

Arnout Brouwers, *deVolkskrant*, 19 May 2019:

"Europe cannot escape a choice between America and China"

This a translation from the original article, which is accessible [here](#).

How should the West, that a moment ago thought that history was over, relate to superpower China? On Wednesday, President Trump announced new, far-reaching restrictions for foreign telecom companies that threaten national security (read: the Chinese company Huawei). According to an American cyber expert, the White House has thus opted for "the nuclear option" and the measure will have an effect far beyond the US.



Trump and Xi Jinping during their meeting in Peking in 2017. Image REUTERS

At the same time, de Volkskrant reported that Huawei may be involved in Chinese espionage in the Netherlands, via a hidden back door to unspecified "customer data". The AIVD investigates it, Huawei denies.

And amid these swirling developments, the Dutch cabinet - through an inventory of the Chinan note - is carefully putting a little finger in the water to feel what the temperature

is. Hope is focused on the European Union, which must guarantee that Europeans are not ground between superpowers. The Netherlands was long known as a loyal ally of the United States. Now that everything seems to have become fluid in the Trump era, The Hague is keeping its distance from the "competitive approach" of the Americans in China.



Olaf Groth, head of the Cambrian Group, author of the recently published *Solomon's Code: Humanity in a World of Thinking Machines*.
Image Greg Keegan

Olaf Groth, head of the Cambrian Group and author of the recently published *Solomon's Code: Humanity in a World of Thinking Machines*, has a strong opinion about the options that the Netherlands (or rather: Europe) has in this force field. Groth is a German who emigrated to America and who from San Francisco delves into artificial intelligence and the question of the geopolitical implications of the technological revolution.

Europe, says Groth, and therefore the Netherlands, will not escape a choice between America or China in the coming years. And values play a crucial role in this. But first of all Europe must of course choose itself and support its own high-tech industries much more actively [to have a formative voice.]

According to Groth, China is "already the new hegemonic power", thanks in part to the comprehensive Belt & Road project of infrastructure investments in more than sixty countries. "That causes unrest. In Washington, they take the certain for the uncertain as a reaction. In the rest of the world, people are more willing to see if that hegemonial power is benign."

In the US, too, there is no consensus: "On the west coast, we are used to Chinese pioneers, so the emphasis is on opportunities, not threats. But now the technology companies are being woken up about the fact that technology is becoming an instrument of national security. Any form of technology can now also be used as a weapon. That is the new era. And that makes the assessment so difficult: we have to be open to the opportunities and to be aware of the threats."

Not an easy exercise.

'Not at all. The arrival of the Chinese has positive effects on national income in many countries, regardless of the objections to the way China invests in countries. That is important for countries such as Italy or Greece, so it is a very difficult balance. But if the possible espionage from Huawei that your newspaper reported is proven, it will strengthen Trump's hard line."

How can a communist regime that imprisons a million Uighurs in re-education camps at the same time be a benevolent hegemonic power?

"That largely depends on how China will develop. China also meets opposition. Will they realize that a hegemonic power can only play that role if it has followers? America was

also able to fulfill that role because of its soft power and appreciation for the system of transparency, democracy and the rule of law. From the outside, people always looked to the US as a power that was flawed, but America's civic culture also gained much admiration. I don't see that in China at the moment. So the question is also: will China also adopt such American practices? Become more transparent, and listen to the world if it says it's not okay to lock up a million Uyghurs.

"Or will China continue on the current path of power-pounding where it asserts its political and economic power without reserve? That will be decided over the next five years under Xi Jinping's rule. If China does not change, does not adapt, then Europe faces a very difficult question. And that also applies if America does not open its doors again, and behaves itself in an open and benign manner. Then you run the risk that the Chinese model is the only available model."

Europeans hope to pin China down on reformed international rules.

"China did indeed join the World Trade Organization, with all its rules, but these are not, or hardly, complied with. In the meantime, China has developed its own institutions. And the way China now invests in other countries is not in line with international rules. So I don't see China complying with our rules. They act as if they work on their own "evolution of the international regime."

The US, Japan and Australia exclude China from developing 5G networks in their countries. Europeans hesitate and say: Americans also steal our data, so what's the difference?

"There are two major differences. Europeans share a value community with the US and in America you have a working legal system. That does not exist in China. "

So if nothing changes in China's approach, Europe will be compromised between American pressure and a Chinese alternative that is not in line with our values. So what to do?

'Choose. I understand that it is uncomfortable because the Europeans are not fans of Trump. Yet Europe must choose between the Euro-American value system and Chinese techno-Confucianism. And I think that Europe should clearly head in the American direction."

Techno-Confucianism?

"China has the old and according to some people no longer working tradition of Confucianism. Add to that forty years of technological and economic development. Technology makes the Chinese very pragmatic - because it involves a lot of cash - but it also confirms certain aspects of Confucianism, such as social stability, respect for authority, etc. This is monitored by technology. The surveillance state exists by virtue of technology. If that model is projected on the dozens of countries of the Belt & Road initiative, you are talking about Chinafication, [re-]making many international rules in Chinese. That is the competition between two models."

Will it not be difficult for many countries to adopt that model?

"But is it easier to adopt a model of the rule of law and democracy? We have been naive about spreading democracy to countries such as Russia and China. Or Pakistan. The traditions are not there. For the leaders of many countries, that Chinese model is more attractive. And those leaders can sell this system to their people by saying: see how many Lamborghinis are driving around in Beijing and Shanghai. That is an attractive model compared to those failed experiments with democracy. "

Europeans are put off by the cold war approach of the Trump government. There is even talk about excluding Chinese students.

"Of course we must continue to admit Chinese students. Such kind of suggestions smell a bit like Japanese internment camps in America during the Second World War. Trump, as a populist, uses such images. It is rhetoric. But it also shows how important China is for the insiders in Washington - much more important than Russia."

"It is very important if Trump is re-elected next year. If he can continue his isolationist course, it will hurt the American economy. The US still leads in artificial intelligence, but that may be different in five years. As far as 5G is concerned, America is already lagging behind. Europe is still a bit involved with Nokia and Ericsson, but China is leading. Trump will block Huawei as long as America has not regained its leadership role in this area, or at least has a good chance of competing. That is dangerous, and we have to wait and see if the next president will also continue such an America First policy. "

"Ultimately, it will depend on whether America regains its confidence and whether China has enough confidence to face the world flexibly. I would like there to be a third factor, namely a Europe that can organize and assertively promote its interests in the world. I don't see that happening. Brussels can adopt action plans, but can you also project your power outside the EU? I don't see those economic champions who can export the European value model, as the US and China do."

What would you advise Europeans not to be crushed in the technology wars? Do you also want to ban Huawei?

"They are constitutional states so I would say: innocent until proven guilty. Secondly, I would opt for a European solution - to protect the European economy and to work on a network that other countries can adapt [and opt into]. Europe has a few global players and should help smaller companies to bundle computer capacity, databases and talent. That would help enormously in competition with American and Chinese competitors, who already have the resources. "

You know how much Europeans value privacy protection.

"The good news is that there is also a turnaround in tech companies in California. They begin to wonder: what are we doing to ourselves and the world? America (and China by the way) always goes two steps forward, one step back. We do not regulate until the damage is done. And now we have a bloody nose and the politicians are wondering what to do about it. Are we going to break them up or change the rules? The governor

of California is going to introduce a law next year that is somewhat inspired by European privacy legislation.”

“That is why I am optimistic that a middle ground can be found between Europe and America. Both believe in the protection of the individual. Europe can better help to reform the American model than to turn to China. But in the meantime you have to create your own digital champions, who also meet European values.”