financial aid to support international response efforts and is helping the region establish a new Africa Center for Disease Prevention and Control.³⁵

When individual nation-states create global challenges, China is more likely to play a spoiler role. Responding to those challenges often requires the multilateral community to impose pressure on the offending nation, and Beijing fears that if

China faces another massive social movement such as the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, it could once again find itself on the receiving end of multilateral pressure. To reduce that risk, China leverages its role in multilateral forums such as the U.N. Security Council to push a Chinese principle of “non-interference in other nations’ internal affairs.”³⁶ Chinese officials and scholars apply this term broadly, using it as a rationale to oppose activities ranging from U.S. military action in Iraq and Libya to Japan hosting a World Uyghur Congress meeting to British efforts to investigate whether Beijing’s crackdown on Hong Kong violated the Sino-British Joint Declaration.³⁷ Within the United Nations, China has blocked, among other things, six U.N. resolutions on Syria’s humanitarian crisis and other resolutions on Zimbabwean government violence toward its political opposition; Myanmar military use of force against ethnic minority regions; and a peace process for Guatemala.³⁸

Chinese leaders are willing to take a flexible approach on noninterference when they begin to suspect that by blocking multilateral action, China is increasing the risk that other nations will form military coalitions or take unilateral military action to address the crisis. In this respect, Beijing is more flexible on noninterference than on issues relating to universal values. During the Obama administration, China shifted its position on Iran’s nuclear program, eventually supporting strong sanctions designed to bring Iran to the negotiation table.³⁹ Beijing feared that strong sanctions could destabilize the Iranian regime but also had deep economic interests in the region and feared that, if Iran continued down the nuclear path, other nations—particularly the United States and Israel—were likely to react militarily, threatening China’s economic interests. China demonstrated a similar pattern on North Korea in 2017, backing stronger multilateral sanctions once it perceived a growing risk that the United States would respond militarily.

2. Disrupting international legal regimes

In the Chinese political system, there is no authority higher than the Chinese Communist Party. The party constitution describes China’s legal system as a “socialist system of laws with Chinese characteristics,” and calls for the party to “fully advance the law-based governance of China.”⁴⁰ In practice, the party is always above the law and can interpret or ignore laws as it sees fit. President Xi is currently working to reinforce that dynamic with a new initiative to “strengthen Chinese Communist Party leadership over law-based governance”—particularly China’s legislative apparatus, law enforcement agencies, and judicial system.⁴¹

This approach clashes with the international legal system. When nation-states sign treaties and other forms of binding international law, they are expected to abide by them, even when doing so conflicts with certain national interests. The United States and other Western nations agree to be bound by international law because doing so enables them to exist within a stable, secure, and predictable international environment. China has demonstrated a concerning pattern whereby it reaps benefits from that environment but flouts laws that go against China's national interests. Unlike democratic norms, China is generally content to leave international legal regimes in place, but China sometimes violates those regimes in ways that undermine them from within.

China's compliance with the World Trade Organization (WTO) is one prominent example. When China signed its WTO accession agreement, Beijing made multiple commitments—many of which are still unmet nearly two decades later. For example, China has refused to file WTO-required subsidy reports and continues to force foreign firms to hand over core technology as a prerequisite for Chinese market entry, despite the fact that it is the only WTO member with instructions to eliminate and cease enforcement of “technology transfer requirements” in its accession agreement.⁴² When foreign firms try to use WTO dispute resolution procedures, Beijing threatens to kick them out of its markets entirely. Many firms are so fearful of Chinese economic retaliation that they never even bring complaints to the WTO. China also waters down domestic regulations in order to make it harder for foreign firms to use them as evidence of WTO-illegal action. For example, after multiple nations complained about forced technology transfer, Beijing revised those rules to make transfers voluntary but, in practice, still made transfer a mandatory requirement for market access. That pattern of action undermines the entire rules-based trading system.

When other nations confront China, Beijing either denies violating the rules, argues that the rules are unfair, or claims that the rules should not apply to China. For example, in current discussions regarding WTO reform, Beijing is calling for reforms to be “jointly formulated by the international community, not dictated by a small number of members”—a clear dig against the current system.⁴³ Last fall, Wang Shouwen, China's deputy international trade representative spoke at a Ministry of Commerce press briefing, declaring that, “China is willing to assume its obligations in the WTO according to its own level of development and capabilities and does not allow other members to deprive China of the developing member special and differential treatment it ought to enjoy.”⁴⁴ In other words, China wants to enjoy the same global market access as everyone else, but it does not want to be held accountable to the same rules and standards.

In the security arena, China is deploying a similar strategy to undermine the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The convention states that when there is a dispute among signatories regarding how the convention should be applied in a specific case, either party can bring that dispute to a U.N. tribunal, and the tribunal's ruling will be legally binding. In 2013, the Philippines used that mechanism to challenge Chinese maritime claims in disputed areas of the South China Sea.⁴⁵ China first responded by arguing—contrary to conventional international law—that the dispute was a bilateral matter, and as such, the UNCLOS tribunal did not have legal authority to issue a binding ruling. China's national cabinet called the Philippines use of established legal practice a “wanton abuse of the UNCLOS dispute settlement procedures” and stated that the Philippines was engaging in an “invasion and illegal occupation” of Chinese territory.⁴⁶ China further claimed that the Philippines had “concocted a pack of lies” to convince an UNCLOS tribunal to hear the case.⁴⁷ When the tribunal ruled against China, Beijing stated that China believes “the will of sovereign states should not be violated” in international dispute settlement, and “on issues concerning territory and maritime delimitation, China does not accept any means of dispute settlement imposed on it.”⁴⁸ In other words: The Chinese state is not bound by international law and will not respect international rulings that violate its will.

Since the UNCLOS ruling, Beijing has sought to use its economic, military, and diplomatic power to shift how the ruling is implemented in the region. Economically, China promised to invest \$24 billion in the Philippines based on the understanding that, in return, the Philippines would not push to enforce the UNCLOS tribunal ruling.⁴⁹ Militarily, China ramped up its presence in the South China Sea to deter other nations from pressing their own claims. On the diplomatic front, Chinese scholars called on Beijing to use its “discourse power” to shape the way other nations viewed the ruling and avoid facing similar crises in the future. Writing in the *Global Times*, National Defense University professor Qiao Liang claimed that one of the key lessons Beijing should draw from the arbitration case is that, just as China must increase its military capability, it must also “increase the construction of discourse capability [because] the previous discourse system is clearly insufficient” for protecting China's interests.⁵⁰ Chinese Communist Party newspaper *People's Daily* featured Wuhan University China Institute of Boundary and Ocean Studies associate professor Huang Wei's view on the crisis. Professor Huang stated that, instead

of viewing the legal ruling as the ultimate conclusion to the conflict—which, from an international perspective, is exactly how China should view it—Beijing should instead view it as a “turning point.”⁵¹ He argued:

*If China can seize this opportunity to promote relevant country implementation [of the ruling] to develop in a direction favorable to China, and to unite more countries to support China’s practices and attract more countries to adopt similar approaches, then, there is every reason to believe that, when dealing with issues similar to South China Sea arbitration in future, China will have greater advantages in law or jurisprudence, thereby gaining more maneuvering space for diplomatic struggle.*⁵²

The common thread throughout both the WTO and UNCLOS examples is that China enjoys the benefits of being a part of international legal regimes, but when those regimes rule against China or seek to constrain Chinese actions, Beijing does not accept constraints on its own behavior, which, in turn, undermines the entire system.

3. Shifting international norms

International norms pose unique challenges for China, particularly those that promote universal values such as freedom, human rights, and democracy. The very existence of those norms is a problem for the Chinese Communist Party because they set governance standards the party does not intend to meet. Beijing is particularly concerned about norms relating to human rights and internet freedom. On both fronts, Chinese leaders are working to modify those norms by promoting a more authoritarian interpretation that balances individual interests with state interests, which, in China’s case, is primarily the desire to maintain single-party political control. China is convening its own multilateral forums to promote that shift, as well as working within existing multilateral institutions.

In 2017, Chinese leaders brought together 50 developing nations to attend China’s first South-South Human Rights Forum in Beijing, which articulated a Chinese alternative on human rights. President Xi outlined that alternative in his opening letter to the forum, which defined human rights as having both “universality and particularity,” stating that “human rights must and can only be promoted in light of specific national conditions.”⁵³ Foreign Minister Wang Yi echoed this messaging in his address, stating that China follows a “human rights development path with Chinese characteristics” that, unlike the Western version, has a more balanced “combination of universality and particularity.”⁵⁴ Forum participants adopted a Beijing

declaration, which gives states the authority to balance human rights against other needs, particularly public order. The declaration states that national governments can legitimately violate human rights—or, as the declaration puts it, impose “restrictions on the exercise of human rights”—as long as the measures they take to do so “meet the legitimate needs of national security, public order, public health, public safety, public morals and the general welfare of the people.”⁵⁵ In other words, human rights with Chinese characteristics are privileges that a state can provide or deny.

Within the United Nations, Beijing is blocking efforts to criticize its human rights record and is working to water down accountability mechanisms.⁵⁶ China recently put forward two resolutions at the U.N. Human Rights Council: a June 2017 resolution suggesting that human rights must be balanced with economic development needs, and a March 2018 resolution that calls for nations to address human rights problems through “mutually beneficial cooperation.”⁵⁷ The March 2018 resolution further states that when assessing a nation’s responsibilities in the human rights domain, “the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind.”⁵⁸ Both resolutions passed, thus baking Chinese-style norms—which give states leeway to abuse human rights in their pursuit of other interests—into the U.N. system.

China is pursuing a similar normative shift in the digital space. Beijing has long suspected that the United States seeks to foster domestic unrest in China via the internet. President Xi laid out these suspicions in a speech at the 2013 National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference, claiming that, “Western anti-China forces have been trying to use the internet to pull down China ... On the battlefield of the internet, whether we can stand and stay upright, fight and win, is directly related to China’s ideological security and political security.”⁵⁹ Although Western observers are generally aware of China’s internet firewall, many do not realize that Beijing also views a free and open global internet as a national security threat. A 2015 article in *Qiushi* claimed that Western nations “use foreign policy such as ‘cyberfreedom’ to insinuate and attack us for lack of ‘freedom of speech’ ... It makes people feel that online freedom is restricted, and they want to break through this bondage to get the so-called true ‘freedom’” that they are missing out on under Chinese Communist Party rule.⁶⁰

China is seeking to devalue those external freedoms by pushing authoritarian principles in global internet governance forums. Just as China is convening its own human rights forums, it is also hosting World Internet Conferences that bring in representatives from other nations—including major U.S. companies—to legitimize

Chinese norms. In his speech to China's second World Internet Conference in 2015, President Xi pushed a set of principles for global internet governance reform that included "respect for cyber sovereignty," "maintenance of peace and security," and "cultivation of good order."⁶¹ President Xi stated: "We should respect the right of individual countries to independently choose their own path of cyber development, model of cyber regulation and Internet public policies ... No country should pursue cyber hegemony, interfere in other countries' internal affairs or engage in, connive at or support cyber activities that undermine other countries' national security."⁶² In other words, states have the right to control internet activity within their borders, and other nations should respect that right.

China is pushing these concepts in existing international institutions as well. For example, China participated in all five rounds of a U.N. Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) process established to study cyberspace—the latter rounds of which the U.N. General Assembly directed to determine how international law should apply to nation-state behavior in cyberspace.⁶³ In the fourth round, China added "state sovereignty" to the GGE list of governance principles, a move that effectively blocked the group's ability to establish how international law should apply in the cyber domain.⁶⁴ The fifth round failed to produce a report, reportedly because China—along with Russia and Cuba—objected to principles put forward by other nations, including the right to respond to internationally wrongful acts.⁶⁵ After this logjam, the process split into two groups: one spearheaded by the United States and other democracies that will continue to focus on international law, and another, organized by authoritarian regimes such as China, Russia, North Korea, and Venezuela, that describes itself as an alternative "open-ended working group acting on a consensus basis."⁶⁶

China's normative push in the internet domain is a particular concern because it has an infrastructure component: Beijing is building digital infrastructure in developing nations and providing regulatory training as part of the package. China's Belt and Road Initiative includes a "Digital Silk Road" that brings officials from Belt and Road nations to China for workshops on information and communication technology (ICT) policy, including internet control.⁶⁷ Some of these nations are applying those lessons at home. (See text box below) If China successfully expands the set of countries following its approach to the internet, there will be a growing base of support for China's "cyber sovereignty" principles in global governance forums.

China's digital package deal: Digital surveillance and control follows Chinese infrastructure projects

Kenya

China's Huawei constructed the Kenyan government's communication network and installed a video surveillance network that local police use to monitor citizen activity in Nairobi.⁶⁸ Chinese digital infrastructure company StarTimes established a Kenyan subsidiary in 2012 and, by 2017, accounted for almost half of Kenya's pay TV market—a position StarTimes uses to push pro-China media content.⁶⁹ In 2014, Huawei signed an MOU with Kenya's ICT authority to bring students to China for ICT training; in 2017, it signed another MOU focused on “sharing ICT best practices, development of ICT infrastructure and e-government services, [and] building ICT capacity amongst government and the ecosystem.”⁷⁰ In 2017, Huawei donated radio systems to Kenyan police bureaus and promised to build a new data exchange platform for the Kenyan government.⁷¹ In 2018, Kenya passed the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, which empowers the government to imprison people for publishing “false, misleading or fictitious data” online, including information that “results in panic, chaos, or violence” or “negatively affects the rights or reputations of others.”⁷² The Bloggers Association of Kenya is currently working through the nation's court system to oppose those and other new restrictions on Internet freedom.⁷³

Tanzania

China has supported Tanzania's digital infrastructure development since 2009 when its Export-Import Bank provided a \$70 million loan to finance the nation's fiberoptic network.⁷⁴ In 2015, Tanzania awarded a \$182 million contract to Huawei—the Chinese equipment provider—to construct landline and mobile networks, including 4G LTE.⁷⁵ In 2015, China began providing cyber governance training.⁷⁶ Shortly after, Tanzania passed a cybercrime bill that forbids “misleading, deceptive, or false” internet postings and empowers the government to track down netizens who violate the rules.⁷⁷

In 2017, Tanzania's deputy minister for transport and communications cited China as a model for internet regulation.⁷⁸ In 2018, Tanzania passed legislation requiring bloggers and other website operators to obtain licenses—which can be revoked by the government—and remove “prohibited content” when directed to do so.⁷⁹ Bloggers won a temporary injunction against the order.⁸⁰

Vietnam

China's ZTE, a telecom equipment provider, constructed Vietnam's first 3G network,⁸¹ and in 2013, Chinese private equity firm CDH Investments purchased a 20 percent stake in Vietnam's largest mobile phone retailer.⁸² In 2013, Vietnam adopted new regulations forc-

ing internet service providers—including online social networks and general information websites—to host their data on in-country servers.⁸³ In May 2018, Huawei rolled out indoor 4G communication platforms in Vietnam. In April 2017 and May 2018, the Chinese government hosted Vietnamese officials for training that included “the methods and experience of the Chinese Communist Party’s news public opinion work.”⁸⁴ In June 2018, Vietnam enacted a law requiring internet companies to localize Vietnamese internet user data and to remove content that includes “propaganda against the state of Vietnam.”⁸⁵

Zimbabwe

Huawei has been active in Zimbabwe since 2010, with more than \$300 million in financing support from China’s Export-Import Bank.⁸⁶ In 2015, China began bringing students from Zimbabwe to Beijing for a Huawei-run program to develop ICT talent and “enhance knowledge transfers.”⁸⁷ In 2016, then-President Robert Mugabe noted that Zimbabwe would look to China as a model for internet supervision and control, stating that “the Chinese have put in place security measures and we will look at these so that we stop these abuses on the internet.”⁸⁸ In 2016, Huawei signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the University of Zimbabwe to establish an ICT training center and a joint degree program.⁸⁹ In 2018, Zimbabwe hired China’s CloudWalk Technology to implement a mass facial recognition project and sent a group of ruling-party leaders to China for a workshop on party-government relation.⁹⁰ According to senior Zimbabwean official Simon Khaya Moyo, China shared expertise during this workshop on how “to ensure that the party exerts itself in terms of its supremacy over government.”⁹¹ In 2019, Zimbabwe passed a new cybercrime and cybersecurity bill that restricts internet freedom, including by targeting overseas-based Zimbabweans who use social media to “cause harm back home.”⁹²

4. Co-opting existing international organizations

As a member within existing international organizations, China generally operates within the rules and therefore can be said to conform to the existing system. For example, at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), at the World Bank, and across multiple U.N. organizations, China uses organizational rules to pursue its objectives, just like any other nation.

As Chinese nationals begin to hold key leadership positions, however, a concerning pattern is emerging. The Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service provide common guidelines for individuals who serve as leaders or staff in international institutions. Those guidelines state that international civil servants such as World Health Organization (WHO) employees must serve their organizations inde-

pendently, and “in keeping with their oath of office, they should not seek nor should they accept instructions from any Government, person or entity external to the organization.”⁹³ China frequently violates these standards. When Chinese nationals occupy leadership positions in international organizations, Beijing leverages those individuals to co-opt the institution and push narrow Chinese political objectives, particularly on the issue of Taiwan.

Current and former Chinese government officials have used their leadership positions at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the WHO to diplomatically isolate Taiwan. During Fang Liu’s term as ICAO secretary general, the organization stopped inviting Taiwan to attend its assembly; ICAO Communications Chief Anthony Philbin reportedly told Reuters that “ICAO follows the United Nations’ ‘One China’ policy.”⁹⁴ After two Chinese nationals—Ren Minghui and Zhang Yang—assumed leadership positions at the WHO, the health organization stopped inviting Taiwan to the World Health Assembly, where Taiwan had previously held observer status.⁹⁵ According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Beijing’s view, China has sovereign authority over Taiwan and can therefore determine when Taiwan should be allowed to participate in international organizations. The ministry states that Beijing will make that determination “in the light of the nature and statutes of the international organizations concerned and the specific circumstances.”⁹⁶ The problem is that, as the standards of conduct stipulate, individual Chinese nationals should not leverage civil service leadership positions to implement national policy at a global level. This pattern regarding Taiwan raises concerns that, as more Chinese nationals gain leadership positions in the international civil service, Beijing may leverage those positions to push Chinese government priorities on other issues as well.

5. Creating new international institutions

Beijing has also led the creation of two new multilateral development banks: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB).⁹⁷ Thus far, both are largely positive contributions to the global governance arena. To be sure, there are persistent concerns regarding lending standards. For example, both the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have agreed to limit financing for high-emission coal-fired power plants, whereas the AIIB and NDB have not.⁹⁸ Overall, however, the projects China supports through these two institutions are more transparent and more likely to adhere to high environmental, financial, and social governance standards than the projects China funds directly through its state-run development banks.

In 2016, China launched the Beijing-based AIIB with the support of 57 member nations. The United States initially tried to convince the United Kingdom and other major industrial nations to boycott the initiative, but that attempt failed.⁹⁹ AIIB membership has since grown to 93 nations. The United States and Japan are the only major industrial powers that have not joined. Beijing initially intended to maintain majority control over the bank—giving it the ability to unilaterally set the bank’s financing agenda—but member nations demanded a more equitable arrangement.¹⁰⁰ At the official launch, China’s share was 29 percent; it is now 26.5 percent due to the subsequent increase in membership.¹⁰¹ As of January 2019, the bank has approved 34 projects.¹⁰² Of those, at least 60 percent are co-financed with other major multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank.¹⁰³ European member nations report that the bank’s governance structure gives them an invaluable platform to influence China’s overseas development agenda and push the AIIB to adhere to higher project standards.

China co-founded the NDB in 2015 with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa in order to fund development projects in those and other developing nations. Shares are divided equally among the five member nations. Just as the AIIB is seeking to learn from existing banks, the NDB has signed cooperative agreements with the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, which suggests that, like the AIIB, the NDB seeks to replicate international processes and standards to some degree.¹⁰⁴

Overall, both banks are largely augmenting existing multilateral development efforts and helping fill critical infrastructure needs, which are positive contributions. This is largely due to their formal, rules-based institutional structures, which are much more transparent than China’s state-run banks and provide platforms for the international community to shape the banks’ lending agendas. That is particularly true for the AIIB due to its diverse membership and its governance structure, which is modeled on the World Bank’s.¹⁰⁵

6. Building a China-centric platform for international cooperation

Chinese leaders and scholars describe the Belt and Road Initiative as one of China’s key contributions to global governance reform. For example, in an August 2018 meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, President Xi stated that “jointly constructing the Belt and Road ... will provide new thinking and new solutions to improve the transformation of the global governance system.”¹⁰⁶ Unlike

the AIIB and the NDB, the Belt and Road Initiative is neither multilateral nor rules-based. Instead, it is a set of cross-border development partnerships in which China is always the more powerful partner and, where there are disputes, Beijing expects Chinese interests to prevail. Collectively, those partnerships create a new international ecosystem with China at the center. In his May 2017 speech to the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, President Xi stated that China's goal is to create a "big family of harmonious co-existence."¹⁰⁷

Chinese scholars frequently describe the initiative as a new China-centric global economic order. Wang Huiyao, founder and president of the Centre for China and Globalization (CCG), claims that Beijing will utilize the initiative to "lead the construction of the digital era equivalent of the World Trade Organisation."¹⁰⁸ Speaking on China's domestic state-run television network, Renmin University Professor Wang Yiwei described the Belt and Road Initiative as "Chinese-style globalization," claiming it will be "globalization for ordinary people" and will provide "feelings of participation, benefit, and happiness."¹⁰⁹ In contrast, he described Western-style globalization as benefiting narrow developing-country interests, particularly multinational corporate interests. Yang Xilian, senior adviser at the China Institute of International Strategic Studies, expects the initiative to challenge the Western-led global governance system, predicting: "The gaming will be inevitable between the emerging economies represented by China and the established economies represented by the [United States]."¹¹⁰

From a liberal democratic perspective, a new global economic order in which the participants respect China's core interests for the sake of "harmonious co-existence" poses concern. President Xi has stated that each Belt and Road nation "should respect each other's sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other's development paths and social systems, and each other's core interests and major concerns."¹¹¹ In practice, Beijing has a pattern of leveraging its economic clout to coerce Belt and Road partners into supporting Chinese political and diplomatic interests. When nations do not comply, Beijing accuses them of violating "mutual trust" and uses China's economic leverage to inflict punishment. For example, in November 2018, New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau blocked Spark—a local telecom operator—from utilizing Huawei equipment in the nation's 5G infrastructure, claiming the Chinese equipment posed security risks.¹¹² In response, Beijing called on New Zealand to "do something conducive for mutual trust and cooperation" and took a series of actions undercutting the revenue New Zealand receives from Chinese tourists.¹¹³

Another concern is the fact that many Belt and Road projects are structured and financed in ways that build dependence on China or undermine host nation governance mechanisms. The Chinese loans often have very high interest rates, which can create debt problems in recipient nations. For instance, Pakistan is seeking a bailout package from the IMF to cover its escalating debts, including its Belt and Road debts to China.¹¹⁴

From 2007 to 2015, China loaned more than \$44 billion to Sri Lanka to finance a port project via a series of loans with interest rates as high as 6 percent.¹¹⁵ That is extraordinarily expensive debt; the World Bank generally offers interest rates in the 0.25 to 3 percent range.¹¹⁶ When the project did not generate enough revenue to cover the nation's debt payments, Beijing forced Sri Lanka to cede control of the port to a Chinese company for 99 years.¹¹⁷

Domestically, when Beijing calls for harmony, that is code for uniformity: Chinese citizens should not voice opinions that conflict with the Chinese Communist Party line. Beijing appears to interpret Belt and Road harmony in a similar manner: Partner nations receive Chinese economic benefits, and in return, they are expected to support Chinese political objectives. Those that do not comply are likely to face economic punishment. For nations who are deeply in debt to China, that punishment can be catastrophic.

Liberal democracies wield powerful levers to shape China’s ambitions, but it requires a coordinated effort

From a liberal democratic perspective, if Beijing achieves its systemic-level reform objectives, the future global governance system will be less free, less prosperous, and less safe. At the same time, democratic nations should not seek to eliminate China’s voice or contributions in the global governance arena. As the largest global economy, China has an outsized responsibility and capacity to contribute, and it is natural for China to expect a seat at the table. The challenge is figuring out how to create space for China in ways that do not undermine the prevailing liberal democratic system. Doing so will require coordinated action among liberal democracies that share an interest in protecting that system. That coordination is not yet happening.

Under President Trump’s leadership, the United States is leaning out at the multilateral level, creating a leadership vacuum that China is stepping in to fill. The White House’s 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) states that “China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests,” describing a zero-sum battle for influence in which the United States should seek to counter Chinese initiatives on every continent.¹¹⁸ For example, on infrastructure development, the strategy states that “China and Russia target their investments in the developing world to expand influence and gain competitive advantages against the United States,” and as such, the United States should find ways to pull nations out of China’s orbit.¹¹⁹ That framing overlooks the global governance system altogether, as well as the fact that the global community needs Chinese contributions on global challenges. At a time when Chinese President Xi Jinping is engaged in a massive global charm offensive that includes promises to increase China’s contributions to the global community and build a more democratic, diverse, and functional global order, the current U.S. approach is to ignore the global governance system in some areas, actively undermine it in others, and lecture other nations on their naivete about China.

To better understand how that messaging is landing with some of America’s closest allies, the authors of this report traveled to Western Europe in April 2018 and February 2019. While there, they interviewed 30 European experts on China—working in national governments, European Commission agencies, and leading foreign policy think tanks—to gather their perspectives on current U.S. and Chinese

approaches to the global governance system. Across the board, these observers are acutely aware of and focused on China's global actions. However, unlike the United States, they report that European nations take a more nuanced approach, working with China as a "strategic partner" on transnational issues but viewing it as an "adversary" on others, particularly values issues relating to human rights, global internet freedom, and attempts to prop up Syria and other authoritarian regimes.¹²⁰

Unlike the United States, European nations are Belt and Road partner nations, and that heavily influences how they view China's broader global governance agenda. European experts report that right after the global financial crisis, EU nations were desperate for investment and welcomed China's Belt and Road Initiative without reading the fine print. By 2018, however, they were growing increasingly concerned about the downside risks. In particular, European counterparts report that China is offending EU states with Belt and Road memorandums of understanding that require them to endorse a Chinese worldview without getting much in return. They see normative battles happening at the regional level, where China is leveraging investments in cash-starved European nations to divide the EU over key issues. The experts interviewed cited examples such as Greece, Hungary, and Croatia's opposition to a strong EU joint statement on the July 2016 UNCLOS South China Sea tribunal ruling and Greece successfully blocking a joint EU statement on China's human rights abuses at the United Nations in 2017.¹²¹ European experts also report increasing "fatigue" due to unkept Chinese promises—even in Eastern Europe, where poorer nations are more likely to be pro-China.¹²² In April 2018, Hungary was the only EU member nation that did not sign a joint letter to Beijing sharply criticizing China's Belt and Road Initiative.¹²³ European experts view the letter's broad support—even Greece and Croatia signed, despite previously objecting to a sharp UNCLOS statement—as evidence that the tide is turning.

However, whereas the United States is currently seeking to counter the Belt and Road Initiative and other Chinese initiatives in a zero-sum fashion, European nations see an opportunity to shape these initiatives. In particular, they are pushing Beijing to make the Belt and Road Initiative more rules-based, more transparent, and more in line with high environmental, financial, and social governance standards, which currently is not happening. Individual nations are pushing China to improve its approach in different ways. For example, President Emmanuel Macron describes the current framework as an unacceptable "new hegemony" and states that France welcomes the Belt and Road Initiative if it is reciprocal, providing market access in China for French companies that is on par with the access China seeks in France.¹²⁴ European nations are taking lessons from the AIIB: Instead of vetoing the program, they are joining it but imposing conditions and seeking to shape its direction.

Across the board, the European experts interviewed for this report view the current U.S. policy as making it harder to marshal an effective democratic response to China's global governance reform push. At a multilateral level, U.S. retreat makes it harder to address common global challenges and gives China a new platform for exerting influence. For example, on climate change and Iran, multiple experts reported that China is now the primary EU ally, not the United States. When China is the superpower saving the world in the face of U.S.-induced disorder, it has more political capital to push its reform objectives at the system level—many of which aim to undermine liberal democratic norms.

On a normative front, as well, Europeans see the United States as undermining the narrative on why democratic values are important. A 2018 25-nation Pew Research Center survey found that the global community had less confidence in U.S. President Trump than in Chinese President Xi or Russian President Vladimir Putin to “do the right thing” in global affairs.¹²⁵ That mistrust—and the fact that growing global suspicion toward the United States paints China in a favorable light—hinders collective action among liberal democracies. One expert who was interviewed for this report stated that “President Trump makes the Western democratic narrative more complex” at a time when China is pushing a “win-win” narrative that is crafted to sound like a great deal for the global community. Another expert stated that, particularly on China, Europeans do not call the United States a “like-minded partner,” because the two nations have very different views, including on some angles of the China challenge.¹²⁶

Going forward, democracies need to find a way to articulate a like-minded vision on global governance issues. The current empirical pattern suggests that, without a common liberal democratic vision, China will bring about a major shift in the global governance system. The challenge is daunting, because it requires democracies to not just defend the status quo but find ways to make the global governance system more representative—that is to say, more inclusive to developing economies—and more response to today's challenges.

The pattern of Chinese actions outlined in this report suggests that democracies do have powerful levers for shaping Beijing's actions, and here's why:

Global norms are powerful levers. Beijing would not be obsessed with universal values if the very presence of those norms in the international arena did not constrain its actions and ambitions at home and abroad. Currently, the international community has been indecisive and is allowing China to reshape those norms in ways that legitimize authoritarian governance. Going forward, liberal democracies must figure out what they stand for and, when Beijing challenges those values, mount a collective and strategic response.

China values international prestige. The fact that Chinese leaders wrap their global governance initiatives in positive international rhetoric indicates that China values international prestige and is seeking a favorable reception on the global stage. That is why President Xi uses fuzzy concepts such as “common destiny for mankind” when speaking to international audiences and reserves his fiery speeches on zero-sum ideological battles for internal party and government forums.

Going forward, liberal democracies should not continue allowing China to describe its intentions one way internationally and another way domestically. The international community should engage China in a deep debate regarding what Beijing actually means when it uses concepts such as “democratic international relations,” “harmonious family of Belt and Road nations,” and “common destiny for mankind.”¹²⁷ Western observers tend to dismiss such rhetoric as empty Chinese propaganda and allow Beijing to bake these terms into international governance forums—such as the U.N. Human Rights Council—without questioning or challenging them. This is a mistake. From a Chinese perspective, these terms define the nation's intentions on global governance reform and forecast the actions China plans to take in future.

Over the past few years, China's rising ambitions have produced a pattern of empirical actions that other nations can use to push Beijing to explain exactly how Chinese actions do or do not support common global objectives such as peace and prosperity. Other nations can then use China's desire for international prestige to either shape Chinese initiatives—by holding Beijing accountable to its lofty promises—or rally the global community to push back against problematic actions. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank provides evidence that China's ambitions can be shaped in positive ways, particularly when those ambitions are channeled through formal multilateral institutions that give other nations a strong platform to monitor Chinese actions and hold Beijing accountable to its promises.

Liberal principles have an edge over authoritarian ones. Transparency creates a key dividing line between liberal and authoritarian principles. In general, transparency strengthens actions based on liberal democratic principles and undermines, unwinds, or blocks those based on authoritarian tenets. That gives liberal democracies a powerful tool for shaping Chinese global governance initiatives. Improving transparency—for example, by giving local citizens and the global community more information about the terms of China’s Belt and Road loans—makes it much harder for Beijing to sell negative actions as positive ones and extract diplomatic and political concessions in return.

For this approach to work, democracies must be willing to accept similar scrutiny. When the authors broached policy ideas regarding cross-border infrastructure transparency in Western Europe, some European counterparts pointed out that, just like China, some EU nations—including Germany—are financing dirty coal plants in the developing world, and those states are therefore reluctant to push for tough transparency conversations regarding China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

Conclusion

In sum, China's ambitions toward global governance reform pose both risks and opportunities for the global community. On the positive side, China has huge incentives to work collaboratively with other nations to solve global challenges. As the largest global economy and one heavily dependent on global integration, China is deeply affected by problems such as climate change or pandemic disease. It has a growing capacity to help address those problems, and that is something the United States and other nations should support.

On the negative side, when it comes to the global governance system—the set of rules, norms, and multilateral organizations that guide collective global efforts—China's reform ambitions are problematic. The current global governance system is rules-based, and it privileges liberal democratic values and standards. Beijing's alternative vision is a system based on authoritarian governance principles in which nations negotiate issues bilaterally instead of following common rules and standards. From a liberal democratic perspective, if Beijing succeeds in bringing about that vision, the world will be less free, less prosperous, and less safe.

Fortunately, democracies still have substantial leverage to shape China's global governance reform agenda. Utilizing that leverage, however, will require democracies to clarify exactly what they stand for and how that stance differs from China's authoritarian governance vision. Just as importantly, it will require democracies to work collaboratively to create more global governance space for China and other developing nations in ways that do not undermine key aspects of the current international system.

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