



INKSTER, NIGEL: VEĽKÉ DELENIE – ČÍNA, AMERIKA A BOJ O TECHNOLOGICKÚ NADVLÁDU

INKSTER, NIGEL: THE GREAT DECOUPLING – CHINA, AMERICA AND THE STRUGGLE FOR TECHNOLOGICAL SUPREMACY

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The deeping rivalry between China and the United States has been becoming an omnipresent topic for policy-makers, commentators, and economists. The conflict is particularly reflected in the field of science and technology. The Made in China 2025 (MIC 2025) plan, launched in 2015 by the Chinese Government, sets an ambitious goal of Chinese companies providing 70 % of domestic technology manufacturing components and materials to reduce China's dependence on foreign-owned technology. China's more recent Vision 2035 strategy aims to make "major breakthroughs in core technology", particularly in new areas of competition with the US such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing

To respond to those challenges, the technology restrictions, such as over 5G telecommunications networks that the US has imposed on China represent an escalation of the decoupling policy pursued by not only the preceding Trump Administration but also the current Biden Administration. In spite of various speculation of a possible softer approach, president Joe Biden adopted the tough stance toward Beijing which enjoys broad bipartisan support in the Congress.² That means the

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² For instance, the recent executive order to review supply chains and the addition of seven Chinese supercomputing groups to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List to effectively

continuation of the tech decoupling strategy in a long-term perspective. Accordingly, the rivalry will be one of defining developments for the world order for the decades to come. As such, it is necessary to understand its origins and as well broader contours.

The recently published book *The Great Decoupling* has those ambitions. Its author Nigel Inkster having a lifelong experience with China started when he studied the language and culture at Oxford. Being a Mandarin speaker and senior British diplomat posted in China and Hong Kong as well as the former director of operations and intelligence for the British Secret Intelligence Service later provided him a unique insight into the Chinese affairs. His deep knowledge is also evident in his book which showcases rich historical and cultural references. And it mirrors in the concept as well as the structure of the volume.

The narrative which Inkster presents starts with China's intellectual and scientific traditions and first encounters between China and the West. In this way, he explains what is behind China's drive to achieve global technological dominance. Subsequently, covering a digital revolution and a development of China into a techno-security state, it slowly builds up to final chapters which are focused on the current state of affairs, mainly US-China conflicting relations in trade, finance, and technology.

Based on the latest development, Inkster admits that "it is hard to predict exactly how a technology decoupling might play out, not least because the relevant technologies do not evolve in a predictably linear fashion." Yet, he foresees the establishment of two distinct spheres, one built around the US and free-market principles, the second one state-directed, mercantilist, and developed by China. To keep pace with China's technological ambitions, Inkster suggests rediscovering industrial policies which already led to great advancements such as the space programme or the Internet in the past. Looking at recently published economy plans by the governments in the US, the European Union, or Japan, it seems that Western policymakers came to similar conclusions and we may witness the rejuvenation of industrial policy in the West. Such development only proves the relevance of Inkster's book.

Therefore, there is now no doubt that the technology contest will be one of the characteristics in international relations of the 21st century. However, we should not perceive it only as a threat to global stability and an evidence of the Thucydides Trap. Other elements of the mutual entanglement must be taken into account. Strong economic ties exist between the US and China, so the decoupling process will not be easy. For instance, the leading Chinese ICT companies listed on the US stock market at

cut off their access to American technology confirm a degree of continuity with the Trump Administration's policies.

the end of August 2020 had annual sales amounting to 463 billion dollars and a market capitalisation of 1.3 trillion dollars. In addition, there is also a positive side of the rivalry. It will drive funding for technological development, with broader benefits for the global economy and innovation. We are already witnessing unprecedented boosting assets into emerging technologies that may provide a breakthrough in years to come. The Great Decoupling is the reality and given that China and the United States feel overly dependent on each other, the process is likely to continue.

To conclude, the present book is the story about China's technological rise which leads to conflict with the current technological power as it poses the threat to US dominance. Inkster analyses not only the internal motivation and aspirations of Chinese leaders but also puts in the broader context of China's long history and its self-perception. Yet, and perhaps, for this reason, the study remains rather general and does not delve too much into the details. Accordingly, one could complain about the misleading title as the issue of "decoupling" is dealt with only in two out of twelve chapters. Regardless of this minor criticism, the book is recommended to everyone interested in the current state of global affairs and aspiring to understand the dynamism in relations between the two powers.