

E-Diplomacy as an Instrument for the Establishment of a Geo-Economic Environment: What are China's media strategies regarding the latest trade war?



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Abstract:

The interplay between diplomacy and digital can affect three main areas: firstly, by changing the geopolitical and geo-economic environment in which diplomacy is conducted (sovereignty, cyber conflicts, distribution of economic & political power). Secondly, the emergence of new topics on diplomatic agendas (e-commerce, human rights, cybersecurity, digital health, AI governance) and, at least, the use of digital tools for diplomats (social media, online conferences, big data. (...)

In light of the renewal of the trade conflict between the world's leading nations (China and the United States of America), we seek in our study to determine the media strategies employed by Chinese diplomacy to address the recent tariffs imposed by the United States. Following an analytical method, with critical examination of the official statements from the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons on the X platform. The most important result is that the official Chinese diplomatic discourse remained consistent with the overall trajectory of Chinese policy.

Keywords: E-Diplomacy, Digitalization, Geopolitical, Geo-Economical Environment, Media.

الملخص:

يمكن أن تؤثر التداخلات بين الدبلوماسية والرقمية على ثلاثة مجالات رئيسية: أولاً، من خلال تغيير البيئة الجيوسياسية والجيواقتصادية التي تُدار فيها الدبلوماسية (السيادة، الصراعات السيبرانية، توزيع القوة الاقتصادية والسياسية). ثانياً، ظهور مواضيع جديدة على جداول الأعمال الدبلوماسية (التجارة الإلكترونية، حقوق الإنسان، الأمن السيبراني، الصحة الرقمية، إدارة الذكاء الاصطناعي) وأخيراً، استخدام الأدوات الرقمية للدبلوماسيين (وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، المؤتمرات عبر الإنترنت، البيانات الضخمة. (...)

وفي ضوء تجدد النزاع التجاري بين الدول الرائدة في العالم (الصين والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية)، نسعى في دراستنا إلى تحديد الاستراتيجيات الإعلامية التي تستخدمها الدبلوماسية الصينية لمواجهة الرسوم الجمركية الأخيرة التي فرضتها الولايات المتحدة، وباعتماد على طريقة تحليلية، مع فحص نقدي لبيانات المتحدثين باسم وزارة الخارجية الصينية على منصة X. النتيجة الأهم هي أن الخطاب الدبلوماسي الرسمي الصيني ظل متسقاً مع الاتجاه العام للسياسة الصينية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدبلوماسية الرقمية، الرقمنة، الجيو-سياسة، الجيو-اقتصادية، الاعلام.

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Introduction

Nowadays, messages flow at the highest attainable speed, and with the incoming 5G infrastructures, the rate of downloading and transmission of information will keep on increasing. Therefore, states can easily post videos, tweets, graphic descriptions, or any other kind of digital content.

Even As Edward R. Murrow had mentioned in ABC TV's "Issues and Answers," August 4, 1963, "It has always seemed to me the real art in this business is not so much moving information or guidance or policy five or 10,000 miles. That is an electronic problem. The real art is to move it the last three feet in face-to-face conversation. However, there is no doubt that we can easily figure out the application of social media in the field of diplomacy, which has been hailed as a transformative development of international politics. Not only is social media able to transcend hierarchical chains of diplomatic communication. The use of ICT in foreign ministries has been largely focused on internal operations until recently, and in the last few years the concept of e-diplomacy has started to challenge and replace traditional methods of diplomacy to support the multiple functions of diplomats.

The interplay between diplomacy and digital can affect three main areas: firstly, by changing the geopolitical and geo-economical environment in which diplomacy is conducted (sovereignty, cyber conflicts, distribution of economic & political power) because digitalization promotes a new arrangement of economic and societal power. Secondly, the emergence of new topics on diplomatic agendas (e-commerce, human rights, cybersecurity, digital health, AI governance) and, at least, the use of digital tools for diplomats (social media, online conferences, big data.(...

In recent times, ministries of foreign affair have undergone significant changes in the way they handle foreign affairs as governments have adopted different approaches to interact (F & F.Hanson, 2010)with foreign countries. . It has been noticed that foreign ministries are increasingly making exemplary use of the potential of technology..

In the last few days, the trade conflict between China and the United States re-emerged as a prominent issue, following the latter's imposition of further customs restrictions beyond those established in 2018. A multipolar world will be dominated by a struggle between a rapidly- weakening United States on one

hand, and an ever more confident China—aspiring to regain the status of the world's strongest economy (Landovský, 2013). Obviously, the efficacy of digital diplomacy as a kind of soft power to facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts and wars has been reexamined.

In light of the renewal of the trade conflict between the world's leading nations (China and the United States of America), we seek in our study to determine the media strategies employed by Chinese diplomacy to address the recent tariffs imposed by the United States. Following an analytical method, with critical examination of the official statements from the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons on the X platform.

And to answer this issue, we pose a series of questions:

-How is geopolitics shaped within diplomatic relations? And what is the relationship between geopolitics and geoeconomics?

-What is the relationship between technology and geoeconomic?

-How does social media contribute to building the geoeconomic environment?

-What are the media discourse strategies used by the official spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry regarding the recent trade war between China and the U.S. in April 2025?

The conceptual framework:

Before embarking this study, we should clarify the terminological ambiguities:

-1.1digital', 'cyber', 'tech', 'net', 'virtual', or 'e-' diplomacy: We can note The use of different adjectives and prefixes to describe the digitalization of diplomacy tends to create confusion in discussions and policies in this field. There is not a single agreed-upon definition of digital diplomacy, conceptually, digital diplomacy has been used interchangeably with other terms that include e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy or twiplomacy. Some experts have defined the Digital diplomacy as the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manages its image and reputation (Manor, 2015, pp.

.(122-103Therefore, digital diplomacy represents a novel and practical extension of the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy. While others have

focused on e-diplomacy as the electronic component of public diplomacy (Al-Muftaha, 2018, p. 503)

-1.2 Geoeconomic:

In the early twentieth century, the Bolshevik revolutionary Lenin claimed that imperialism was an inevitable form of geopolitics given the nature of capitalism. Also, in the 1800s, contrarian geopoliticians such as Kropotkin and Reclus were linking geopolitics to capitalism and suggesting alternative forms of political organization. These were the first examples of what has become known as geoeconomics.

Geoeconomics is connected to the term mercantilism, which has been used since the sixteenth century to describe how governments have intervened in their economies as a way to increase the power of the country (flint, 2022.)

.2 Literature review:

.2.1 The digitalization of diplomacy: new term& new view

Over the past decades, as mentioned above, diplomacy had been urged to using new technologies. Within the realm of public diplomacy, MFAs have begun to employ software programmers so as to analyse big data sets and manipulate social media algorithms using Bots (Bradshaw, 2017.)

We consider diplomacy as two way communication process which established on three main pillars: soft power (the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce), public diplomacy (pro- active interaction with audience) and at least digital diplomacy (transparency, accountability and engagement.)

The digital age has a real impact on diplomacy in general by offering different tools to manage the state image and contact the foreign public. Furthermore, it helps nations alter their status quo.

.2.2E-Diplomacy & Geo-Economic Environment: The Dual Impact of Technology and Economy

The development of economic diplomacy is one of the manifestations of the new role and relevance of geo-economics (Neves, 2017). The reform of state external actions commenced in the late 1990s, spearheaded by the most dynamic and competitive nations in the global economy, notably the US, China, India, Brazil, the UK, Sweden, and Germany. The primary objective was on the necessity to change and adjust a diplomatic paradigm primarily influenced by

political and military concerns, characterized by the conflict between economic interests and strategic goals (Neves, 2017.)

The shift towards a paradigm that prioritizes economic concerns while establishing a new equilibrium with political matters. Edward Luttwak, for example, conceives them as temporally successive, with the world moving on from geopolitics to geo-economics.

The recent focus on economic diplomacy does not imply the exclusivity or supremacy of economics. International economic relationships are an important factor in the diplomatic sphere of influence (Bergeijk, 2009). Therefore, it signifies an improved equilibrium and coordination between the political and economic aspects of external relations, rather than the advent of a mercantilist foreign policy.

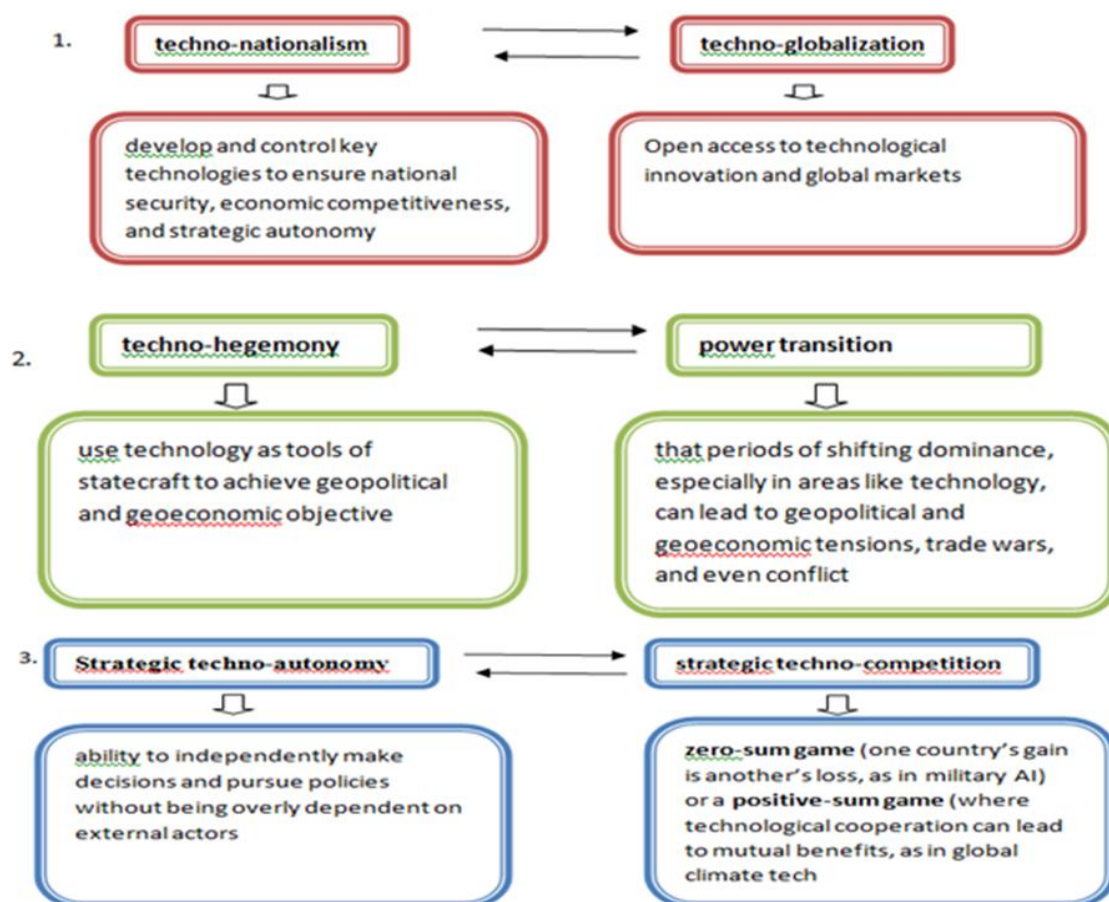
Nowadays, with the emergence of NTIC in our daily life, social media has a pivotal influence in the efficacy of economic diplomacy. It influences both local and global public opinion about economic matters and advocates for the economic policies and changes implemented by governments.

The significance of the digital realm as a primary geopolitical and geoeconomic battleground, and the attributes of the corporate entities inside that realm indicate a need to reevaluate geo- economic theory especially in this epoch of geoeconomic struggle, centred on the China-United States rivalry, warrants particular scrutiny.

The geoeconomics of technology explores how technological advancements and policies influence global economic power dynamics and international relations (Clayton, 2023). Theories in this field are based on both geopolitics and economics, emphasizing the strategic use of technology to achieve economic and geopolitical goals.

Three approaches may be identified: techno-nationalism vs. techno-globalization, techno- hegemony vs. power transition, and strategic techno-autonomy vs. strategic techno-competition (Zhang, 2024). We can illustrate this economical view in the figure bellow:

Figure1: theoretical approaches of geoeconomics & technology



Source: The figure is produced by the researcher based on (Zhang, 2024)

.2.3China & USA trade war :

China has unexpectedly emerged in mere a few decades as the 2nd largest economy in the world and the global largest in terms of purchase power parity since 2016 (Bank, 2024).

In mere 44 years, China's GDP rose by almost 44-fold, while the US, the best performer in G-7, raised its economy by 3-fold in the same period. The fast growth reduced China's gap with the US, the China/US GDP ratio rose from 5.5 % to 79 % in 1979–2023 (Bank, 2024).

Since 2018, the United States has been involved in a struggle for technological supremacy with China by implementing extensive industrial policies. Both nations made substantial investments in their domestic technology while attempting to subvert the technological-innovation system of the other. The US, for instance, has implemented export controls and investment restrictions to slow China's rate of technological innovation, while launching innovation initiatives covering emerging energy technologies, quantum computing, and wireless communications, among other industries (Starrs, 2021).

The “America First” policies of President Trump led to the rise of “trade wars” between the United States and China, Canada, and the European Union. Trade wars are a form of mercantilism as they are based on the idea that the government can promote domestic or national companies at the expense of foreign companies, and the result will be greater power for the country (flint, 2022).

The geopolitical shift of power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asian and Asia-Pacific (particularly from the USA to China) region is obviously going on and has been analyzed by geopolitical analysts like J. S. Nye, Z. Brzezinski and R. D. Kaplan. J. S. Nye identifies five major global challenges (including possible reactions) as an answer to the most pessimistic projections of American decline and the inevitable rise of China's economic and geopolitical dominance, which is reflected in global media (Nye, 2011).

.1 The intersection of terrorism with nuclear materials: This requires policies for countering terrorism, creating stability in the Middle East, giving attention to failed states and so on.

.2 Political Islam: More open trade, economic growth, education, development of civil society institutions, and gradual increases in political participation may help strengthen the mainstream over time.

.3 The rise of a hostile hegemon as Asia gradually regains the share of world economy: This requires a policy that welcomes China as a responsible stakeholder but hedges against possible hostility by maintaining close relations with Japan, India, and other countries in Asia that welcome an American presence.

.4 Economic depression: A strategic response to this challenge will require policies that gradually reduce American dependence on oil.

.5 Ecologic breakdowns: such as pandemics and negative climate change: This challenge will require greater cooperation through international institutions.

II. Methods and Materials:

II.1. search Approach and Design

The present study applies a mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative); it aims to identify China's media strategies regarding the latest trade war (China & USA). Content analysis was employed to scrutinize 104 posts of Mao Ning Spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China DG of Department of Press, Communication and Public Diplomacy on X platform. In a specific time range from 09-29 April 2025, that is, after the announcement by the USA to raise tariffs on Chinese goods.

The content dimension was coded into three sub dimensions:

Categories of figures: How was articulated? Included: Analysis of Profile Picture, Public engagement was measured in the form of the number of shares, comments, and likes and bookmarked to reveal the association between different levels of public engagement and communication strategies used by the spokesperson.

□ Categories of non-verbal grooming: for interactive features, they were coded into links to external sources, use of hashtags, use of questions to solicit feedback, and use of multimedia

□ Subject classifications: what was articulated?

1.1.Data analysis

a. Categories of figures Analysis of Profile Picture:

The personal photograph is orientated nearly diagonally.

With a classic white jumpsuit with a blue background

Tag Binder: present Follower number : 92,8 k

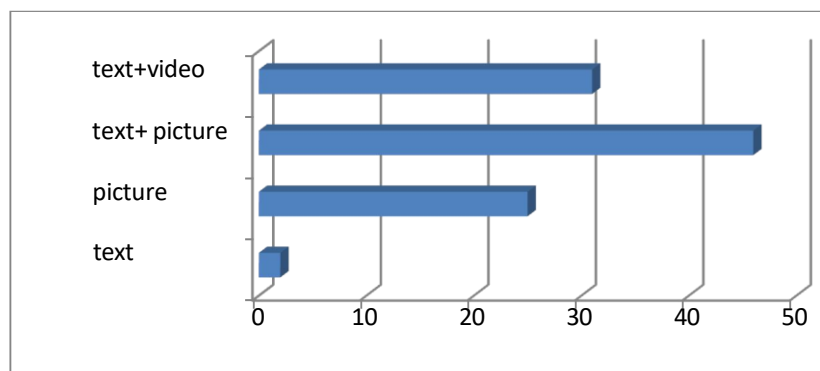
Number of following :229 Language utilised: English

Joined X platform in February 2025 number of posts (until 29 April 2025-311)



Type of publication:

Figure2: type of publications



Source: The figure is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

The publications were presented in several formats, prioritizing the combination of text with images, followed by text with videos, then photos alone, and last text by itself.

Structure of expressions:

Expressions with an ideological symbolic dimension came on the top with score of 45 expressions (equivalent to 58.44%). then, we found direct declarative assertions.

Dimensions and modalities of interaction:

Emotional categories: 78.7% (like and bookmarked) Behavioral categories: 21.24 % (comment and share(

b. Categories of non-verbal grooming: for interactive features

The hashtag was used in posts by 2.8 percent, while external links were used by only 1 percent.

c. Categories of Content:

- major subjects:

Table1: Political issues

Subjects	Repetition	Percentage(%)
Cooperation china – Malaysia	3	11.11
Cooperation china – Cambodia	7	25.92
Cooperation china – Kenya	2	07.40
Cooperation china – Azerbaijan	1	3.70
Cooperation china – Viet Nam	06	22.22
Cooperation china – Spain	01	3.70
Rejection of unilateral action	02	7.40
Self-isolation	1	3.70
Protect Legitimate rights	02	7.40
Security	02	7.40

Source: The table is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

Table2: Economical issues

Subjects	Repetition	Percentage(%)
Cooperation china - The New Development Bank	1	2.22
Tariff & Trade war	11	24.44
Competition China – USA	6	13.33
investment China- Asia	9	20
investment China- Africa	0	0

investment China- EU	2	4.44
Tourism trade	11	24.44
Technological trade	5	11.11

Source: The table is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

Table3:Historical issues

Subjects	Repetition	Percentage(%)
pride	3	12.5
Communist party & socialism	4	16.66
Millennium- old friendship	12	50
Common values	5	20.83

Source: The table is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

Table4:Sustainable Development

Subjects	Repetition	Percentage(%)
International fairness and justice	3	12.5
Shared future	9	37.5
Stability and positive energy	1	4.16
Enhance solidarity and cooperation	2	8.33
Clean energy	1	4.16
Modernization	5	20.83
Ecosystem	2	8.33
Solidarity	1	4.16

Source: The table is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

Table5: major used appeals:

Appeal nature	Repetition	Percentage(%)
Mental and logic appeals	40	38.46
Emotional appeals	59	56.70
Intimidation appeals	05	4.80

Source: The table is produced by the researcher based on data collection.

III. Results and discussion:

- It appears clearly that the visual display of identity has become especially significant, and users tend to present highly curated versions of themselves on social media. We can figure out the black-and-white from the profile picture of the China foreign spokesperson, photo

as “serious.” However, the colour in the background which is used to seem “more realistic,” “authentic,” “exciting,” and “vibrant.

- The techno discourses used from the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons on the X platform characterizes by its multimodal format. She is focusing heavily on the use of images and videos, as the image is more attractive and possesses persuasive qualities.

- Regarding interactions, emotional interactions had the highest rates, followed by behavioral interactions. Although the speaker's account is recent (established only in February 2025), the view rates recorded were much higher than the interaction rates, reaching 19 million on April 11, 2025, which is after the American announcement of raising customs duties.

- As for the update periods, there were variations in the rates. The period from April 9 to April 17 saw updates with an average of more than every three hours a day. Then, there was a stagnation that reached every five hours from April 18 to April 22, followed by a return to the same pace from April 23 to April 29. This corresponds directly with the American statements about increasing customs duties on Chinese products and the period of rising gold prices, followed by waiting for a correction.

- We note that the use of non-verbal communication tools such as hashtags and external links was low, ranging between 1-3 percent. However, what is noteworthy is that the speaker frequently uses video clips, especially those that reflect real and historical images, employing them symbolically according to the

context and event. This is particularly evident when she discusses videos of past U.S. presidents (Reagan), indicating that the conflict is an old and recurring one. She shares videos about the anger of the American street regarding these taxes, with the purpose of conveying implicit messages that the unilateral action has not achieved victory.

□ Topic analysis and revealing media trends:

- Regarding political issues, the media discourse has focused more on the China-Asian political partnership, followed by the African one (China-Kenya). This is merely an extension of the economic partnership that we will analyze later, aimed at strengthening the Asian political front. Then, the political topics were closely related to achieving security and protecting legitimate rights.

In the end, we find Chinese-European relations (specifically with Spain) and the rejection of self-isolation, reflecting China's approach towards political openness in its relations with all continents (Africa, Asia, Europe.)

- Regarding economic issues, the trade war and the increase in American tariffs on China have received the highest attention. Alongside this, the tourism industry has also emerged as a focus. The matter clarifies the adopted approach, which is fully aligned with the positive sum game as we've mentioned before. Then came the Chinese investments in Asia, and the purpose of this discourse is to affirm China's aim to strengthen its current markets in Asia and even increase them by finding alternative markets, especially those related to tourism and technology.

The discourse did not overlook the issue of competition between China and the United States, which came in fourth place. It included assertive phrases characterized by logic arguments and repetition, along with implicit references, emphasizing China's parity with the United States. Among the most important arguments used are numbers (the demographic element), Chinese production, and the future outlook. (using of logic appeals)

It is noteworthy that the speech did not include China's investment trends in Africa (despite the Kenyan president's visit to China), as the Chinese Silk Road project is considered one of the most prominent geopolitical and economic challenges for the state.

- Regarding the symbolism of the discourse used, the spokesperson focused extensively and excessively on discussing the historical relations between China and Asian countries. She was focusing on Millennium- old friendship, then – common values. Then, regarding the communist ideology, the arrangement of the discourse in this manner seeks to establish the foundations of historical human relationships first and then embrace communist thought, not the other way around. This justifies the intensive use of emotional appeals, which focused on the relationship between peoples and rejected everything that is against equality and justice.

- Sustainable development is one of the most prominent current geopolitical trends. It is clear that the official spokesperson focused on this aspect to showcase China's efforts towards environmental preservation and clean energy (especially with reports considering China as the largest fossil fuel exporter in the world). Therefore, the speech was characterized by extensive use of evidence, images, and videos that support the idea of the Chinese project towards achieving sustainable development based on a shared future.

- The employed media discourse strategies can be inferred based on the previous analysis data, where they were primarily solidarity-based (especially with the Asian region first and then with the world). Subsequently, they were persuasive, aimed at affirming China's pivotal role as the most important economic power in the world. Finally, there were directive and intimidating strategies that did not deviate from the official context of the Chinese discourse, which rejected compliance with the taxes imposed by the United States.

IV. Conclusion:

It can be concluded that numerous foreign ministries globally continue to operate through conventional diplomacy: directives to ambassadors and embassies abroad; private meetings and negotiations; the gathering, reporting, and synthesis of pertinent information; the establishment and engagement of interested parties; and the resolution of various technical issues utilizing intergovernmental mechanisms such as international conferences and regional organizations. Consequently, it is challenging to envision that digital diplomacy would entirely supplant traditional diplomacy in its classical form; nonetheless, e-diplomacy, as a distinct instrument, can enhance a state's position in modern foreign policy and international relations.

Through our brief study of the official page of Mao Ning Spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China DG of Department of Press on X platform we found out how social media could be an important instrument used by diplomacy to reshape the economical environment during the last trade war between China and USA.

The digital media discourse was characterized by following the official Chinese approach but employing strategies that align with postmodernist discourse, especially those related to spectacle and attraction, which the speaker sought to emphasize through the use of emotional and logic appeals to a large extent. Her discourse was also distinguished by a fear strategy, depicting the American state as seeking unilateral control over the world to give the opinion public a sense of danger and instability.

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