The Biden Doctrine and Technological Decoupling: The Return of Cold War Rhetoric as a Driver of Technological Division between China and the West

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the emerging great power competition between the United States and the Peoples' Republic of China. We claim that there is a connection between the communicational strategy employed by the Biden administration and the growing technological decoupling between the two economies. To show this, we compare rhetorical strategies used by the Reagan administration during the Cold War with those used by the current administration, showing that there are distinct similarities but no greater emerging conflict. We also examine the economic relations between the two powers, with a closer look at the semiconductor industry's supply chains where a trend towards technological decoupling emerges. We conclude that while the comparison between the Cold War and the current environment of competition between the US and China cannot be made directly, there is nevertheless a link between the emerging technological decoupling and the form of communication practiced by the Biden administration. There are also signs that both trends will continue to deepen, possibly causing further deterioration in the relations between the two powers.

Keywords: US, China, decoupling, trade war, technological competition, great power politics, semiconductors, Cold War rhetoric, political communication, strategic communication

1. Introduction

In this research paper, we aim to present and analyze how the U.S. President Joe Biden and his administrations' foreign political rhetoric and strategic doctrine affect the phenomenon of technological decoupling between two superpowers: the United States and China. Recently, we have witnessed a new phase in the US rhetoric and strategy related to China: President Biden is framing the struggle between the US and China as a clash between democratic and authoritarian regimes (Brands 2021). The US has led the formation of Western alliances that recognize China's rising power as a growing threat to the global balance of states. We position these recent developments in a historical context and, as a point of comparison, also address whether or not the aforementioned struggle should be called a rhetoric of a new Cold War.

The first section discusses our understanding of the current international communications landscape through the concepts of political and strategic communication. The concepts of the global public sphere and society of states are introduced and discussed.

The second section then outlines the state of the US–China relations from recent history through to the present day. This gives context to understanding the American pivot to the Indo-Pacific region. The Biden doctrine is introduced as an attempt to balance between cooperation and containment in relation to the rising China.

The third section continues with an empirical look at the rhetorical aspects of the strategic communication employed by the Biden administration and compares them to the rhetoric of the Cold War era United States. The section attempts to answer whether the use of the term 'new Cold War' is justified in respect of the Biden doctrine.

The fourth section then looks at the decoupling of US–China economic relations, specifying two distinct types of decoupling: trade and technological. A closer look is taken at the supply chain for semiconductor devices to assess whether the talk of decoupling is justified. The implications of possible decoupling in the technological sector are also discussed.

The fifth section brings together the discussion, connecting the rhetoric of the Biden administration's foreign policy doctrine to the decoupling in US–China relations. This is achieved through analyzing three concepts: *economic competition*, *technological and military competition*, and *geopolitical competition*.

2. International Relations as strategic political competition – Markku Haavisto

Political rhetoric and international relations between competing nations is a complex phenomenon with various extensions. During the Cold War, we saw tightening rhetoric and strong political rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. After a long period of US dominance in international politics a challenger from the east has risen again – but this time it is China. The competition has caused economic decoupling which in turn has evoked tightening in political communication and rhetoric in international relations.

In this chapter, my ambition is to clarify to the reader the relationships between digital division, technological decoupling and the tightening rhetoric between the US and China. First, we will define political communication, strategic communication, and the global public sphere as relevant concepts. After this, we will discuss how these three concepts are used in international relations and lastly, we will consider how these factors are applied in this research paper. The primary question is, how have the recent events impacted the technological decoupling between the two nations. The aim is also to specify what kinds of similarities the current environment has with the era of the Cold War.

2.1. Political communication

Communication is an interactive process that includes transmitting and receiving information between actors, for example individuals, communities or the news media, and the audience. Political communication and strategic communication can be considered branches of a larger concept of communication, but they are not easily separated or clearly independent fields of communication. In addition, these two forms of communication are often overlapping with each other when public discussion and communal or societal deliberation is a part of decision-making.

Political communication is a notoriously difficult term to define and therefore this research paper will follow Brian McNair's (McNair 2011 pp. 3–4) interpretation which highlights "the intentions of its senders to influence the political environment" and takes into consideration all forms of political discourse – not just verbal and written statements. In other words, he defines political communication as "purposeful communication about politics" (McNair 2010 p. 24). In addition to McNair, also David L. Swanson and Dan Nimmo have emphasized the strategic nature of political communication. Nimmo and Swanson (Swanson & Nimmo 1990 p. 9) define political communication as "the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters". The strategic nature of political communication is particularly visible when politicians and political actors are pursuing public approval and support for their political actions. From this point of view, we can consider technological decoupling, and political rhetoric around it, within a framework of political communication.

2.2. Strategic communication

If we consider how McNair (McNair 2011) and Swanson & Nimmo (Swanson & Nimmo 1990) approach the concept of 'political communication' it is also always strategic by nature. For McNair, political communication contains a purpose (McNair 2011 p. 4) which implies that the communication is used to achieve something. Also, Swanson and Nimmo argue that political communication is "strategic use of communication" (Swanson & Nimmo 1990 p. 9). James Stanyer (Stanyer 2007, p. 4) argues that systems of political communication are strategic by their nature and all the actors in these systems are acting strategically. If we assume that all political communication is purposeful it must also be strategic.

It is being acknowledged that even political communication that appears irrational can be strategically planned or at least politically biased. This is so especially nowadays, when the majority of citizens receive their information of current political events via the media, and the information that is transmitted in the media is more of an impression of the events gathered from various sources (Stanyer 2007 p. 139). Depending on the platform, the purpose of a media transmitted product can vary from entertaining to enlightening – or strategically or politically influencing the receiver.

2.3. Global public sphere and the society of states as a milieu of communication

Rapid modernization and mediatization have globally impacted the landscape of national political communication systems and exposed democracies to a series of reactions and counter-reactions (Stanyer 2007 pp. 4–5). According to Blumler and Kavanagh (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999 p. 211) stable national systems have become 'turbulent, less predictable, less structured'. Even though Blumler and Kavanagh are discussing national circumstances and relationships between the media, citizens, and political institutions, their viewpoints can be applied to how we are discussing international relationships in a globalized world. Eventually, the changes in the political communication system can influence political institutions and democracy. James Stanyer has discussed 'promotional logic' in government communication as a tool to maintain public support and control the public relations (Stanyer 2007 p. 42). According to Stanyer, the pursuit of so-called performance politics has become more common in political communication, in addition to the growing role of mass communication and emerging social media platforms (ibid. pp. 204–205).

The English school in international relations theory offers the concept of a society of states as a tool to analyze world politics. Hedley Bull (Bull 1977 pp. 9–10) defined this international system of states as being formed "when two or more states have sufficient contact between them and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave as parts of a whole". Following Bull's notion of the social nature of the international system, it's fair to argue that states are communicational by their nature and that international politics takes place in a communicational relationship between two states, for example the US and China.

Michelsen and Colley discuss strategic narratives as "a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors" (Michelsen & Colley 2019 pp. 2–3). For political actors these strategic narratives are tools for extending their influence and controlling the discursive environment. According to Michelsen and Colley (ibid. pp. 176–177), a lot of effort and resources are used to strategically control the narrative in public diplomacy campaigns. In fact, they suggest that strategic narratives "are often used as a means to legitimate order based on material power distribution in the system" and "to justify policy objectives" (ibid. p. 89).

2.4. Summary

After the Cold War era, binary narratives like capitalism and communism or West and East have not bound states together (Michelsen & Colley 2019 p. 62). Especially lately

however, as a response to the emerging power of China, the US has aimed to construct a coalition of states to prevent China from achieving more power in its region and globally.

After all, public debate as well as what is shown in the news have an influence on public opinion. Considering political communication is therefore important because it gives us tools to analyze what kinds of subjects arise in public debate. According to quantitative research on media reporting, the public opinion on China is related to media sentiment, at least in the short term (Huang, Cook & Xie 2021 pp. 4–5)

When discussing the current political environment between the US and China, taking the concepts of political communication, strategic communication, and society of states into consideration is beneficial in drawing a more comprehensive picture of the consequences of digital division and tightening rhetoric between the two nations. The divergence between the US and China has affected the landscape of political communication and polarized the discourse.

3. Biden's China doctrine – Ilmari Reunamäki

This chapter deals with President Joe Biden's foreign policy doctrine toward China. We will present how the US foreign policy strategy to contain China's rise as a major world power has evolved in recent years, and how the strategy is progressing at present. Foreign policy doctrine is understood here as a concept that comprises the key goals, attitudes, and stances for a country's foreign affairs. In the US context, foreign policy doctrines are by tradition named after presidents (Hastedt 2009 p. 28); therefore, the Biden doctrine is used here as a broad concept that encompasses US foreign policy's leading beliefs and goals during President Joe Biden's administration. We focus mainly on studying how China's rise has profoundly changed the overall US foreign policy strategy, and how the US has attempted to create a China strategy combining cooperation and containment, while at the same time proceeding a strong geopolitical pivot to the Indo-Pacific region.

The dominant doctrine of the early 21st century US foreign policy was the Bush doctrine, which focused on spreading liberal political institutions and promoting democratic values, especially in the Middle East (Hastedt 2009 p. 34–35). The US foreign policy during the Bush doctrine has been characterized to have been based on democratic liberalism, national security realism, democratic globalism, and even messianic universalism (Monten 2005 p. 112). After the Bush administration, both the Obama and Trump administrations attempted to separate their foreign policy from the Bush doctrine but were unable to detach from it entirely – especially due to ongoing wars in the Middle East. However, in recent years the US has seen a need for a drastic change in its foreign policy on account of the world evolving from the unipolar world order of the post-Cold War era to the multipolar era of rising power competition. Therefore, we assess that President Biden's decision to withdraw militarily from Afghanistan in August 2021 should be seen as a major turning point in US foreign policy, since it marked the definitive end of the Bush doctrine. Consequently, Biden's presidency has a chance to create a foreign policy doctrine which will be more influential than Obama's or Trump's doctrines, thus the Biden doctrine deserves to receive academic attention from early on.

3.1. The US geopolitical pivot to the Indo-Pacific region

The Biden administration's first National Security Strategy is due in early 2022. Because of that, far-reaching analysis on the Biden doctrine's stated details should be avoided. Nevertheless, the Biden administration has from early on made it clear that China will be a priority in its foreign policy and has assessed that China's aim is "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by 2049 to match or surpass US global influence and power." (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2021 p. 1.) In addition, public sentiment in the US has grown increasingly hostile to China in recent years (Galston 2021), and a tough line against China is one of the few unifying policy areas in the heavily polarized Congress, which gives room for the Biden administration to maneuver.

The Biden administration attempts to contain China's rising influence as a world power by putting regional emphasis on the Indian Ocean and on the Pacific Ocean. As a concept, the Indo-Pacific region is a useful generalization to use as the main geographical priority. We propose that the US' geopolitical shift to the Indo-Pacific region can be defined as a sideline strategy in the 2010s and as the mainline strategy in the 2020s. The shift began in 2011 when President Obama gave a speech to the Australian Parliament and stated that the US is "here to stay", referring to the Indo-Pacific region (Bohan & MacInnis 2011), and conceptualized the 'Pivot to East Asia' foreign policy strategy (De Castro 2013; Davidson 2014 p. 77). During Obama's term, despite the pivot, the US failed to prevent China's rise to become a regional power. President Trump's foreign policy's biggest difference to Obama's was in rhetoric, which was significantly more hostile toward China. However, the Trump administration shared the same goals as Obama's Pivot to Asia strategy, with a bigger emphasis on trade policy (White House 2015; White House 2017). As a whole, Trump's doctrine has been criticized for having been confusing and even "dysfunctional by design" (Moynihan & Roberts 2021 p. 152). From the US perspective, so far, the US foreign policy strategies on China have been inadequate in responding to the rising power competition.

3.2. Volatile balancing act between cooperation and competition

The latest National Security Strategy by the US Department of Defense (DoD) outlines, "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security." (US Department of Defense 2018, p. 1.) In addition, the most recent stated strategy on the US–China relations by the DoD states, "National Defense Strategy seeks areas of cooperation with China from positions of US strength, with a long-term aim to set the military-to-military relationship on a path of strategic transparency and non-aggression, and to encourage China to act in a manner consistent with the free and open international order." (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2020, p. xii.) Two key words in these quotes are *cooperation* and *competition*, which serve as a two-track approach for the US foreign policy toward China. However, competition is at the moment dwarfing cooperation. In Biden's first address to the Congress, competition was stated to be the main strategy on China (White House 2021b). Also, the recently

published Interim Strategic Guidance's objective is to "prevail in strategic competition with China." (White House 2021a, p. 20.)

A key challenge for the Biden administration is how to balance between cooperation and containment when it comes to China. The US' gradual military shift to the Indo-Pacific region has been criticized as containing China primarily by military means, which in turn has led China to respond by becoming more aggressive (Ford 2017). Thus, the Biden administration will have to find a way to contain China without supporting a constantly escalating arms race in the region. Niall Ferguson has proposed that Biden's doctrine should differ from Trump's confrontational rhetoric, and that the US should search for a military *détente* to reduce "the tensions inherent in a cold war and reduce the risk of it becoming a hot one." (Ferguson 2021, p. 119). A doctrine based on military *détente* is possible due to growing interdependence in the world. China's importance for the global economy is and will remain so vital that the US cannot resort to attempting to isolate China altogether. In addition, Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the National Security Council's Coordinator for the Indo Pacific Kurt Campbell stated in their 2019 letter, "Despite the many divides between two countries, each will need to be prepared to live with the other as a major power." This seems to be an explicit argument for searching *détente* with China (Ferguson 2021, p. 121).

3.3. Minilateralism as a compromise strategy in alliances

An essential decision of the doctrine will be whether the US chooses to act unilaterally or multilaterally in its China policy. In principle, we assess President Biden to be a believer in alliances, and the most prominent military alliance unveiled during Biden's first year in office has been AUKUS, the trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US. While AUKUS is not explicitly adversarial toward China, in practice it represents the US' most important military alliance in the region alongside with the US–Japan–South Korea partnership (Economist 2021). In addition, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) between the US, Australia, Japan, and India received great attention during Biden's first months, and its first summit in 2021 emphasized its importance for the US as a future alliance (Gaens 2021, p. 1).

It should be remembered that the US has a difficult history of collective defense pacts in Asia. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), active from 1957 to 1977, never came to prominence as an "Asian NATO". SEATO was considered "a fig leaf for the nakedness of American policy", and the member countries a "zoo of paper tigers." (Franklin 2006, p. 1.) The US obviously wants to avoid its new alliances becoming new paper tigers in front of China. Hence, any attempt to create the "Asian NATO" is not the realistic path for the Biden administration. Instead, alliances such as AUKUS and QUAD, consisting of three or four countries and focusing pragmatically on few policy areas, are turning out to be the Biden doctrine's specialty. This midway strategy between unilateralism and multilateralism does not yet have an established term but has already been called, for instance, *minilateralism* (Gaens 2021, p. 2). The drawback of a minilateralist approach lies, among other things, in technology policy where the US' attempts to gather an alliance as wide as possible against China (McTague 2021). Biden doctrine's main challenge will thus be, how to unite the minilateralist military strategy with multilateralism in economic and technology policy.

Biden's doctrine will be evaluated in the future of whether it managed to find the right balance of the above-mentioned strategies to contain China's continuing rise as a global power.

4. The Rhetoric of the Cold War: then and now? – Miikka Pynnönen

The Cold War was a time period between 1945 and 1991, characterized by a bipolar world order of two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union (Heywood 2014 p. 223). The Cold War encompassed various political, military, economic and cultural phenomena, which can all be viewed in a greater frame of ideological battle between capitalism and communism (ibid. p. 38). In this section, we will briefly analyze the rhetoric of the Cold War, using Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech as an exemplar of the rhetoric. Our purpose is then to answer the question whether or not Joe Biden's rhetoric should or could be called rhetoric of a "New Cold War". To achieve this, we look at parts concerning China in President Biden's address to the Joint Session of Congress in 2021.

4.1. The study of rhetoric and the Cold War

Why study rhetoric? The realist school of foreign policy analysis views rhetoric as merely underpinning underlying power realities, such as social influence and resources (Wohlforth 2016 p. 37). This view is contrasted by post-structuralist approach that emphasizes power as a discourse: post-structuralists argue that linguistic practices make reality intelligible, so it "can be known and acted upon" (Hansen 2016 p. 96). Whereas the former does not discredit the study of political speech, the latter makes rhetoric a key device in bringing about a certain state of affairs in international politics, or a world order. For example, in the years of the Cold War (in itself a rhetorical construction), both sides used words, images and symbolic actions to pursue their respective ends in national and international politics.

Martin J. Medhurst classifies rhetoric of the Cold War as, by definition, strategic communication, its purpose being to realize certain goals and being itself shaped with those goals in mind (Medhurst 1997 p. 20). These goals were situation dependent, as rhetorical messages are ubiquitous and delivered in such different settings as one-to-one conversations, small groups, public speeches and mass communication (Medhurst 2000 p. 269). However, two overarching goals were to avoid a "hot" war between the superpowers, while maintaining their respective sphere(s) of influence in the world (Medhurst 1997 p. 20).

We propose that the "Evil Empire" speech of Ronald Reagan in 1983 encapsulates at least some of the rhetorical themes or devices central to the political rhetoric of the Cold war. These include appealing to values and identities, highlighting the ideological divide between two systems and the use of rhetoric in justifying underlying material or political goals in the face of a perceived external threat.

4.2. A look at the rhetoric: Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech of 1983

In his famous "Evil Empire" speech in 1983, Ronald Reagan aimed at regaining political support for a decisive US nuclear armament (Nobrega 2014 p. 172). In the speech, given at the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan used strong religious imagery in order to appeal to the values of his audience, which he portrayed as morally superior to those living under the communist regime (ibid., pp. 172–174). Values, such as liberty, equality or freedom of speech are a staple in political rhetoric and essential in shaping an "imagined" community (Finlayson 2012 pp. 277–278). Values are also central in constructing political identities, which is why they need to be articulated in political communication (Laclau 1994 p. 5).

In his speech, Reagan implicitly distinguished those that were evil from those that were not, that is, American citizens (Nobrega 2014 p. 175). According to Stuart Hall, this kind of distinction between "us" and "them" is a key element in creating a group identity (Hall 2002 pp. 80–82). Reagan's speech reminded the audience of the threat posed by totalitarianism bent on world domination and he then urged them not to remove themselves "from the struggle between good and evil" (Nobrega 2014 p. 180–181). The rhetorical divide between a friend and an enemy is considered intrinsically political (Palonen 2007 pp. 70–71). Correspondingly, the rhetoric of the Cold War evoked images of enmity and rivalry between two competing ideological blocs.

Rhetoric is always contextual; the realist school of foreign policy analysis instructs us to look at the underlying material interests (Wohlforth 2016 p. 37). Reagan's speech took place in time when the US Congress was about to support a nuclear disarmament policy ("nuclear freeze") to which Reagan was opposed: he made an explicit mention of this policy in the speech, warning his audience about the ultimate evil nature of communism (Nobrega 2014 p. 172). This is an example of how rhetoric was utilized during the Cold War to justify material or military ends that were represented as crucial in a struggle against the menacing enemy. The rhetoric of American foreign policy is generally positioned in reference to either rivalry or a threat, as demonstrated in phrases such as "defending the free world", "protecting our national security" and "countering the communist menace" (Wander 1997 p. 153).

4.3. Rhetoric of president Joe Biden and the New Cold War

The question at hand is, whether or not the rhetoric of Biden's administration should be called the rhetoric of the new Cold War. As President, Joe Biden gave his first address to the Joint Session of Congress in April 2021 (White House 2021). The following excerpts are taken from this address. A question may be posed if these two pieces of rhetoric are comparable. We argue they are: although oriented at citizens, "Evil Empire" speech was also aimed at persuading the Congress; although presented at the Congress, the Presidential address was broadcast to the public and then analyzed by journalists around the world.

In the address, Biden represents the US "*in competition with China and other countries to win the 21st century*". The US, however "*welcome(s) the competition. We're not looking for conflict*". President Biden also remarks that the US military presence in the Indo-Pacific is "*not to start a conflict, but to prevent one*". It is worth

noting that in the speech, China is portrayed as an economic rival, and it is also reminded that a conflict is not desirable. The reasons for this are clear: the US and China are much more economically interdependent than the capitalist and communist blocs were in the years of the Cold War. Instead of presenting two nations at the doorstep of a total war, the address reflects the multilateral character of a world order different from the bipolarity of the 1980's: several threats such as Russia, North Korea, and ISIS are all mentioned. The rivalry is technological in nature, as is the partial focus of this paper and demonstrated in this citation: "*We have to develop and dominate the products and technologies of the future: advanced batteries, biotechnology, computer chips, clean energy.*"

Values, collective identities and divisions between "us" and "them" also form a backdrop against which to evaluate the rhetoric of foreign policy. President Biden refers, albeit vaguely, to human rights violations in China, when he states that "*no responsible American President could remain silent*" in front of them. However, there are mentions of "autocrats" as opposite to America's democracy, such as: "*Democracy is durable and strong. Autocrats will not win the future.*" Autocrats are said to be "*America's adversaries*". It is not the spiritual battle between good and evil, but a battle between democracy and autocracy, nonetheless. This view has also been articulated in other fora, that are outside the scope of this work (Brands 2021).

In this section, we have looked at some features of the Cold War rhetoric and briefly visited Joe Biden's administration's present-day discourse towards China. A more valid analysis of rhetoric would require a much larger reading and source material. Nevertheless, the question is, should the rhetoric of Joe Biden be called "the rhetoric of the New Cold War"? We propose that this is not the case, at least not entirely. While Biden's 2021 address recognizes China as a competitor and a rival, China is not overtly represented as an existential threat to American citizens or their way of life. The overarching theme appears to be the grudging, cautious, but at least for now a peaceful rivalry of two interdependent superpowers.

5. Decoupling in trade and technology – Tomi Kristeri

This section introduces the concept of economic decoupling in the context of US–China relations. Decoupling is understood here as concerning both trade and technology. Based on this, the section focuses on the global semiconductor supply chain, wherein the ongoing tendencies toward decoupling between the US and China can be clearly seen. Last, the prospects and possible impacts of decoupling will be considered.

5.1. Conceptualizing decoupling

Due to economic globalization, and spurred by the rapid development of information and communications technology (ICT), the Chinese and American economies have grown increasingly interdependent in global supply chains following the reform and opening-up of the Chinese economy from the 1980s onwards (Farrell & Newman 2019 Dec 10). In the 2010s, amid rising nationalist rhetoric, protectionist sentiment, and a trade war between the two nations, the idea of decoupling from these supply chains has been continually brought up by both sides (ibid.).

Decoupling doesn't have a precise analytical definition outside of its common usage in describing the severing of economic ties between two countries. It has, however, seen continued use in the conceptual tool kit that tries to understand the dynamics of contemporary trade wars alongside the concept of 'weaponized interdependence' (Kim 2021 pp. 19–21). The latter refers to the ability of nations that are strategically situated in global networks to use this position to their advantage (Farrell & Newman 2019 pp. 42–47). Decoupling has been introduced then as a way to shield oneself from these asymmetric and weaponizable interdependencies by cutting off ties to global economic networks (Farrell & Newman 2019 Dec 10).

Li (Li 2019 pp. 548–550) conceptualizes economic decoupling as including trade decoupling and technological decoupling. Trade decoupling simply refers to the lowering of trade (inter)dependencies between two parties (ibid. p. 548). In the Sino-American trade relations, this can be seen as resulting from the protracted trade war with continually lower levels of imports and exports between the two nations (ibid. p. 548). Technological decoupling on the other hand refers to lower levels of technological cooperation between two nations, a situation relevant to the relations of the technologically rich US and the relatively poor China (ibid. 549).

5.2. Techno-nationalism and pursuit of "semiconductor independence"

The emerging trend of 'techno-nationalism' is central to understanding decoupling within both spheres. Techno-nationalism refers to an emerging political-economic ideology, linking technological innovation and industry to national security and prosperity, which is gaining increasing traction in both the US and China (Capri 2020 p. 58). The advancement in ICT has generated both new ways of accumulating wealth, with the birth of the internet and the digital economy, and new cyberthreats that need to be addressed with cybersecurity (Yan 2020 pp. 323–328). These developments have started to increasingly frame policy makers' views on international issues, generating a 'digital mentality' wherein the strategic control of digital technology and cyberspace is of the utmost importance (ibid. pp. 316–318). Combined with a 'Cold War mentality' of strategic competition, this is prone to regress the world of the 21st century to bipolar digital spheres of influence (ibid. pp. 334-340).

At the intersection of both trade and technology decoupling, the semiconductor industry exemplifies these trends well. Integrated circuit (IC) chips, colloquially called 'microchips', are a subsection of semiconductor devices at the heart of the ICT revolution, forming the backbone of future technologies such as the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles and big data computing (Seppälä & Holmström 2020 p. 9). On top of this, chips are important for the continued development of modern warfare capabilities both in cyberspace and in traditional arenas as well (Majerowicz & Medeiros 2018 pp. 5–8).

The supply chains for chips are spread out across the Pacific and are therefore a clear flashpoint in the emerging US-China technological rivalry (Seppälä & Holmström 2020 pp. 6–11). Resulting from the complexity of the manufacturing process, the geopolitics of chips is based around strategic bottlenecks along the supply chain, with only the Taiwanese TSMC and the Korean Samsung being able to compete at the leading edge of chip manufacturing (Triolo & Allison 2020 pp. 4–5). While China also

has a domestic chip foundry for less than leading edge chips in the form of SMIC, it is still dependent on foreign equipment such as American plasma etching equipment from Applied Materials (Kleinhans & Baisakova 2020 pp. 16–17). This can be seen as resulting in a dependency of Chinese companies on the US and aligned states for high-end microchips, as well as on key technologies needed for building domestic chips (Seppälä & Holmström 2020 pp. 13–14).

These dependencies were weaponized by the Trump administration when it imposed a series of export controls on the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei along with the subsidiary semiconductor design company HiSilicon and the affiliated semiconductor foundry company SMIC (Bown 2020 pp. 376–377). The 'Huawei ban' was justified by the state affiliated company's alleged unfair trade practices, forced IP transfers, and national security issues related to its role in producing critical 5G infrastructure (ibid.). The action involved adding Huawei to the so-called Entity List, banning American semiconductors and equipment inputs from use by Huawei, HiSilicon and SMIC (ibid. pp. 377–378). Later secondary sanctions were used to block the use of equipment based on US technology by all companies dealing with Huawei, such as TSMC and Samsung (ibid. pp. 379–380).

The pursuit of 'semiconductor independence' is not a new development, having already been clearly stated as a goal in the 'Made in China 2025' national industrial policy strategy published in 2015 (Lewis 2019 p. 15). Weaponization of dependencies in the trade war, combined with an increasing consumption-production gap in the Chinese domestic market (Majerowicz & Medeiros 2018 pp. 20–21) has however prompted China to invest even more heavily into its semiconductor industry (Capri 2020 pp. 49–57). The American sanctions gave China no choice but to find other sources of technology and manufacturing capacity, and to compete with the American dominated supply chain (Bown 2020 pp. 377–381).

The trade war and the subsequent Chinese pullback from global supply chains have thus raised fears of decoupling into 'blue' and 'red' supply chains based on geopolitical allegiance (Triolo & Allison 2020 p. 13). While some on both sides of the Pacific see this as a simple geopolitical and historical necessity (Capri 2020 p. 68; Li 2019 pp. 550–551; Yan 2020 pp. 334–340) others feel that it would either be unlikely and destructive (Lewis 2019 pp. 26–30; Li 2019 pp. 552–555) or practically impossible because of the deep embeddedness in interconnected global networks (Farrell & Newman 2019 Dec 10).

5.3. Implications of decoupling to global politics

Even though decoupling in the semiconductor supply chains is still uncertain, if it were to happen it would have major effects on the wider sphere of global politics. Semiconductors lie at the base of a wider 'technology stack' at the heart of digital era technology, supporting firstly the system-level of digital infrastructure, and secondly the platform-level of digital ecologies (Seppälä & Holmström 2020 pp. 5–6). Separation on the level of semiconductor technology and architecture could induce a wider technological separation, and consequently two separate digital spheres of influence (ibid. p. 14), especially given the fact that the stack is becoming more vertically integrated because of the need for more special purpose chips (ibid. p. 6). This could

further play into the 'digital mentality' of digital era geopolitics already visible in the securitization of 5G infrastructure in the US-China trade war.

6. How does the Biden doctrine's rhetoric relate to and affect decoupling between the US and China? – Janne Suutarinen

Next, we will bring together and synthesize the main points and arguments presented in the previous sections. First, we present some key concepts that combine processes of IR rhetoric and its material implications in the current relationship between the US and China. As our main focus is on *decoupling*, the concepts are such that highlight the antagonistic and conflictual relation between the superpowers. These phenomena are or might be affected and further strengthened by Biden's doctrine and the more general hardening of IR rhetoric between the two countries. While analyzing these overlapping concepts, we propose answers to the following questions:

1. How does the mode and style of IR rhetoric affect the phenomenon in focus?
2. How is the phenomenon connected to *decoupling*?
3. What kind of effects of decoupling can we already see within the phenomenon, and what kind of future trajectory can we interpret based on our observations?

The concepts we analyze are *economic competition*, *technological and military competition*, and *geopolitical competition*. The concepts are closely interrelated, and they should be analyzed as such. This particular distinction into three areas of competition is made in order to bring analytical clarity to the complex subject.

6.1. Economic competition

Economic competition that might catalyze decoupling between the US and China has recently been most prominently present in the ongoing trade war between the countries. As discussed above, the phenomenon includes antagonistic political rhetoric and causes trade decoupling as the countries are locked in a spiral of sanctions and counter-sanctions. While incumbent, President Trump aggressively criticized international multilateral trade deals which could be seen as damaging to the strong American influence on the global scale (Elms & Shriganesh 2017 pp. 255–256), and his aversion for trade treaties between multiple parties did not only bring about the trade war with China but trade struggles with America's allies as well (Bown & Kolb 2021). Trump even called foreign investments a threat to national security (ibid.), which fits into the recent trend of major economies striving for more material and economic self-reliance (e.g. Malcolmson 2021). China has been openly working its way towards more self-reliance, for example by setting self-reliance targets for science and technology in the Communist Party's latest five-year plan (Communist Party of China 2021).

The Biden presidency has not brought dramatic changes to the active 'America first' economic and trade policy trend that began to shape during Trump's regime. In July 2021, the White House published a report (The White House 2021) on 'supply chain resilience' (Alden 2021). In the report, the White House criticizes the relaxed internationalist approach that the US had regarding trade policies during the post-1980's

decades of global American hegemony. The report proposes various economic policies that are set to revitalize domestic US industries and provide security for domestic supply chains. China's positions in connection to and as a threat to American (and global) supply chains are discussed widely in the report. Moreover, as Biden's administration began to communicate publicly its bilateral trade policies with China, there have not been promises to abolish the trade war tariffs placed on Chinese goods. Instead, the Biden administration's official statements declare that the US is ready to use "all tools and explore the development of new ones" in order to attain favorable trade deals (OUSTR 2021). Trade Representative Katherine Tai's speech underlines the importance of (democratic and open-market) allies in the process – "But above all else, we must defend – to the hilt – our economic interests" (ibid.).

The Biden administration has toned down the aggressive rhetoric of economic competition between the US and China, but the mood and style of the statements remain strict, competitive, and protectionist. The ongoing trade conflicts and economic competition form the basis for other kinds of superpower competition and decoupling that might come as a result. Developments in trade and domestic economic policies of the US and China provide solid ground for the interpretation that *there has been decoupling and there are no strong signs of 'recoupling' happening soon, but instead, the tensions for further decoupling are in place*.

6.2. Technological and military competition

Technological competition is inherently related to economic competition between the superpowers. When discussing technological decoupling, we are looking at the technical side and practical operating principles of technological products and devices, as well as developments that are seemingly outside the sphere of technology but nevertheless affect these principles. In the context of this study, we are looking at (geo)political and economic developments that lower the level of technological cooperation between adversaries (Li 2019 p. 548) or might even have the potential to render American ("Western") technology incompatible with the Chinese one.

Both the US and China have recently stated that they are aiming for greater technological self-reliance (The White House 2021; Gill 2021). Technological abilities and readiness for innovations are crucial parts of having high-performing modern armies (e.g. Eaglen & Pollak 2012 pp. 1–3), transnationally competitive domestic industries, and economic growth (Romer 1986; Zalewski & Skawińska 2009 pp. 38–40). As competition between the US and China has developed into strategic competition (Wang & Zeng 2020) carrying implications of struggle for global hegemony, it is logical that technological superiority becomes a pressing issue for the superpowers. The countries' competition in the military, industrial, and digital technology can be considered a "contest for supremacy over the next generation of military and economic power as well as a contest for dominance in the global digital information domain" (Mori 2019 pp. 108).

The military competition between the adversaries has had the form of an accelerating arms race since the Cold War, and it is argued that this contest has become a complex 'technological race' that unfolds both in military and civilian sectors (Bogdanov & Evtodyeva 2021). This dynamic, in addition to the protectionist trends

discussed above, leads to the growing need of securing technological and innovation assets from the reach of the adversary. There are large-scale needs to contain the adversary's technological developments: a revealing example is the recent blacklisting of strategically relevant Chinese companies by the Biden administration (e.g. Shepardson 2021).

As the superpower contest is deeply technological in nature, it is clear that the consequences will include technological decoupling as understood as lowered levels of technological cooperation. The phenomenon will be accentuated in the military sphere since the contest's military aspects are becoming more prominent and both sides need to pursue superiority also by securing their own systems and information from reconnaissance. *Political rhetoric that heightens competitive tensions between the US and China will drive technological decoupling further.* Thus, Biden's doctrine has the potential to deepen the technological decoupling between the two countries.

6.3. Geopolitical competition

As competition between the US and China has become strategic, in the same vein it has become highly geopolitical: the foreign political contesting has strong geographic and economic elements, and other countries and regional and international institutions are increasingly involved in the struggle. The existence of US-led alliances such as AUKUS and QUAD, NATO's and G7 group's rhetorical challenges towards China (see e.g. Piper, James & Faulconbridge 2021; Khalaf & Foy 2021), and President Biden's narrative of a global struggle between democracies and autocracies are all signs of the conflict expanding into a global and complex geopolitical issue. *The Biden doctrine includes rhetoric that is clearly aimed for alliance-building against China, and this increases geopolitical decoupling between the superpowers as more and more geopolitical actors are getting drawn into the conflict.* As with the other aspects of decoupling discussed above, the geopolitical decoupling between the US and China does not show signs of rewinding but instead is getting stronger partly as a result of the rhetorical strategy of the Biden doctrine.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we have argued that US President Joe Biden's foreign policy doctrine on China contains rhetoric that furthers technological decoupling between the US and China. Technological decoupling is one of the elements of the larger foreign political and geopolitical competition between the countries. The competition which is becoming increasingly strategic and accumulating higher stakes represents a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon in which concepts of decoupling (and recoupling) provide some clarity to what kind of relations there are between the countries and what is their current state. Based on our observations, we can conclude that technological decoupling between the US and China has been increasing during recent years, and there are no clear signs of the trend turning back into recoupling. Instead, there is enough evidence to back up the interpretation that technological decoupling between the countries might deepen in the near future. Even though Biden's doctrine is not explicitly bellicose, it is competitive and poses open challenges to China. When the rhetorical challenges are

combined with the explicit democracies-versus-autocracies dichotomies and alliance-building against China, we can observe some essential parallels with the Cold War – which was defined by deeply adversarial communication relationships and two wholly separate systems of the US and the Soviet Union.

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