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THE ELEMENTS OF THE CHINA CHALLENGE

READING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S CHINA POLICY TESTAMENT

ABSTRACT

Between 2017 and 2021 Donald Trump's administration published over a dozen strategic documents on China among which *The Elements of the China Challenge* seems to stand out as it outlines a longer perspective and sketches a wider framework for US policy towards China. This paper attempts to examine the major assumptions of *The Elements*, arguing that by putting forward an anti-imperialist rhetoric, the American policy-makers want to emphasize the systemic differences with China, the importance of which have long been underplayed by Western policy-makers who have given precedence to economic considerations. However, the analysis also gives weight to the argument that the strong ideological appeal in *The Elements* is also intended to mobilize the American allies, anchor them to the leader of the "free world," and reduce their tendencies to cooperate with China, including in 5G technology as in the case of Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: US-China relations, ideology, Cold War, Central and Eastern Europe, China's foreign policy

INTRODUCTION

Published in November 2020 by the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) at the office of the US Secretary of State, the report entitled *The Elements of The China Challenge* is a diagnosis of changes in the architecture of the world order generated primarily by the rise of China's power and the corresponding relative decline of the American influence.¹ *The Elements* also sets out to indicate ways in which to reverse the trajectory of changes that are unfavorable for the United States (and the US-led bloc of democracies and like-minded countries) in the international system which, as it states, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is trying to dominate and reformulate in accordance with its own interests.

The publication was immediately hailed as a new "long telegram," which is an allusion to the famous 1946 text by George F. Kennan, the creator and first director of the PPS, that had served for decades as the landmark reference for the policy of containment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Soviet-controlled Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). *The Elements* itself refers to Kennan's seminal analysis, emphasizing the need to understand the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s governing ideas as a largely neglected element in explaining the conduct of a great-power rival.² Although between 2017 and 2021 Donald Trump's administration published over a dozen strategic documents on China,³ *The Elements* seems outstanding as it outlines a longer perspective and sketches a wider framework for US policy towards China.

With this in mind, the analysis seeks to answer the following questions: Why has ideology become an important component of the US policy toward China? What does *The Elements*'s increasing emphasis on Leninism-Marxism and the authoritarian character of the Chinese state tell us about the major US policy shift under the Trump administration, from an economic engagement to a multifaceted policy of containment? Last but not least, the paper aims to examine the role of anti-imperialist rhetoric in mobilizing the US allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the first section, the paper examines the rationale behind the anti-imperialist rhetoric employed in *The Elements* from the perspective of the US ideological rivalry with the Soviets during the Cold War. In the second part, it evaluates China's official response to the publication of *The Elements*, followed by an analysis of China's

¹ *The Elements of the China Challenge*, The Policy Planning Staff, U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, Washington 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>, 25 November 2020.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 45. For the excellent discussion on "Long Telegram," see George F. Kennan's "Long Telegram" at 75. *Appraising a Critical Cold War Document*, Wilson Center, 22 February 2021, at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/video/george-f-kennans-long-telegram-75-appraising-critical-cold-war-document>, 25 February 2021.

³ T. Geer, *Assessing the Trump China Strategy: The Key Documents*, The Scholar's Stage [blog], 18 January 2021, at <https://scholars-stage.blogspot.com/2021/01/assessing-trump-china-strategy-key.html>, 15 February 2021.

conduct as sketched by the American policy-makers. The final section seeks to examine *The Elements* in light of the Trump administration's foreign policy practices toward the CEE countries that since 2012 have entered the Chinese-led multilateral 16+1 (17+1) format.

ADVANCING ANTI-IMPERIAL RHETORIC IN CHINA'S CONTAINMENT

The Elements was published in peculiar circumstances: namely, when the incumbent president Donald Trump failed to be re-elected in November 2020, and as such, it may be read as his "diplomatic testament." Although initially the Trump administration was primarily focused on the technological and economic aspect of the competition with the great power rival, toward 2018 it also started to emphasize the axiological and ideological underpinnings of the rivalry with China and the failure of engagement. This reassessment was highlighted in Vice President Mike Pence's China speech at the Hudson Institute in October 2018: *Previous administrations made this choice in the hope that freedom in China would expand in all forms – not just economically, but politically, with a newfound respect for classical liberal principles, private property, religious freedom, and the entire family of human rights [...] but that hope has gone unfulfilled.*⁴

In this respect, *The Elements* can be seen through the prism of the challenge posed to the US by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which for diplomat and scholar Zbigniew Brzeziński had primarily a political and ideological rather than military character.⁵ Although it is still debated whether the Cold War was truly an ideological contest between liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism or whether both sides used it only to conceal their real power struggle and interest-driven motivations,⁶ *The Elements* seems to be subscribing to the ideological dimension of the China challenge, by which the US tries to mobilize its allies.

To this end, the opening of *The Elements* explicitly frames US-led policy towards Communist China along "anti-imperialist" lines: *In the face of the China challenge, the United States must secure freedom,*⁷ in what largely resembles the post-war discourse of containment against the Soviets. However, as Cold War historian John Gaddis has pointed out, despite its anti-imperial postures, in fact both the US and the USSR constructed empires in post-1945 Europe (in the Western and Eastern parts of the

⁴ Vice President Mike Pence's Remarks on the Administration's Policy Towards China, Hudson Institute, 4 October 2018, at <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>, 25 October 2018.

⁵ Brzeziński quoted in P. Chmielewski, *Dyplomacja sowiecka w Radzie Bezpieczeństwa ONZ wobec zadań utrzymania pokoju i bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego u progu zimnej wojny* [The Soviet diplomacy in the UN Security Council and the goal of maintaining international peace and security on the brink of the Cold War], vol. 1, Łódź 2005, p. 193.

⁶ M. Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25 (1999).

⁷ *The Elements...*, p. 1.

continent, respectively).⁸ Accordingly, both then and now, to paraphrase Gaddis, credibility is the currency in which the United States, and China, like most empires in the past, have been counting their assets.⁹ In other words, every empire needs to face the problem of whether its “subject” would cooperate or resist, and China is still no match for the US in this regard, at least across the developed world.¹⁰

ASSESSING CHINA’S RESPONSE: MAOIST RHETORIC IN THE WOLF-WARRIOR DIPLOMATIC GUISE

In line with the increasingly harsh and confrontational language adopted by PRC officials in recent years, amplified after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic under the rhetoric of wolf-warrior diplomacy,¹¹ the PRC’s Foreign Ministry has identified *The Elements* as another collection of anti-Chinese lies concocted by some “living Cold War fossils” in the US Department of State, exposing America’s deep-seated Cold War thinking and ideological bias.¹² According to the Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, *the sinister plot to revoke the Cold War will surely be rejected by the Chinese and peace-loving people around the world. It is doomed to failure and will eventually be swept away into the dustbin of history.*¹³

Such statements evoke inevitable connotations with the rhetoric of the Maoist era, especially the early years of the Cultural Revolution, when vehement attacks against American (Western) imperialists (and Soviet revisionists) were a daily occurrence. A model example in this regard is the statement by Chairman Mao Zedong in May 1970 that American imperialism is essentially a “paper tiger,” and the laws of history are on the side of the Chinese and other oppressed peoples around the world whom Mao called *to unite and defeat the US aggressors and all their running dogs.*¹⁴

Indeed, both the US and China portray themselves as anti-imperialist powers. After all, China – like any other empire – defines itself in universalist terms, and perceives the international order built around Western economic and political norms as unfair,

⁸ J. Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, Oxford 1998, pp. 284-285.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁰ L. Silver, K. Devlin, Ch. Huang, *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*, 6 October 2020, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>, 20 April 2021.

¹¹ M. Ye, “Wolf Warriors Blow Hot Before Cooling Down”, *Global Asia*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2020), at https://www.globalasia.org/v15no3/focus/wolf-warriors-blow-hot-before-cooling-down_ye-min, 20 April 2021.

¹² “Wu yan lianmeng’ fabu she Gang lianhe shengming, waijiaobu huiying” [“The Five Eyes Alliance” issued a joint statement concerning Hong Kong, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded], *People.cn*, 19 November 2020, at <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/1119/c1002-31937509.html>, 20 November 2020.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ T. Mao, “People of the World, Unite and Defeat the U.S. Aggressors and All Their Running Dogs”, *Peking Review*, 23 May 1970, p. 9.

a perception based on a deeply rooted sense of national exploitation by foreigners, and carefully fostered by the CCP ideologists.¹⁵

The revival of Maoist rhetoric by the PRC diplomats, especially towards the West, and particularly the US, clearly substantiates the general assumption behind China's conduct outlined in *The Elements*. As such, the PRC reaction to the publication of *The Elements* is unsurprising, although the Cold War references are not key to the document *per se*, and the similarities between the USSR and the PRC drawn in *The Elements* are justified primarily due to the authoritarian nature of both communist giants (combining Leninism with nationalism), at the same time pointing to a significant difference: the former sought domination mainly on the military basis (coercion of its communist peripheries), while the latter, with its growing military capabilities surely to be reckoned with, too, is trying to transform the international system in a much more subtle way, backed by an economic power *of which the Soviets could only have dreamed*.¹⁶ It should also be noted that the term "Cold War" itself, which has become a commonplace to describe the nature of US-China relations, while not entirely adequate given the economic interdependence of the two, was only referenced three times in over seventy pages of the document, and not in direct relation to the current situation.

CHINA SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF WHITE HOUSE STRATEGISTS

The narrative axis of *The Elements* is determined by the instructions that Xi Jinping delivered to the CCP Central Committee in January 2013. According to the PRC leader, on its road to socialism, China conditionally uses the strengths of capitalism as a means to achieve the overriding goals of domestic and foreign politics (universal prosperity and domination in the international system, respectively). These remarks, along with a number of the mounting challenges that China poses to the "free world", the awareness of which is growing in the US, lead the author(s) of the document to conclude: *Home to an extraordinary culture and to moral and political traditions stretching back thousands of years, China today is a great power governed by an authoritarian regime modeled on 20th-century Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. Prodigious economic growth has enriched China. Major military modernization has emboldened it. And nations around the world have enabled the CCP by engaging, and welcoming commerce with, Beijing*.¹⁷

Therefore, *The Elements* implicitly admits flawed assumptions in the US strategy towards China shared by many in the West in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown – that China's entanglement with the capitalist economy, coupled with "constructive engagement" into the international system, will eventually lead to its

¹⁵ P. Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, Stanford 2004.

¹⁶ *The Elements...*, p. 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

democratization, or westernization.¹⁸ In the US, this policy shift began during the George W. Bush presidency (1989-1993) and continued throughout the Bill Clinton years (1993-2001).¹⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that such an expectation was not only wrong but also unjustified, based on the belief that history is a teleological process and that humanity was heading to the “end of history” with a world order grounded indefinitely in a normative model of liberal democracy. Contrary to the USSR, China – as historian Rana Mitter put it – was *the communist giant that the West loved to love*.²⁰

That these assumptions are now being reevaluated may come as a surprise, although the CCP has never officially implied to the West that it is interested in adapting to the liberal normative package. Deng Xiaoping made this issue clear as early as 1979 when he formulated the so-called Four Cardinal Principles about the inviolability of the CCP’s rule and the Marxist-Leninist doctrine in the process of modernization of the state. Xi Jinping recalled this fact upon the 40th anniversary of Deng’s declaration, something which *The Elements* also refers to.²¹

Moreover, in line with Xi Jinping’s abovementioned speech, China has to a large extent chosen an alternative model of development, deciding – only partially, or temporarily – to apply market mechanisms, following the general example of Lenin’s New Economic Policy rather than the liberal model of economic modernization, in what constitutes a form of state capitalism.²²

The list of sources of the PRC’s economic success, cited in *The Elements*, is long. The most important of them is intellectual property theft (costing the US economy up to USD 600 billion annually), takeover of global supply chains, the growing power in many industries and high technologies, the development of AI in an authoritarian state (collecting data without respecting citizens’ privacy), state support and control over companies developing the 5G network and surveillance technologies, projection of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a tool for economic expansion and drawing countries and their elites into Beijing’s political orbit, advantages of unlimited access to global capital markets (over 130 Chinese companies on the American stock exchange with a total valuation of over USD 1 trillion), and taking advantage of the openness of liberal democracies to pursue economic statecraft.²³

Although, as the document admits, economic development does not necessarily bring about political change, one may view at least some of the above listed “contradictions” between the US and the PRC as stemming from the nature of global capitalism

¹⁸ R. Mitter, E. Johnson, “What the West Gets Wrong About China,” *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2021, at <https://hbr.org/2021/05/what-the-west-gets-wrong-about-china>, 5 June 2021.

¹⁹ N. Thomas, *Matters of Record: Relitigating Engagement with China*, at <https://macropolo.org/analysis/china-us-engagement-policy>, 5 July 2021.

²⁰ R. Mitter, *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2016, p. 62.

²¹ *The Elements...*, p. 31.

²² B. Naughton, K.S. Tsai (eds.), *State Capitalism, Institutional Adaptation, and the Chinese Miracle. Comparative Perspectives in Business History*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 12-20.

²³ *The Elements...*, pp. 9-13.

itself rather than the Leninist nature of the Chinese state. For example, as *The Elements* indicates, since China's entry into the WTO, American producers have increasingly benefited from low labor costs in the PRC, which translated into lower prices for American consumers and an increase in producer profits. A negative consequence of these actions was "the China shock," which hit the small and medium-sized manufacturing sector in the US (estimated loss of 2.4 million jobs) and other countries, leading to growing dependence on China's controlled supply chains.²⁴ However, *The Elements* fails to acknowledge that China's accession to the WTO in 2001 on a political rather than economic basis only increased possibilities of influence and emboldened the PRC's leadership global aspirations.

At the same time, US policy-makers seem to acknowledge the fact that with Xi Jinping in power, China has become overtly confident in its claims for supremacy, and found itself again – to paraphrase historian Ge Zhaoguang – in the epoch *without a mirror*.²⁵ Indeed, as *The Elements* points out, the PRC suffers from weaknesses inherent in any autocracy, such as the difficulty of maintaining innovation or adapting the economy in the long term, and ineffectiveness in creating lasting alliances and mobilizing friends. Moreover, as an inherently repressive autocratic state, China must redirect funds from military expenditure to maintaining social order, spending more on internal security than on national defense. *The Elements* also lists huge income disparities in society; the strong economic dependence on the American dollar and export-oriented production, technological reliance on Western semiconductors; over-indebtedness of Chinese companies, a fragile demographic situation (rapid aging and gender imbalance), environmental devastation, and corruption. Another factor with potentially very negative consequences is the power transition process broken by Xi Jinping's lifting of term of office limits, which, since Jiang Zemin, had ensured a relatively stable continuation of the authoritarian system.²⁶ Last but not least, one of China's weaknesses is also the low level of trust it inspires in the international arena (*currency in which an empire can count its assets*), which, at least in developed countries, has decreased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁷

THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN DECODING CHINA'S CONDUCT

In terms of identifying the main features of China's conduct, *the Elements* emphasizes the following: the maintenance of the Leninist regime (the primacy of the CCP in the political system), projection of economic power to subjugate other countries politically

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²⁵ Z. Ge., *Hewei "Zhongguo"? Jiangyu, Minzu, Wenhua yu Lishi* [What is "China"? Territory, Nation, Culture and History], Hong Kong 2014, p. 149.

²⁶ *The Elements...*, pp. 41-44.

²⁷ B. Kowalski, "China's Mask Diplomacy in Europe: Seeking Foreign Gratitude and Domestic Stability", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, vol. 5 (2021).

(economic statecraft), transforming international organizations from within in line with the CCP's goals, and ongoing efforts to create the most powerful army in the world that in the short and medium term will be used to test US responses to security threats to allies in the Indo-Pacific region, especially Taiwan.²⁸

In regard to the ideological sources of China's conduct, *The Elements* points to the Leninist-Marxist character of the Chinese regime, which the US has made a long-standing mistake in downplaying. One can speculate that this was due to the projection of their own American ideas about the state, society, and the international order on China or the imposition of preconceived assumptions on international politics. In this regard, *The Elements* calls for a more rational policy towards the PRC, taking into account the (Leninist) lineage of China's political system and the endemic features of the Chinese state (with a sense of cultural and moral superiority, especially towards its smaller neighbors), according to which Beijing is said to set political goals internationally.

FRAMING THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST RHETORIC OF CHINA'S CONTAINMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Among the most important areas in which the US under Trump demonstrated its mobilizing powers in countering China's influence is Central and Eastern Europe. Comprised of the former socialist countries, the majority of which embraced liberal democracy after 1989 and aligned with the Western structures of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), since the 2010s the CEE has become increasingly open to cooperation with the PRC. In 2012, China established the multilateral format of 16+1 (17+1), under which it developed a net of bilateral partnerships and secured an official support to the BRI. This process is acknowledged briefly yet significantly in *The Elements*, which notes that [b]etween 2014 and 2019, China leveraged its initial investment in Europe's eastern and southern periphery through a series of Memorandums of Understanding.²⁹

However, the US's renewed China-driven focus on CEE only became evident with the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency in 2017. In a parallel policy shift taking place in recent years, the majority of CEE countries started to demonstrate their growing skepticism about cooperation with China. This reassessment resulted from various factors, including disappointment with trade imbalances and the limited volume of Chinese investments, perceived security risks, axiological differences, and respective CEE countries' domestic political changes. However, US agency cannot be overlooked: CEE became the harbinger of China's technological containment in Europe; the process was reflected in the list of 5G security recommendations developed in May 2019 under Prague Proposals, later accepted in the set of non-binding

²⁸ *The Elements...*, pp. 8-16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

joint-declarations with the US and the Clean Network program embraced by the majority of CEE countries, which have previously subscribed to the BRI.

Instructive in this regard is the case of Poland, which, aspiring to perform the role of CEE leader in relations with China, hosted the inaugural meeting of 16+1 in Warsaw in 2012, as well as Xi Jinping's official visit in 2016. However, within a short span of time since Donald Trump assumed office, Poland's right-wing government led by the Law and Justice Party reconfigured its China policy. From being one of the region's leading proponents of cooperation with China, by early 2019 Poland has found itself in the forefront of the US-China technological rivalry.³⁰

Indeed, the US trade war with China gained a clear anti-imperialist build-up in October 2018, when US Vice-President Mike Pence gave a speech at the Hudson Institute signaling an all-out strategy to deter the advancement of China and the CCP. He presented a list of accusations against China, which later found their place in *The Elements*. These included predatory trade practices, technological theft, military aggression, debt-trap diplomacy, and interference in US domestic politics. Pence also admitted that, contrary to the hopes of the previous American administrations, the economic engagement with China not only failed to bring about liberal democratic change but resulted in the development of an unparalleled surveillance state.³¹

Also in October, two weeks after the vice-president's speech, Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchel compared the current US struggle for influence in the world with China and Russia to the rivalry with the Soviet Union after World War II. According to Mitchel, the area that clearly experienced this rivalry was Central and Eastern Europe. The actions of Russia and China in the area between the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea, although carried out with different methods, have been de facto listed in tandem as aimed at the political disintegration of the democratic West.³²

In the following weeks, a similar set of arguments were put forward by Poland's senior officials. First, the Minister of Defence Mariusz Błaszczak, during his visit in Washington, argued in an interview to the Polish Television, that the US will benefit from setting up a permanent military base in Poland as it would help to deter the progress of the Russian empire, which together with China forms a coalition aimed against the free world.³³ Only a few days later, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, speaking at a conference in Hamburg, stated that China was challenging the free world of democracy

³⁰ A. Bachulska, "The Consequences of Sino-American Rivalry for Third Countries: Poland and the 5G Dilemma", *TheAsiaDialogue.com*, 11 November 2019, at <https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/11/11/the-consequences-of-sino-american-rivalry-for-third-countries-poland-and-the-5g-dilemma/>, 15 January 2021. In 2019 Poland became the first country to arrest Huawei employee on spying allegations and the second in CEE after Romania to sign a declaration on 5G security with the US.

³¹ "Vice President Mike Pence's..."

³² W.A. Mitchell, *Winning the Competition for Influence in Central and Eastern Europe* (keynote speech), Atlantic Council, 19 October 2018, at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/transcript/winning-the-competition-for-influence-in-central-and-eastern-europe-us-assistant-secretary-of-state-a-wess-mitchell/>, 25 October 2018.

³³ "Fort Trump' coraz bliżej?" [Is "Fort Trump" getting closer?], *Wiadomości TVP*, 13 November 2018, at <https://wiadomosci.tvp.pl/39936650/fort-trump-coraz-blizej>, 20 April 2021.

and the Transatlantic Alliance: *We need to find a way to maintain the right level of deterrence, not against the forces of the free world, but against China and Russia.*³⁴ Thus, on the declarative level, the epistemology of the “free world” presented by the Polish government has become almost identical to that presented by the Trump administration.

WHAT IS LEFT FOR JOE BIDEN?

Although *The Elements* was produced by the outgoing administration, the main recommendations to meet the Chinese challenge do not necessarily reflect the overall practice of Donald Trump’s policy. They postulate *a return to the foundations*: first of all, to preserve the constitutional order and democratic freedoms at home, which has always been crucial for the implementation of foreign policy challenges. It also seems to suggest that in order to regain soft power capabilities – undermined by Trump’s unilateral policies – the US should move away from the hub-and-spoke system and reevaluate and reinvent its system of alliances. This goal is also intended to maintain the primacy of the American military and technological power and to strengthen the free, open, and rule-based world order, the creation of which was led by the United States after World War II and which serves American interests.

On the other hand, in accordance with the policies outlined by the Trump administration, the system of alliances is to be strengthened by more effective sharing of responsibilities between their members, the formation of (smaller) groups and coalitions for specific threats to freedom, and the reform of international organizations with the provision that where this is impossible (that is, where China is strongly embedded), new ones should be created based on the values of liberal democracy.

CONCLUSION

As analysis of *The Elements* reveals, US policy toward China under Trump had undergone fundamental changes. From the initial focus on mostly economic issues, it clearly became more ideologically-oriented, emphasizing the normative challenge posed by the *great power governed by an authoritarian regime modeled on 20th-century Marxist-Leninist dictatorship*. In this sense China is presented by the American policy-makers not only as a great-power rival, but also as a fundamental systemic threat to the rule-based order and democratic bloc to which the US is making an appeal.

By publishing *The Elements*, the outgoing administration seems to admit that the decades-long logic behind the economic engagement with China did not bring about the expected political change in the country. On the contrary, the Leninist system has been strengthened and China has turned itself into an economic and military superpower.

³⁴ “Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in Hamburg: Poland is both pro-American and pro-European”, *Premier.gov.pl*, at <https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-in-hamburg-poland-is-both-pro-american-and-pro-european.html>, 17 November 2018.

Therefore, in order to contain the global advancement of the authoritarian Chinese state, *The Elements* advocates paying more attention to the Marxist-Leninist character of the Chinese regime, a factor which should be more exposed in forming anti-China alliances.

However, *The Elements*, a kind of synopsis of the Trump administration's (often self-contradictory) China policy, suggests that the United States will lend its military and technological umbrella only to those allies that will take on a greater burden of defense spending and will attest their loyalty to the aim of "securing freedom." In practical terms, this was demonstrated in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which in the majority declared the exclusion of Chinese technological companies from its telecommunications infrastructure.

Indeed, despite pursuing anti-imperialist rhetoric and an ideological focus on the Chinese leadership's devotion to Marxism-Leninism, *The Elements* in fact presents a realist agenda. It remains to be seen how much from *The Elements* will be kept up by the Biden administration, but one would expect some continuity, given that, as *The Elements* acknowledges, the US appreciates *the complex interplay of ideas and interests in foreign affairs*.³⁵

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³⁵ *The Elements...*, p. 3.

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