

THE RISE OF IDEOLOGY IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

China's increasingly ideologised foreign policy may cloud its perception of the global landscape.

Over the past year, China has notably escalated its influence activities towards Europe.

The Belt and Road Initiative continues to hold a central place in China's global strategy.

Since lifting COVID restrictions in January 2023, China has notably escalated positive engagement efforts aimed at Europe. China's long-term plan to create a divide between Europe and the United States remains unchanged. At the working level, China continues to seek common interests with the EU to ensure its active presence at the negotiating table and influence the EU towards decisions more favourable to China.

China has stepped up its efforts to invite European officials to visit China, often fully covering the expenses associated with these trips. The goal is to use these tourism packages to foster a more positive attitude towards China among EU officials. Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party has set the task of strengthening political relationships with like-minded individuals and political parties abroad as part of its strategy for positive engagement. This trend is expected to continue in 2024. However, it is important to underscore that China continues recruiting foreigners, specifically within its borders.

In the context of the Ukraine conflict, China has begun spreading a narrative of assisting Ukraine. As a public relations spin, China has started to highlight its warnings to Russia against using nuclear weapons, framing these warnings as the Chinese contribution to supporting Ukraine. Another narrative promotes the idea that China has always been concerned about Ukraine's problems and, with that in mind, is proposing a peace plan. However, the peace plan contains a clause about "considering the interests of all parties", which implies respecting Russian interests. This narrative aligns well with China's global security initiative, which aims, like Russia, to disrupt the existing European security architecture and rebuild it in line with its interests.

The Chinese Communist Party is increasingly institutionalising Xi Jinping's ideology. While initially appearing as an internal matter, the widespread institutionalisation of Xi Jinping's ideology is starting to blur the worldview among Chinese diplomats, journalists, and think tank experts. This raises the risk that China may misjudge international situations, and its calculations may not seem rational to the West, which could, in turn, lead to misjudging China's potential moves. The West needs to gain a deeper understanding of China's worldview and rely less on preconceptions rooted in Western rationality and thought patterns when analysing China's foreign policy decisions.

In foreign policy strategy, China continues to pursue its interests by focusing on the Belt and Road Initiative. Following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, China is actively working to revive its Belt and Road projects, some of which were put on hold during the pandemic years while others were suspended as blatantly counterproductive.