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Challenges and threats to the security of the Visegrad Group countries: intensification of relations with the United States as a means to overcome risks?

Wyzwania i zagrożenia dla bezpieczeństwa państw wyszehradzkich. Intensyfikacja relacji ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi sposobem na ich przezwycięzenie?

Abstract: Since January 2017, when Donald Trump assumed the post of US president, there has been a visible intensification of relations between the United States and the countries from Central Europe, aimed at, for example, counteracting challenges and threats faced by the allies. The objective of the article is to analyze challenges and threats to Central Europe, identified by Donald Trump. He points to the necessity: 1) to strengthen NATO and increase the engagement of European allies; 2) to ensure energy security; 3) to counteract threats from two superpowers – Russia and China. The text addresses how important the challenges and threats identified by the American president have been for individual Visegrad states. The article begins by presenting characteristic features of the foreign policy conducted by Donald Trump's administration which influence relations between the US and the Visegrad countries. It then analyzes the relations between the US and individual states regarding the previously presented challenges and threats. The article's thesis is that Poland is the only Visegrad country to perceive all three challenges and threats in a way similar to the US, and thus cooperates with the US in this matter. The work is a comparative analysis based on content and narrative analysis.

Keywords: Donald Trump, the Visegrad Group countries, security policy, United States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, energy security, defense, China, Russia

Streszczenie: Od objęcia przez Donalda Trumpa urzędu prezydenta Stanów Zjednoczonych w styczniu 2017 r. nastąpiła wyraźna intensyfikacja relacji z państwami Europy Środkowej, mająca na celu m.in. przeciwdziałanie prob-

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lemom i niebezpieczeństwom stojącym przed sojusznikami. Celem artykułu jest analiza wyzwań i zagrożeń, jakie Donald Trump kreśli przed Europą Środkową. Wskazuje na: 1) konieczność wzmocnienia NATO i większego zaangażowania europejskich sojuszników; 2) zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa energetycznego; 3) przeciwdziałanie zagrożeniom płynącym ze strony dwóch potęg: Rosji i Chin. Dokonana zostanie próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jakim stopniu wyzwania i zagrożenia zidentyfikowane przez amerykańskiego prezydenta są istotne dla poszczególnych państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej. Na wstępie artykułu wskazane zostaną charakterystyczne dla polityki zagranicznej Donalda Trumpa elementy, które mają wpływ na relacje z państwami V4. Następnie przeanalizowane zostaną stosunki USA z poszczególnymi państwami pod kątem wyżej wskazanych wyzwań i zagrożeń. W artykule postawiono tezę, że Polska – jako jedyna z Grupy Wyszehradzkiej – podobnie jak USA postrzega wszystkie trzy wyzwania i zagrożenia, a w konsekwencji współpracuje ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi w tej materii. Praca stanowi analizę porównawczą powstałą w oparciu o analizę treści i narracji.

Słowa kluczowe: Donald Trump, państwa Grupy Wyszehradzkiej, polityka bezpieczeństwa, Stany Zjednoczone, Polska, Czechy, Słowacja, Węgry, bezpieczeństwo energetyczne, obronność, Chiny, Rosja

Introduction

Since Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary (the Visegrád Group, or V4 countries) gained full independence after 1989, alliance with Washington has been an inherent element of their security and defense strategy. Through the subsequent American presidencies, the relations between the V4 countries and the US have been harmonious, although not without numerous challenges and limitations. In the 2000s Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, and Bratislava became Washington's partners in the global combat against terrorism, and active members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). During the tenure of Democrat Barack Obama in the White House (2009–2016), the states of Central Europe were no longer central to American foreign policy, although they continued to perceive Washington as a pillar of their security policy and expected greater engagement and support from the US, particularly regarding Russia's actions towards Crimea and Ukraine after 2013. Assuming the post of US president by Republicans' candidate Donald Trump on 20 January 2017, raised hopes among the V4 countries for a "new opening" in their relations with the United States and the region to be noticed again. However, the new presidency was also approached with specific but justified fears.

The objective of this article is to analyze challenges and threats to Central Europe identified by Donald Trump's administration in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America published

in December 2017.¹ The White House points to the necessity: 1) to strengthen NATO and to increase the engagement of European allies; 2) to ensure energy security; 3) to counteract threats from two super-powers – Russia and China. The text attempts to answer how important the challenges and threats identified by the American president's administration are for V4 states. In the beginning, the article presents elements that are characteristic of the foreign policy conducted by Donald Trump's administration which influence relations between the US and the V4 countries. Then it analyzes the relations between the US and individual states with regard to the previously presented challenges and threats during Trump's first three years in office. The article formulates the thesis that Poland is the only V4 country to perceive all three challenges and threats in a way similar to the US, and thus cooperates with the US in this matter.

1. Characteristic features of the foreign policy conducted by Donald Trump's administration. Challenges and threats for Central European states identified by the US presidential administration

Already during his election campaign, Donald Trump promised to implement the "America First" doctrine which prioritizes and promotes American interests in all dimensions – political, military, and economic – over the interests of other states and international actors. The doctrine was published in December 2017 in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America. One of its key elements defining the approach of Trump's administration to foreign policy is realism "based on the assumption that peace, security and prosperity depend on strong and sovereign nations."² In a realistic manner, Trump prefers a bilateral approach in international relations and cooperation wherever possible, based on bilateral contacts, and not through multilateral agreements and commitments. US support for certain multilateral projects, e.g., the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), which focuses on

1 The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> [2020-02-05].

2 *Ibidem*, p. 1.

the development of gas infrastructure in Central Europe and significantly facilitates the sales of American LNG, primarily aims to pursue American interests.³

The greatest threat to Central European states identified by Donald Trump's administration in the US Security Strategy is Russia's aspirations to subordinate its former peripheries. The activities that are to protect V4 countries in this matter include the necessity to strengthen NATO's Eastern flank, allocate 2% of their GDP to defense as the allies had committed, as well as to modernize the armies and defense systems of individual states through purchasing American military equipment. With regard to Russia's activity in Ukraine and the major concern voiced by Central and Eastern European states, Trump's administration declared NATO readiness to develop the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and the tailored Forward Presence (tFP). Moreover, the presence of American troops in Eastern Europe under the NATO mandate increased, so did the transfer of additional resources for US military operations in the region as well as military assistance to the allies. In cooperation with the Congress, the administration extended sanctions against Russia in response to the state's various aggressive activities (Ukraine, Syria) in the international arena as well as its repressive internal policy. What is more, Washington is putting pressure on its European allies to uphold EU sanctions against Russia and oppose the construction of Nord Stream 2 (NS2).⁴

An important challenge and threat to V4 countries identified by Trump's administration is their excessive dependence on Russian energy resources. Trump talks about the need to diversify energy resources and purchase American LNG and nuclear technologies. His concept of "energy domination" is not without significance here. It is based on three pillars: 1) energy independence from external weaknesses; 2) cheaper energy for American consumers; 3) sources of eco-

3 A. Chojan, 'The United States on the Three Seas Initiative', *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2019, p. 89.

4 G. Varga, 'A Trump-kormányzat Oroszország-politikája' ['The Trump Government's Russia Policy'], *KKI-elemzések*, E-33, 2018, https://kki.hu/assets/upload/33_KKI-elemzes_USA_Varga_20181010.pdf [2020-02-19].

conomic growth.⁵ From Washington's perspective, it is unacceptable for US allies (especially Germany and France) to continue their lucrative energy trade with their opponents, particularly Russia.

Besides Russia, the greatest threats in the international arena are posed by China, Iran, North Korea, and terrorist groups that have emerged after ISIS' defeat. What seems particularly dangerous is the competition between superpowers, mainly Russia and China. Trump's administration aims to win this competition and defeat both China and Russia. Removing the influences of Beijing and Moscow from Central Europe through greater military, energy, and political engagement means serving this goal.

2. Hungarian-US relations

During the presidency of Barack Obama, Hungarian-US relations were far from perfect. Obama's administration openly criticized Viktor Orbán's government for their reforms and departure from the principles of liberal democracy.⁶ However, it should be emphasized that Budapest continued its cooperation with Washington on the issues of defense. Orbán officially expressed his support for Donald Trump during the election campaign. It was not without significance that Orbán and Trump are similar personalities who use "populist rhetoric to legitimize [their] style of governance, while promoting authoritarian values."⁷

During Trump's presidency, the re-intensification of Hungarian-US relations has become significant. On 29 May 2018, there was a meeting in Washington, the first in many years at this level, between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó, and US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo. In 2018 Szijjártó visited Washington

5 The White House, *President Donald J. Trump Is Unleashing American Energy Dominance*, 14 May 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-unleashing-american-energy-dominance/> [2020-02-02].

6 P. Rada, 'The V4-US Relation and the American Foreign Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe', in: *Central Europe and the Visegrad Cooperation: Historical and Policy Perspectives*, ed. P. Stepper, Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2018, pp. 298-309.

7 P. Norris, R. Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash. Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 3.

three more times.⁸ After that, on 11-12 November 2019 US Secretary of State visited Budapest for the first time after seven years and met with Orbán, Sziijártó and the Minister of Defense Tibor Benkő.⁹ The next stage of intensification of bilateral relations was the Hungarian Prime Minister's visit to the White House – the first such visit since 2005. Orbán met with Trump on 13 May 2019, and their talks (as in the case of Sziijártó and Pompeo) covered mainly the issues of defense, energy security, and countering the influences of Russia and China.¹⁰ It can be noticed that at the meeting, Trump did not refer to the sensitive issues which could evoke tensions between the leaders, i.e., the closing down of CEU in Budapest or the failure to extradite two criminals upon extradition request from the USA, whom Hungary then extradited to Russia.

The goals that Trump managed to achieve were: the update to the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) of 1997 in April 2019, following two years of talks, allowing the American army to move on the territory of Hungary; the signing of the Hungarian declaration on the purchase of the medium-range air defense system by Budapest; Hungary's declaration of increasing defense spending to 2% of its GDP in 2024; and deciding on the increased participation of Hungarian soldiers in foreign missions. On the one hand, this may suggest that Budapest has recognized American aspirations to oppose Russia in this part of Europe and the need to strengthen NATO. On the other hand, as Veronika Józwiak noticed: "The Hungarian authorities anticipate that in return, the U.S. will not place much importance on their other political moves, which will allow them to maintain the current domestic policy and good relations with Russia and China."¹¹ Since 2010,

8 The Hungarian Government, *Hungarian Foreign Minister and U.S. Secretary of State to hold talks in Washington*, 29 May 2018, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-foreign-minster-and-u-s-secretary-of-state-to-hold-talks-in-washington> [2020-01-18].

9 U.S. Department of States, *Secretary Pompeo Travels to Hungary*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-pompeo-travels-to-hungary/> [2020-01-18].

10 The White House, *Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary before bilateral meeting*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-orban-hungary-bilateral-meeting/> [2020-01-23].

11 V. Józwiak, 'The Role of Defence Cooperation in Hungary's Relations with the U.S.', *Bulletin PISM*, no. 52 (1298), 2019, https://www.pism.pl/publications/The_Role_of_Defence_Cooperation_in_Hungary_s_Relations_with_the_U_S_ [2020-01-20].

Orbán's government has been implementing an "opening to the East" policy, based on good political and economic relations with both China and Russia. Cooperation with the latter is particularly important for Orbán. Since 2013, he has been holding annual meetings with Putin as he strives to build Hungary's image as a mediator between the West and Russia.

At the Hungarian-US meetings, energy security issues, so important for the US, were also discussed. Here the position of the US is clear – the purchase of American gas by Hungary. However, the Hungarian narrative is not explicit. On the one hand, the Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that "[t]he United States will be playing a major role in securing Hungary's energy supply."¹² On the other hand, Orbán said that although Hungary is happy to cooperate, it will not buy energy well above the market price from anyone.¹³ However, Hungary opted for the expansion of the terminal that could receive American LNG on the Croatian island of Krk and for the expansion of the Romanian-Hungarian gas pipeline. Due to its location, Hungary plays a key role in the development of infrastructure connections in the region, which are to ensure independence from Russian supplies. The problem in US-Hungarian relations in this matter is that Orbán supports the construction of NS2 and Turkish Stream gas pipelines, which are to supply Russian gas to Central Europe bypassing Ukraine, for he treats Russia as a reliable partner in energy issues.¹⁴

Concerning China, the second superpower, which according to the American administration threatens the countries of Central Europe, the Hungarian authorities' attitude differs from the American one. For Orbán, Chinese investments are not a threat. The Hungarian government does not rule out Huawei's participation in the construction of 5G infrastructure in this country. For over ten years, the

12 The Hungarian Government, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó: Hungary and the United States have confirmed their strategic alliance*, 31 May 2018, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-and-the-united-states-have-confirmed-their-strategic-alliance> [2020-01-24].

13 The Hungarian Government, *Prime Minister Orban: The major powers should have an interest in Hungary's success*, 14 February 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/the-major-powers-should-have-an-interest-in-hungary-s-success/> [2020-02-17].

14 V. Jóźwiak, 'Hungarian-Russian Economic Relations', *Bulletin PISM*, no. 105 (1853), 2019, https://www.pism.pl/publications/HungarianRussian_Economic_Relations [2020-02-23].

company has had, outside China, its largest production and logistics center in Hungary.

3. Slovak-US relations

During the first three years of Trump's presidency, there was no consensus on the Slovak political stage regarding foreign policy. In the previous government coalition (2016-2020), made up of the social-democratic Smer-SD, the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the Hungarian minority group Most-Híd, the vision of relations with the US remained a contentious issue. The ministry of foreign affairs, with Miroslav Lajčák, was strongly pro-American and pro-transatlantic. The prime minister from Smer-SD (first, Robert Fico and from 2018 Peter Pellegrini) was in favor of enhancing only security cooperation with the US. The SNS, with Andrej Danko, was clearly skeptical about deepening relations with the US, representing a strong pro-Russian stance. There was also a foreign policy discrepancy between the government and the president (Andrej Kiska in 2014-20019 and Zuzana Čaputová since 2019) regarding relations with Russia and China.

During the first three years of Trump's presidency, relations between the United States and the Slovak government intensified. In November 2018, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo met with the Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák in Washington. The talks concerned, among others, the importance of US-Slovak relations, the modernization of the Slovak army, and the leadership of Slovakia in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Secretary of State emphasized the need to maintain sanctions against Russia.¹⁵ In February 2019, Secretary Pompeo visited Slovakia, where he spoke with President Andrej Kiska, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, and Foreign Minister Lajčák. It was the first visit of the US Secretary of State to Slovakia in twenty years. The talks concerned the same issues as in November 2018. In turn, on 3 May 2019, Pellegrini visited

15 U.S. Department of State, *Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák*, 15 November 2018, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-pompeos-meeting-with-slovak-foreign-minister-miroslav-lajcak/> [2020-03-01].

the White House.¹⁶ It was important for Trump that Slovakia expressed its will to purchase F-16 for \$1.8 billion and declared an increase in spending on defense to 2% in 2022. Trump also received confirmation of Slovak opposition to NS2. The Slovak government's statement of consent to sign the DCA seems to be particularly important for the United States. Slovakia had been conducting talks since 2017 and rejected the proposal to sign the document in March 2019, arguing that such an agreement might violate the sovereignty of the state.

Driven by economic interests, the Slovak Republic's government was ignoring US pressure to cooperate with Russia and China. A month after the meeting in the White House, Prime Minister Pellegrini met with President Vladimir Putin and expressed a positive attitude to NS2. This happened despite the fact that Pompeo pointed out Russia's threats during his visit to Bratislava and despite Pellegrini and Trump's objections to this investment during the meeting in the White House. The Slovak government's position results from perceiving Russia as a business partner and not as a source of potential threat.¹⁷ For the Slovak government, China is also an important economic partner. However, it should be borne in mind that the Slovak Information Service (SIS) in its annual report in 2018 reported that the activities of Russian and Chinese secret services pose a threat to Slovakia's interests, including its membership in the EU and NATO.¹⁸

The Slovak government and Trump's administration also have a slightly different opinion on energy security in Central Europe. As noted above, despite its earlier opposition to NS2, Slovakia (after Pellegrini's visit to Moscow in June 2019) withdrew its criticism of the project and, what is more, expressed interest in obtaining gas from it. Moreover, Bratislava and Moscow signed contracts extending the supply of nuclear fuel to Slovak nuclear power plants.

16 The White House, *Joint Statement from the President of the United States Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Peter Pellegrini*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-united-states-donald-j-trump-prime-minister-slovak-republic-peter-pellegrini/> [2020-02-19].

17 Ł. Ogrodnik, 'Slovakia's Relations with the United States', *Bulletin PISM*, no. 164 (1912), 2019, https://pism.pl/publications/Slovakias_Relations_with_the_United_States_ [2020-02-20].

18 Š. Ižák, *SIS vo výročnej správe za rok 2018 upozorňuje na pôsobenie ruských a čínskych spravodajských služieb na Slovensku*, Antipropaganda, 30 June 2019, <http://antipropaganda.sk/sis-vo-vyrocnjej-sprave-za-rok-2018-upozorňuje-na-posobenie-ruskych-cinskych-spravodajskych-sluzieb-na-slovensku/> [2020-09-06].

4. Czech-US relations

According to Monika Brusenbauch Meislová, the Czech policy towards the US was, and remains, frequently unable to act in a concerted way and formulate clear positions.¹⁹ Partially, this lack of coherent standpoint with regard to the US results from the discrepancy between the foreign policy implemented by the government and that of the president. The Czech government, headed by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš strives to support Czech-US relations, while President Miloš Zeman expresses mostly pro-Russian and pro-Chinese views.²⁰

Prime Minister Babiš clearly stated that he is interested in the strong presence of the US in Europe and a strong transatlantic alliance to counter the geopolitical ambitions of Russia and China.²¹ Prague also made several important gestures aimed at achieving rapprochement with the new American administration, including extraditing a Russian hacker to the US (and not to Russia although the latter also requested it), and the Czech cybersecurity agency issuing a warning against Huawei's products, which led to excluding this firm from public tenders.

As in the case of other Visegrad states, the relations with the US intensified during the studied period. In February 2019, the first meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs – Pompeo met with Tomáš Petříček – took place in Washington after four years.²² In March 2019, the Czech Prime Minister visited the White House for the first time in eight years. In a joint statement, Trump and Babiš emphasized the necessity to “ensure secure and reliable telecommunications networks and supply chains to reduce the risk of malicious cyber activity”, allocate 2% of GDP for the defense budget (the Czechs undertook to do it by 2024), and ensure energy security. In the statement, both par-

19 M. Brusenbauch Meislová, 'Relations between the United States and the Czech Republic: From Honeymoon to Hangover?', in: *The Relations Of Central European Countries With The United States*, ed. A. Péczeli, Budapest: Dialóg Campus, 2019, pp. 69-70.

20 B. Baksa, B. Pál, Á. Szászi et al., 'The Value of Central Europe on Donald Trump's Map: Cooperation and Divergence on Regional Issues (1)', *KKI Policy Brief*, E-09, 2020, p. 9, https://kki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/E-2020-09_C-EUR-Trump_1.pdf [2020-01-27].

21 Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, *Future of the Transatlantic Bond Opening statement by DMFA Tomáš Petříček*, 13 September 2018, https://www.mzv.cz/file/3000322/Future_of_the_Transatlantic_Bond.pdf [2020-02-04].

22 U.S. Embassy in the Czech Republic, *Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Czech Foreign Minister Tomas Petricek*, 22 February 2019, <https://cz.usembassy.gov/secretary-pompeos-meeting-with-czech-foreign-minister-tomas-petricek/> [2020-02-09].

ties also confirmed the need to continue sanctions against Russia and support Ukraine.²³ A success of Trump's administration is the declaration of Babiš' government regarding the purchase of eight UH-1Y Venom utility helicopters and four AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters. The Czechs also sent their contingents to strengthen NATO's Eastern flank and decided to increase the number of their soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like Trump's administration, Czech fear – as their security services point out – the potential connection between 5G technology offered by Huawei and ZTE, and China's espionage activities. However, they perceive energy security differently as the Czech government is interested in the construction of the NS2 pipeline, hoping to profit from gas transit and become a hub for this part of Europe. They are, clearly, uninterested in buying American gas, pointing out to its high price and lack of appropriate infrastructure in their country.

ANO's Prime Minister and leader Andrej Babiš favors dialogue with Russia and perceives the EU sanctions as a negative factor for the Czech economy. At the same time, it should be noted that Russian espionage and disinformation activities have a negative effect on bilateral relations.²⁴

5. Polish-US relations

Since 1989 Polish-American relations have been friendly. Evidently, they have intensified after the start of Andrzej Duda's presidency and the right-wing Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party winning the 2015 parliamentary election. The Polish government began striving to ensure that American forces are located in Poland to counterbalance the threat from Russia's militarism and neo-imperialism.

Donald Trump's first visit to Poland took place in July 2017. In his speech to the Poles, Trump referred to the issues of NATO art. 5 being

23 The White House, *Joint Statement by President of the United States Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Andrej Babiš*, 7 March 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-united-states-donald-j-trump-prime-minister-czech-republic-andrej-babis/> [2020-02-10].

24 K. Dębiec, 'A crisis in the Czech Republic's relations with China and Russia', *OSW Analyses*, 2 October 2019, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2019-10-02/a-crisis-czech-republics-relations-china-and-russia> [2020-01-16].

in force and the export of gas to Poland.²⁵ During the visit to Washington in September 2018, the Polish president made it an obligation that the entire two-billion-dollar infrastructure needed for the American troops' permanent presence in Poland would be funded solely by Poland. The Polish and American presidents signed a new declaration on strategic partnership, and, in June 2019, they signed the Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation Regarding United States Force Posture in the Republic of Poland.²⁶ The document states that the US plans to increase by ca. 1000 personnel its military presence in Poland (so far approximately 4500 American soldiers on rotation); furthermore, that Poland intends to ensure and maintain the jointly defined infrastructure necessary for the American forces quartered within its borders so that no costs are incurred by the US. The specific provisions focus on such issues as the establishment of a United States Division Headquarters (Forward) in Poland and joint use of the Combat Training Center (CTC) by the United States Armed Forces and Polish Armed Forces. Then founding: the United States Air Force MQ-9 Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance squadron in Poland; an aerial port of debarkation to support the movement of forces for training or contingency; an area support group to support current and future United States forces in Poland; United States special operations forces capability in Poland to support air, ground, and maritime operations; infrastructure to support the presence of an armored brigade combat team, a combat aviation brigade, and a combat sustainment support battalion. The Warsaw talks in February 2019, held between Pompeo, President Duda, the Minister of Defense Mariusz Błaszczak, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz, also addressed the agreement on the future delivery of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) as well as the Patriot missile defense system, ordered in March 2018.

25 The White House, *Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland*, 6 July 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-people-poland/> [2020-02-02].

26 The White House, *Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation Regarding United States Force Posture in the Republic of Poland*, 12 June 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-declaration-defense-cooperation-regarding-united-states-force-posture-republic-poland/> [2020-02-01].

The Polish government and the president agree with the American administration on matters of cooperation and energy security. During the period in question, the US-Poland Strategic Dialogue on Energy was established.²⁷ Cooperation in the sphere of energy focuses on multiple issues, including the discussed joint projects in the areas of nuclear energy, fossil energy, energy infrastructure, and cybersecurity. However, its cornerstone is the cooperation on LNG and its purchase by Poland. Poland and the US criticize the NS2 gas pipeline most vehemently, perceiving it as a way to make Europe entirely dependent on Russian gas.

Besides military and energy-related matters, another significant field of cooperation is countering cyber threats, including those from China. In September 2019, Poland and the US signed a relevant declaration entitled “Joint Declaration of Poland and the United States of America on 5G.”²⁸ In November 2018, at a conference in Hamburg, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki described China on a par with Russia as countries that challenge the free world. China’s unfair trade activities, as well as cyberespionage, including industrial ones, are especially important.

Conclusions

Donald Trump defined three challenges and threats that Central Europe has to face. He pointed to the necessity of: 1) strengthening NATO and greater involvement of European allies; 2) ensuring energy security; and 3) counteracting threats coming from the two powers – Russia and China. Undoubtedly, the US’ involvement in overcoming these problems stems predominantly from securing American interests according to the “America First” doctrine. Following Obama’s tenure, the V4 states expected more involvement from the US in ensuring the security of Central Europe.

27 The White House, *Joint Statement by President Donald J. Trump and President Andrzej Duda of the Republic of Poland*, 18 September 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-president-andrzej-duda-republic-poland/> [2020-01-19].

28 Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów RP, *Joint declaration made by Poland and the United States of America with regard to 5G*, 2 September 2019, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/joint-declaration-made-by-poland-and-the-united-states-of-america-with-regard-to-5g.html> [2020-01-12].

The intensification of relations of all the V₄ states with the US during the first three years of Trump's tenure, with the signing of agreements on purchase of American military equipment, and declarations of increasing defense expenses to 2% of GDP, can confirm that, like Trump, the Central European states see a military threat in Russia that can be overcome jointly with NATO. The shared perception of specific challenges and threats is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Perception of challenges and threats by the Visegrád states

	Strengthening NATO and defense cooperation		Energy security		Threats to international security	
	2% GDP for defense	Purchase of American arms and armament	Nord Stream 2 criticism	Purchase of American gas	China	Russia
Hungary	Obligation	Yes	No	No	No	No
Poland	Meets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Czech Republic	Obligation	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	Obligation	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

The talks conducted by the Visegrad leaders and the US presidential administration, as well as the joint statements issued by them, demonstrate that Poland is the only state to perceive those challenges and threats in the same way as the US. The Czech Republic leaders have similar views on strengthening NATO and their defense potential as well as on the threats, mostly coming from China, yet they perceive the question of the country's energy security differently. In Slovakia and Hungary's case, the opinions on the issues of energy security, and the purchase of American gas are divergent. Hungary is the only V₄ country that perceives the threat posed by Russia and China differently than Trump's administration.

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