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Multidimensional Factors Exploring the Decline of U.S. Global Hegemony Under the Great Changes

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of a once-in-a-century major transformation, U.S. global hegemony is showing a systemic decline. Existing research often attributes the decline of hegemony to single dimensions such as economic competition or military overexertion, or fails to effectively bridge the interactive logical connection between domestic political-economic structures and the international power landscape. In particular, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how the interplay between hard power and soft power shapes a nation's strategic capabilities. Existing literature on hegemonic stability theory also generally overlooks how domestic variables erode governance effectiveness and diplomatic credibility, thereby inversely shaping international strategic behavior and hegemonic maintenance capabilities. The core innovation of this study lies in constructing a dual-dimensional resonance theoretical framework model, breaking through the limitations of traditional single-dimensional analysis. This framework organically integrates the core concerns of hegemonic stability theory and relative strength theory, innovatively placing the decline of domestic political and economic soft power and the depletion of hard power at the international system level on the same analytical plane. Through the resonance effect mechanism between the two, it reveals the composite dynamics of the decline of U.S. hegemony. Based on hypothesis verification through typical case studies, the decline of U.S. hegemony is not merely a simple decline in power indicators, but rather a structural dysfunction resulting from the resonance between domestic governance deficits and the deepening of the international power redistribution landscape. Theoretically, this study advances the exploration of the internal decay of hegemony mechanism within power transfer theory through the dual-dimensional resonance model, providing a more dynamic and integrated analytical tool for understanding the rise and fall of great powers. Practically, this study offers a deeper lens for interpreting the internal contradictions and behavioral logic of current U.S. foreign policy, providing important practical implications for China in optimizing its positioning in major power relations, proactively planning for changes in the international order, and precisely defining its own development strategy.

Keywords: Hegemonic State; Hegemonic Decline; National Power; U.S. Politics and Diplomacy; Hegemonic Stability Theory

1. Introduction

Since entering the 21st century, the United States' position as a global hegemon is facing unprecedented challenges. Whether in the political and economic fields or in the military field, the global hegemony of the United States is gradually being weakened, a phenomenon that not only triggers widespread concern on a global scale, but also has far-reaching impacts on the existing liberal international order. In recent years, along with the rise of emerging powers such as China and Russia, as well as globalization and the complication of regional conflicts, the global leadership of the United States has encountered a severe test. At the same time, the trend of multipolarity in the international system is becoming more and more significant, the international order dominated by the West is in the process of deconstruction, and the center of gravity of the world's political and economic pattern has begun to shift, showing a trend of eastward rise and westward decline.

In this context, the decline of U.S. hegemony presents multi-dimensional structural characteristics, and the continuous fermentation of its domestic political and economic contradictions and the profound changes in the international power pattern have led to the relative decline of hard power and soft power, forming a resonance effect. In addition, the causal mechanism of the decline of U.S. global hegemony also presents a significant two-way interaction characteristics. Specifically, the weakening of U.S. domestic political leadership and its international credibility, the weakening of U.S. control over the domestic economy and the decline in the effectiveness of its global governance constitute two sets of interacting causal chains. So what is the specific mechanism of the decline of American hegemony? How do domestic and international factors interact?

1.1 Theoretical Criticism and Theoretical Framework Explanation

First of all, the characterization of the decline of U.S. hegemony at the domestic and international levels is diverse. Based on the domestic level, in the political realm, U.S. global leadership has been challenged with the changes in the global leadership pattern. The popularization of Western democracy was once considered an important pillar of U.S. hegemony in international affairs, but in recent years, the value system of democracy has been questioned in some areas, especially in developing countries and some non-Western countries. Huntington pointed out in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Reconstruction of World Order* that the popularization of Western democracy is not a global trend, but a competition between diverse cultures and political systems; in the economic field, scholar Li Wei, from the perspective of traditional international political economy, believes that economic competition is the key to the survival of the U.S. hegemonic system, and that industry and science and technology are the most central elements of it (Li W., 2023), and that the increasingly fierce competition between the U.S. and China Nowadays, it is questionable whether the US hegemony is stable; in the military field, Mearsheimer explores in his *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* how the US interventionist strategy has led to the intensification of regional conflicts and even challenged its military power in some regions. Based on the international level, in terms of the shaping of the international order and system, the balance of the global order is being reshaped by the growing trend of multi-polarity.

Huntington has made a unique observation in this regard, pointing out that the clash of civilizations will lead to changes in the distribution of global power, and that the international order dominated by the West is in the process of being deconstructed, with the center of the international system no longer dominated by Western countries alone. In addition, international multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization are increasingly becoming arenas for emerging powers to exert their influence.

Second, the existing literature focuses on the impact of a single factor on the decline of U.S. hegemony, or pays too much attention to the challenges posed by the international situation to the U.S. position of relative power, while ignoring the complex interaction between domestic and international factors. While theoretical paradigms such as the hegemonic stability theory and the power shift theory dominate the discussion of U.S. hegemonic change and its decline, we still need to recognize their inherent limitations, which are becoming increasingly prominent under the complex changes of the contemporary situation, in order to lay the foundation for the construction of a new explanatory framework that is more attuned to reality.

The hegemonic stability theory, based on the views of Gilpin, Kindleberger and other scholars, emphasizes that the existence of a hegemonic power is a necessary condition for the stability of the global system and the provision of international public goods (Keohane, R. O., 1984). Its core logic is that “the rise and fall of the hegemonic power determines the stability of the system (Kindleberger, C. P., 1973).” The theory implicitly views the existence of hegemony as an end in itself, and fails to adequately explain how hegemony itself shapes and ultimately undermines its dominant position through dynamic interactions, competition, and even self-defeating behaviors (Wang, J. S., 2003). In addition, the hegemonic stability theory to a certain extent also underestimates the corrosive effects of endogenous factors such as policy failures, institutional rigidity, legitimacy loss and social cleavages within the hegemonic powers themselves on the foundation of hegemony by endogenizing the endogenous dynamics of the hegemonic powers and underestimating the corrosive effects of policy failures, institutional rigidity, legitimacy loss and social cleavages within the hegemonic powers themselves (Strange, S., 1996). Its description of the provision of purely “international public goods” by the hegemonic power is too idealistic, and it pays insufficient attention to the role of non-state actors and immaterial power in accelerating or slowing down the process of hegemonic decline.

In terms of power transfer theory, represented by scholars such as Organsky and Kugler, it focuses on the power contrasts among major powers in the international system (Organski, A. F. K., 1958), especially the dynamic changes when the strength of rising powers approaches or surpasses that of established hegemonic powers. Its core theoretical assumption is that “changes in relative power are the main cause of systemic conflict or hegemonic turnover” (Gilpin, R., 1981). The power shift theory usually measures state power in terms of a single, quantifiable metric, providing a strong explanation for an era dominated by material power, but it oversimplifies the definition and measurement of power in today’s society, which is characterized by high levels of interdependence, profound technological

change, and diverse forms of power. In addition, the theory is often fatalistic in its predictions of systemic stability and the risk of war, and fails to adequately explain whether the transfer of power will inevitably lead to the end of hegemony. It holds a simple dichotomous logic of “compliance-challenge” (Wang, G. X., & Liu, J. H., 2017), and tends to regard hegemonic states as passive recipients of the transfer of power (You, Q. M., 2018). In the face of the limitations of the hegemonic stability theory and the power transfer theory, especially their inadequacy in explaining the endogenous dynamics of hegemony and the complex composition of power in the contemporary international system, this paper proposes and adopts the two-dimensional resonance as the core theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon of U.S. hegemonic decline in a more comprehensive way. The “two-dimensional resonance” model argues that the contemporary decline of U.S. hegemony stems from two core dimensions: endogenous and exogenous, emphasizing that internal structural problems erode U.S. hard power, while external pressures amplify endogenous vulnerabilities and impact the existing international order. The theoretical framework of this paper overcomes the inherent theoretical blind spot by proposing the two-way reinforcing resonance effect to provide a more holistic and dynamic analytical tool to deeply understand the challenges of the decline of U.S. hegemony.

1.2 Research Implications

An in-depth analysis of how multidimensional factors intertwine with each other to lead to the decline of U.S. hegemony is of great theoretical and practical significance. At the level of theoretical significance, analyzing the reasons for the decline of U.S. hegemony from a multidimensional perspective not only helps to better understand the dynamics of the current international political landscape, but also provides a direction for thinking about the evolutionary trends of the future international order. Although the academic community has conducted many discussions on the decline of U.S. hegemony; on the level of practical significance, Trump won the U.S. election in 2024, and the United States entered the Trump 2.0 era. Based on this background, analyzing the United States as a hegemonic country, its influence and legitimacy is weakening (Xie, T. et al., 2024), which plays an important guiding role in exploring the changes in the international pattern.

In summary, based on the macro background of the world’s great change not seen in a hundred years, this paper explores the domestic and international factors of the decline of U.S. hegemony, and argues that the U.S. hegemony has suffered mainly due to the cumulative effect of its domestic political and economic problems and the relative decline of its international influence. From the perspective of domestic factors, political polarization, generational differences, money politics and the waning of the industrial economy are weakening the absolute national strength of the U.S. At the international level, the eastward shift of the center of gravity of the global economy, the rise of the international multilateral mechanism and the new strategic competitive situation undoubtedly pose a threat to the U.S. hegemonic position. By defining relevant concepts and analyzing the impact of US domestic and international factors on its hegemonic status based on a comprehensive multi-dimensional perspective, this paper reveals the internal mechanism of US hegemonic decline and the theoretical framework of its dynamic

evolution, so as to provide a basis for the current international political issues and valuable references for the future development of global governance.

2. Theoretical Analysis Framework

2.1 Definition of Relevant Concepts

When discussing the decline of U.S. global hegemony, it is necessary to first determine what criteria are met to be considered a “hegemonic country” rather than just a “great power”? What kinds of countries can be called hegemonic? And in what ways is American hegemony manifested? How to determine whether a hegemony is in decline?

2.1.1. Hegemony and Hegemonic States

In the field of international political science, many famous scholars have repeatedly defined and elaborated the concept of hegemony based on diversified theoretical perspectives. According to Robert Keohane, hegemony is a dominance of economic resources, where a powerful state with superior economic and military resources implements a policy aimed at constructing an international system centered on national interests and cognitive frameworks (Keohane, R. O., 1984) ; Robert Gilpin argues that hegemony refers to a situation in which a powerful state dominates or controls the weaker states in the system (Gilpin, R., 1981) ; Wallerstein defines hegemony as a situation of power and its imbalance. It means the ability to almost always do whatever you want politically without making major concessions (Wallerstein, I., 1984) . Nuno Monteiro suggests that hegemony can be formed if a powerful state can successfully utilize its own power in the international system and form a controlling force over the system; scholar Qin Yaqing believes that the establishment and operation of hegemonic order requires the support of three kinds of power, namely material power, institutional power and legitimacy power (Qin, Y. Q., 2021). Summarizing the views of the above scholars, a hegemonic state can be comprehensively understood as a state that is dominant and dominant over other states in political, economic, military and cultural aspects.

Waltz pointed out in Theory of International Politics that the “pole” status of certain countries in the international system depends on their scores in terms of population, territory, resource endowment, economic strength, military power, political stability and capacity (Waltz, K. N., 2003) ; Li Wei believed that the strong control of the U.S. hegemony over the global system is reflected in six aspects, namely, military, finance, resources, industry, ideology and international system (Li, W., 2023) . Li Wei believes that the strong control of the US hegemony over the global system is mainly reflected in six aspects: military, finance, resources, industry, ideology and international system, which together constitute the foundation of the US hegemony after the World War II; based on the theory of dominance, scholar Wang Fan proposes that the US seeks, maintains and perpetuates its hegemonic position, and strengthens the US leading edge in the core areas through the formation of exclusive and unique power, the full utilization of soft power, and the continuous adjustment of its foreign strategy (Wang, F., 2023) .

Specifically, in terms of hard power, the U.S. military expenditure has always been in the forefront of the world, and the military alliance partner system presents a networked structure. The U.S. has strong control over the global financial system, and it can form industrial power to deter rivals by mastering the ability to “break the chain”. The country not only owns a number of global financial centers, and its currency also occupies a core position in the global monetary system; in addition to hard power, the United States of America’s soft power should not be underestimated. In terms of values and ideology, the U.S. has appeal and attraction to other countries, and through the establishment of the “hegemonic wing” of the international system network, which is extremely perfect, to grasp the institutional power.

To sum up, this paper believes that the criteria for determining the decline of U.S. hegemony can be based on hard power and soft power, of which material power, institutional power and legitimacy power are indispensable. For hard power, it mainly includes the political leadership and economic control of the United States; for soft power, it focuses on its international credibility and global governance capabilities.

2.1.2. Hegemonic Decline and Its Measurement

In order to analyze this thesis in depth, it is necessary to sort out the relevant concepts and causal theoretical framework of U.S. hegemonic decline. First of all, Kenneth Waltz pointed out in his book *Theory of International Politics* that relative power is the ability of a state to influence the behavior of other actors in the international system, and its essence is the efficiency of the distribution and use of power resources (Waltz, K. N., 2003) ; Robert Gilpin proposed in *War and Change in World Politics* that relative power not only depends on its own growth, but is also based on the changes in the power of other actors in the international system, for example For example, the increase of China’s GDP share in the United States belongs to the structural redistribution of power (Gilpin, R., 1981) ; Joseph Nye further added on the basis of the above theories, clarifying that relative power not only includes hard power elements such as military and economic power, but also needs to be included in the cultural attractiveness, institutional legitimacy, and other soft power dimensions, to form a comprehensive power assessment framework (Nye, J. S., Jr., 2004) . To summarize, relative power is the core concept for measuring the power contrast between countries in international politics, and its definition should be developed from the dimensions of material capacity and structural position. In practical analysis, relative power can be measured by a number of indicators, such as gross domestic product, military power, scientific and technological innovation capacity, international influence, diplomatic capacity and so on. Relative power cannot be measured by observing changes in a single indicator, but rather through a series of comprehensive indices that reflect a country’s relative position in the global system.

Secondly, Joseph Nye defines hard power and soft power in his book *Soft Power: America’s Global Power*, in which he clearly puts forward that hard power is usually manifested as a country’s military and economic power, which is used to realize national goals through means of coercion and deterrence, and is embodied in quantitative data indicators such as military expenditures, army size, nuclear weapons capability, economic scale, and energy production and consumption capacity; unlike hard

power, soft power is concerned with the country's ability to influence other countries through attraction rather than coercion, including cultural attraction, dissemination of values, diplomatic influence, etc. It does not achieve its goals through coercion, but rather through setting an example, shaping global identity and influencing the political tendencies of other countries, but its operationalization is more ambiguous and complex, and it can be done through the influence of cultural exports, participation in international organizations, and foreign aid policies, reputation of international brands, and foreign public diplomacy (among others) can be quantitatively analyzed. In addition, the global influence of multinational corporations and technology companies is also considered as part of soft power. In the theoretical discourse of "hegemonic decline", hard power is usually closely related to the dominant position of the state in the global security system, while soft power has gradually become the new focus of great power competition in the context of the decline of U.S. hegemony.

Finally, given that the theme of this paper centers on the decline of U.S. hegemony, it is important to clarify whether hegemony is indeed in decline and how to scientifically measure this decline. The current academic debate on "hegemonic decline" essentially stems from the cognitive differences on the nature of hegemonic power and its measurement standards. On the topic of "hegemony decline", academic views can be roughly divided into two categories. One category belongs to the camp of recession theory, which believes that the structural decline of American hegemony is irreversible. Emanuel Wallerstein believes that the U.S. hegemony has come to an end in a systemic crisis, that the unipolar moment is the exception rather than the norm in history, and that financialization and military expansion have accelerated its decline (Wallerstein, I., 2006). Scholar Wang Jisi believes that the U.S. is caught in the paradox of hegemony, and that its hegemony maintenance behavior has weakened its own credibility and soft power (Wang, J. S., 2003); the other category belongs to the camp of stabilizationism, which believes that the U.S. hegemony is still resilient and unshakeable. Joseph Nye argues that the US still has advantages in military, science and technology, finance, alliance networks and other structural power, and that the decline refers to "relative rather than absolute" (Nye, J. S., Jr., 2004).

Table 1: Conceptualization of Hard and Soft Power

Dimension	Hard Power	Soft Power
Sources of power	Accumulation of material resources	Conceptual identity construction
Timeliness of action	Immediacy	Strong lag
Mechanisms of action	Coercive power and deterrence	Agenda-setting and framing competition

2.1.3. "Hegemonic Decline" and "Decline in Relative Power"

When analyzing the decline of U.S. hegemony, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the concepts of "hegemonic decline" and "decline in relative power". For the concept of "hegemonic decline", scholars Lu Lingyu and Bao Jiazheng pointed out that hegemony is temporary (Lu, L. Y., &

Bao, J. Z.,(2019) , and all hegemonies can not escape the fate of decline, Lu Lingyu also based on this concept of hegemonic decline for specific elaboration, pointing out that hegemonic decline is the hegemonic country or the dominant political entity in the international power structure due to the loss of resources, the legitimacy of the dissolution and the rise of challengers. The decline of hegemony is a process in which the hegemonic state or dominant political entity's influence and position in the international power structure gradually diminishes due to the loss of resources, the dissolution of legitimacy, and the rise of challengers (Lu, L. Y., & Cui, L.,2024). In addition, according to George Modelski's theory of hegemonic cycle, he pointed out in his book *The Long Cycle of World Politics* that hegemonic decline is the systematic collapse of the dominant state's loss of its authority over international rule-making, public goods supply and systemic crisis management, and its signs include the loss of dominance in the international system, the deficit in the supply of public goods, and the crisis of legitimacy.

The concept of "declining relative strength" refers to the weakening of a country's overall strength or capacity in a specific area in comparison with other actors in the system in a specific time dimension, and the focus of the analysis is on the dynamic growth and decline of capacity based on a comparative perspective, rather than pointing to the overall collapse of the country's international leadership position. George Friedman, in his book *Friedman Says, The Next Hundred Years of Geopolitical Conflict*, emphasizes that while the relative power of the United States has declined in some areas, it does not mean that its global leadership has collapsed instantly (Friedman, G.,2009). John Ikenberry in *The Libertarian Leviathan* also clarifies that changes in a single dimension of power are not the decisive factor leading to the collapse of hegemony, and that declines in relative power may not be equated with hegemonic decline (Ikenberry, G. J.,2011). Joseph Nye points out that the decline of hegemony also includes other dimensions, such as changes in the international system and the rise of other countries' influence. Michael Beckley uses specific data to point out that US control at the top of the global value chain has not declined.

In the actual analysis, although the two concepts of "hegemonic decline" and "decline in relative power" are intertwined, "hegemonic decline" is more from the perspective of international leadership and global influence, while "relative power" is more from the perspective of "international leadership" and "global influence", and "relative power" is more from the perspective of "international leadership" and "global influence". Although the concepts of "hegemonic decline" and "relative power decline" are intertwined, "hegemonic decline" is more from the perspective of international leadership and global influence, while "relative power decline" focuses on the relative change of national power. Hegemonic decline is not only based on quantitative analysis of economic, military, political and other hard and soft power, but also includes changes in the institutional influence in the global governance system, the United States' voting influence in the United Nations, the dominant role in the international monetary system, and other similar cases, can be used as a measure of its hegemonic decline.

Table 2: Conceptualization of Hegemonic Decline and Declining Relative Power

Dimension	Decline in relative power	Hegemonic Decline
Core Characteristics	Decreasing share of material capabilities	Dual loss of rule-making
Measurement Indicators	GDP growth rate, arms race comparison	Veto power over reform of international regimes, rate of alienation of allies
Theoretical Perspective	Power Transfer Theory	Hegemonic Stability Theory

2.1.4.U.S. Relative Power and Hegemonic Decline

However, it is necessary to clearly point out that the thesis discussed in this paper that the U.S. global hegemony has shown a declining trend is centered on the changes in the relative strength of the U.S. as a sovereign state, rather than its absolute strength. A multilevel system of indicators is needed to assess whether a country's hegemony is in decline.

Table 3: Multi-Level Indicator System of Hegemonic Decline

Dimension	Characterization	Specific Indicators
Hard Power	Economic indicators	Economic scale, global trade share, foreign investment, industrial competitiveness, etc.
	Military Power	Military expenditure, number of military bases, global military power projection capability, etc.
	Diplomatic influence	The hegemonic power's leadership and influence in international organizations and its ability to dominate international affairs.
Soft Power	Cultural influence	Cultural output, dissemination of values, leadership of international public opinion, etc.

In response to the theme of hegemonic decline, many scholars in the academic world agree that the decline of a hegemonic power is closely related to the decline of its relative power. In his book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Kennedy points out that the decline of hegemony is not immediately manifested in the decline of its national power, but in its ability to control global affairs and resources (Kennedy, P.,1987) ; Keohane also emphasizes in *Hegemony and Beyond* that the decline of a nation is not simply due to an absolute decline in power, but rather to the fact that it can no longer maintain a stable international system as it did in the past (Keohane, R. O.,1984) . This is because the global power structure is increasingly complex, the emergence of multi-polar trend, the hegemonic countries face more challenges from other rising powers, rather than the traditional hegemonic competition; Gilpin also put forward the hegemony cost theory, that the hegemonic countries in order to maintain the

international order need to pay high costs, and emerging countries can “hitchhike” to achieve the low cost of the rise, the hegemonic countries gradually depleted resources. As a result, the resources of hegemonic countries are gradually depleted (Gilpin, R.,1981).

In summary, the survival of hegemony depends on its relative position in the global power structure. Even as the US grows in absolute power, its ability to shape international rules, suppress competitors, and pass on costs is gradually being eroded, and this is the essence of hegemonic decline.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Two-Dimensional Resonance

Based on the domestic dimension, the institutional decay of the political system and the structural imbalance of the economic base constitute a mutually reinforcing vicious cycle. Politically, the Madisonian mechanism of separation of powers and checks and balances has been alienated into “veto politics” in the context of contemporary political polarization, and the intergenerational political fault line and the erosion of money politics have further eroded the foundation of democratic legitimacy; economically, the structural transmutation of the economic base has exacerbated the vulnerability of the political system. The U.S. dollar is a clear manifestation of U.S. hegemony in the international financial system, but in recent years the effectiveness of U.S. dollar hegemony has been significantly weakened, the limitations of the U.S. unilateral sanctioning tool in the multifaceted settlement system have gradually appeared, and the decline in political leadership and the weakening of the control of financial capitalism have jointly dissolved the hard power foundation required for the maintenance of the hegemonic system.

Based on the international dimension, the unipolar hegemonic order constructed by the United States has encountered systematic challenges from multipolar forces, and its hard power advantage has been seriously depleted when it hedges against institutional power, with its international credibility and influence significantly declining. In addition, the legitimacy crisis of liberal hegemony is particularly significant in the dimension of soft power, and emerging powers have reconfigured the framework of the post-World War II international system and weakened the U.S. capacity for global governance by promoting the institutional innovation of the rules of global multilateral cooperation. This process of power transfer has essentially constructed a progressive deconstruction of the underlying logic of the post-war liberal order, and the weakening of the U.S.-led hegemonic system has evolved into an objective trend of structural change in the international system.

The two-dimensional resonance model proposed in this paper argues that the decline of contemporary U.S. hegemony stems from the cumulative, structural, and resonant strengthening of the evolution and interaction of the two core dimensions mentioned above. Among them, the endogenous dimension focuses on the structural contradictions, systemic flaws and social patterns within the hegemonic power itself, which continue to erode the foundation of U.S. national power and international action capabilities; the exogenous dimension focuses on the changes in the international system

environment and the impact on hegemony, which is specifically characterized by the structural impact on the existing hegemonic order caused by global power redistribution, technological disruption and competition in global governance concepts, forcing the U.S. to cope with a drastic increase in costs. The cost of the U.S. response has increased dramatically. This “internal erosion” and “external pressure” stimulate and empower each other, and when the negative factors in both internal and external dimensions are coupled at a particular point, such as domestic political crises and major international setbacks, the impact may be far more than the simple addition of individual factors, leading to the accelerated loosening of the foundation of hegemony and the impact on hegemony. The impact may far exceed the simple addition of individual factors, leading to the accelerated loosening of the hegemonic foundation and the precipitous decline of the system’s authority, presenting the systemic vulnerability of “the whole exceeding the sum of its parts”.

2.2.2. Causal Mechanism

The causal mechanism of the decline of U.S. global hegemony also shows a significant two-way interaction, which is closely related to the hegemonic stability theory. In fact, the hegemonic stability theory was first introduced by the economist Charles Kindleberger in *The World Depression: 1929-1939* to introduce the concepts of leaders and public goods (Kindleberger, C. P., 1973), but did not explicitly use the expression “hegemony”. Robert Gilpin and Stephen Krasner, based on the realist perspective, emphasized that the starting point of leaders’ decision-making was not only out of economic interests, but also implied a certain political intention; later on, Robert Keohane, while recognizing the role of hegemonic powers in the creation of international systems, further clarified the continuity of the system’s independence from the hegemony (Keohane, R. O., 1984); in the nineties, David Lake pointed out that the realist theory of hegemony, the theory of strategic trade and the “second intention reversal” had been the most important factors in the development of the international system, and that it was the most important. In the 1990s, David Lake pointed out that realist hegemony theory, strategic trade theory and the theory of “second-intention reversal” all belonged to the theoretical scope of hegemonic stabilization theory, which was gradually expanded into a research program consisting of hegemony theory from the perspective of security and leadership theory from the perspective of public goods (Zhong, F. T., 2010). Joseph Nye put forward the concept of “soft power”, expanding the connotation of hegemony and emphasizing the role of non-material power; in the twenty-first century, John Ikenberry put forward “institutionalized hegemony” by combining libertarianism and realism in *Libertarian Leviathan* (Ikenberry, G. J., 2001). He argues that the U.S. reduces the cost of hegemony through the establishment of a rule-based liberal international order. In *The End of the American World Order*, Amita Acharya critiques the hegemony of Western centrism from the perspective of the Global South, arguing that emerging countries and regional organizations are challenging the single hegemonic model and pushing the system towards pluralism (Acharya, A., 2014). In summary, the international political science community has been constantly revising and rethinking the theoretical content with the changes in the international situation, but the anchor point is always around “how the hegemonic powers

maintain the stability of the system through strength and rules, and judge the conditions and limits of such stability”.

In view of the western countries to study international relations from the international system structure level, this paper focuses on the hegemonic stability theory put forward by Robert Gilpin, he pointed out that the hegemonic stability theory of the core proposition is that “a hegemonic position of the existence of a free country, is the world market economy is a necessary condition for the full development of the economy”. According to Gilpin, in an international society where the development of the power of the major countries is uneven, a country needs to have both the ability and the will to become a hegemonic country in the objective sense. In addition, the hegemonic power also needs to maintain the stability of the global system through the provision of international public goods, however, the hegemonic power will indispensably incur high costs when assuming these responsibilities, and its long-term maintenance depends on the ability to pass on part of the costs to other countries. Therefore, “hegemonic cost transfer failure” means that the hegemonic powers are unable to effectively transfer the costs of maintaining the system to their allies or other countries, which in turn leads to their own overburdening, weakening their hegemonic status and even causing systemic instability. This is the internal vulnerability of the U.S. hegemonic system, that is, the hegemonic power’s ability to transfer costs is closely related to its relative strength and willingness to cooperate internationally.

2.2.2.1. The Triple Transmission to the International Order

First of all, the intensification of the U.S. domestic political polarization has led to the U.S. foreign policy is in a difficult situation, the two parties in the change of leadership to formulate trade policy, climate agreements, military commitments and other key issues repeatedly tug-of-war, the formation of the “policy pendulum effect”. This inevitably leads to the United States led by the construction of the alliance system facing a trust deficit, its right to speak and dominance of the damage, the unpredictability of international policy to strengthen the support of countries to the United States policy and the willingness of member states to strategic synergies have been weakened, resulting in the decline of the United States international credibility, the legitimacy of the foundation of global leadership is facing a fundamental question.

Secondly, the hollowing out of the United States industry and the imbalance of its economic structure have led to a decline in the ability to adjust domestic industrial policy and a consequent decline in the ability to supply global public goods. In addition, the strategic overdraft of weaponization of the US dollar has triggered the entropy increase of monetary power, weakened the foundation of multilateral cooperation, and weakened the leadership of global governance.

Finally, the value fault line between the “Baby Boomer Era” and “Era Z” in the United States has appeared in the areas of climate justice, racial equality, and international responsibility sharing, and the spillover of the domestic social movement into an international image crisis, with the soft power indicators continuing to decline, and the values diplomacy that has been consistently promoted has encountered the cold shoulder of countries in the global South. Values-based diplomacy has been met

with a cold reception by countries in the global South, and the intergenerational value fault line has reduced U.S. leadership in the arena of international multilateral cooperation.

2.2.2.2. Reverse Shaping by Pressure from the International System

The strengthening of the multipolar pattern has forced the United States to reconstruct its industrial policy, China's "Belt and Road" infrastructure output and the European Union's Global Gateway Program have forced the United States to adjust its international assistance and diplomatic strategy, and the domestic economic development has shown a different kind of tension, with the labor-intensive industries returning, and the domestic scientific and technological nationalism intensifying the closed situation of Silicon Valley's innovation system. Closed situation.

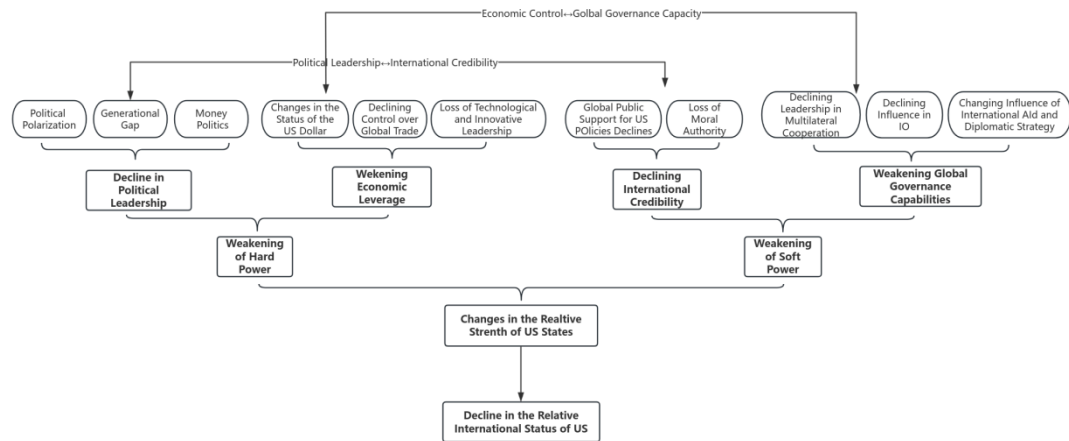
The international rules of checks and balances to the United States also impose a considerable amount of institutional innovation pressure, BRICS expansion, ASEAN centrality to strengthen the CPTPP rules iteration of the system gravity impact on the U.S. hegemony of the system, giving rise to the United States to break through the traditional framework of FTAs, to make the policy adjustment of the "small yard and high walls".

Accompanied by the sudden outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the return of traditional security issues, the United States military investment has shown a sharp rise in trend, and then undoubtedly into the excessive consumption of military resources predicament. In view of the frequent regional hot wars in each continental plate constantly consume the U.S. weapons stockpile, its response to the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, the Middle East and other hotspot issues highlighted the decadence of weak military power. This not only inspires intergenerational anti-war sentiments among the domestic population, but also intensifies the contradiction between the interests of the military-industrial complex and the sustainability of public finances.

To sum up, the deepening of the current multi-polarization pattern is reshaping the U.S. strategic choices and policy logic from a multi-dimensional perspective, pushing the international political economy into the historical node of power structure reconstruction. As a result, the United States strategic debugging presents a double dilemma, that is, the United States domestic industrial nationalist turn reflects the logic of globalization division of labor and sovereignty security claims of incommensurability, the contraction of institutional hegemony reshaping at the same time exposed the power centrality of the narrative and the emerging economies of the rules of the cooperation mechanism of the tension between. The foreign strategy of "precise containment" adopted by the United States is essentially a compromised response of uni-level thinking to the multi-polar reality, resulting in further erosion of its institutional legitimacy. In addition, the over-expansion of the United States in the military sphere reveals that the rise in the importance of traditional security issues has not only failed to consolidate the effectiveness of power projection, but has also deepened the security dilemma due to the overdraft of resources and the tearing apart of the domestic consensus. The above compound crises reflect the deep law of the evolution of the international system: when the cost transfer mechanism of the hegemonic power cannot cover the power loss generated by multipolarity, the limited nature of its

strategic tools and the polycentricity of the world order will inevitably form an irreconcilable structural contradiction, which will ultimately compel the logic of U.S. hegemony to move towards redefinition in the course of self-correction and system reconstruction.

Picture 1: Explanatory Framework of Multidimensional Factors



Synthesizing the explanatory framework shown in Picture 1, this paper hypothesizes that the cumulative effect of the U.S. domestic political and economic problems, as well as the relative decline of its international influence, has caused changes in the relative strength of the U.S. state, leading to the decline of U.S. hegemony. The causal hypotheses for each link can be specifically categorized as:

H1: The decline in U.S. political leadership interacts with its declining international credibility.

H2: The weakening of U.S. economic control interacts with its weakened global governance capacity.

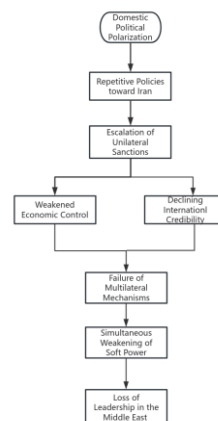
H3: The decline of political leadership and the weakening of economic control weaken U.S. hard power. Declining international credibility and global governance capabilities weaken U.S. soft power. The combination of hard and soft power has led to a decline in the relative international standing of the United States.

3. Case Study

This paper uses a combination of qualitative, which is based on the case study method, and quantitative, which is based on collecting and organizing relevant data, to verify the causal logic chain. Among other things, qualitative cases are used to explain causal mechanisms, and quantitative data are used to verify whether these causal relationships hold true on a larger scale. In terms of the logic of the text, this paper covers all hypotheses and highlights both “domestic-international” interactions and “hard-soft power” resonance based on the dual cases of the Iran deal and global climate governance.

3.1 Iran Nuclear Issue

Picture 2: Logical Chain of Assumptions in the Case of Iran's Nuclear Issue



This paper selects the Iranian case, whose typicality and specificity are now better linked to the confrontation between the U.S. Republicans and Democrats, unilateral withdrawal from multilateral agreements, weakening of military deterrence and decline in international mobilization, which is suitable for the hypotheses put forward. In addition, the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal not only reflects the decline in leadership brought about by the U.S. domestic political program, but also confirms the “hegemonic paradox” that unilateral actions taken by the U.S. to maintain hegemony accelerate the diffusion of power. In 2015, the U.S., China, Russia, the U.K., France, and Germany agreed to a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, under which Iran committed to limitations and activities in exchange for the U.S. and China’s support for the Iranian nuclear program. Iran committed to restrictions and activities in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, however, there are divergent views within the US.

3.1.1 .H1 Validation: Declining Political Leadership and International Credibility

Republican leaders in the U.S. Congress have publicly opposed the deal, with 57 Republican senators co-signing a letter to Iran saying “the deal can be repealed by the next president” (Baker, P., 2015). In 2015 the Republican-controlled Congress passed the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, which requires Iranian compliance reports to Congress every 90 days, and in 2018 the Democrats opposed withdrawing from the deal, the 2023 Republicans block the U.S. from returning to the deal, and congressional competition prevents the U.S. from maintaining continuity in its policy toward Iran. According to CRS Report IF11931, its policy recurrence rate is 83 percent. This has put the U.S. on a slippery slope of credibility in the international arena.

In the Vienna talks in 2021, Iran refused to talk directly with the US and asked the EU to act as an intermediary between the two countries. In addition, according to the Pew Global Survey, public trust in the U.S. in the Middle East has fallen from 38% in 2015 to 17% in 2023. The decline in the

international credibility of the United States has in turn led to a weakening of the diplomatic authority of its president and a decline in the credibility of the ruling party (Pew Research Center,2023).

3.1.2 .H2 Verification: Weakening Economic Control and Global Governance Capacity

In 2018, the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA, reintroduced extreme pressure sanctions against Iran, and banned third-country imports of Iranian oil. The international community reacted strongly to this move, and although the EU is a U.S. ally, it activated the INSTEX settlement mechanism to maintain non-dollar trade with Iran, circumventing U.S. policy for the first time in a major polie (European External Action Service,2019) ; the IAEA multilateral mechanism was paralyzed, and even if Iran gradually breaks through the uranium enrichment limit from 2019, the JCPOA dispute settlement mechanism is also invalidated by the U.S. withdrawal. As Table 4 shows, the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions highlights the decreasing trend, and the U.S. economic control highlights the decline. In addition, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) admitted Iran as a full member in 2023, and Iran became the ninth SCO member state to actively participate in SCO initiatives. on July 4, 2024, the leaders of the member states, based on the shifting context of structural changes in the global political, economic, and other areas of international relations, issued the Astana Declaration to develop more in-depth cooperation with other member states in the areas of transportation, counterterrorism, energy, economic cooperation, and humanistic exchange. In the areas of transportation, counter-terrorism, energy, economic cooperation and humanistic exchanges, the leaders of the member states launched the Astana Declaration to develop deeper cooperation with other member states, and committed themselves to achieving win-win cooperation and the realization of the United States and the U.S., which to a considerable extent also impacted on the hegemonic order under the U.S. rule, and the U.S. ability to weaken global governance.

Table 4: Effect of U.S. Sanctions on Iran

Types of Sanctions	objective	Actual Effect		Data Source
Financial Sactions	Cut off Iranian central bank	Creating a Russian-Iranian”oil and gas for commodities mechanism		SWIFT Annual Review
Oil Embargo	Iran’s Crude Oil Exports Zeroed Out	China’s imports up 210%		GACC Customs Data
Indicators	2017	2020	Comparison	Data Source
Iranian oil Exports	2.5 million bpd	0.5 million bpd	80% decline	OPEC Monthly Report
Non-U.S. Dollar Transaction share	12%	35%	23% increase	CBRIS Annual Report

3.1.3 .H3 Verification: As a Result of the Combined Loss of Hard and Soft Power

The Biden administration attempted to return to the JCPOA, but due to the polarization of domestic bipartisan politics and the pressure of the midterm elections, the negotiations reached a stalemate, with Secretary of State Blinken demanding that Iran stop uranium enrichment first, and Iran insisting that the U.S. lift all sanctions first, making it impossible for the two sides to reconcile their positions. During this period, the U.S. Congress restricted the executive branch's authority to lift sanctions, demonstrating the vice-like grip of domestic politics on foreign policymaking. When negotiations broke down completely in 2023, Iran accelerated its Look East strategy and formally joined the BRICS regime in 2024, signaling the backfiring consequences of the US isolation policy.

In the hard power dimension, the breakthrough of Iran's nuclear capability became a direct reflection of the timeliness of U.S. deterrence. On the one hand, Iran's uranium enrichment level soared from 3.67% in 2018 to 60%, and deployed 1,000 IR-6 centrifuges, with an enriched uranium stockpile of 128 kilograms; on the other hand, against the backdrop of an accelerating regional arms race, the number of attacks on U.S. military bases in the Middle East surged from 18 times in 2018 to 46 times in 2023, while killing him in 2022 by secretly introducing China's "Dongfeng-21" missile technology, the UAE procurement of Chinese L-15 trainer aircraft, traditional allies to break through the U.S. weapons monopoly system.

And the collapse of the soft power dimension is more reflected in the regional reconstruction of the order. Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and six other countries signed the Tehran Declaration on Security, a clear commitment to "reject military intervention by foreign forces", marking the collapse of the U.S. security guarantee system. According to the Arab Barometer 2023, 63% of Arab youth believe that China will be the most important partner in the next decade. Moreover, after the expansion of BRICS to 10 countries, the combined GDP exceeded that of the G7, member countries announced the adoption of a local currency settlement system, and the volume of yuan trading on the Tehran Stock Exchange even surged by 300%.

The above also validates Gilpin's hegemonic cost-transfer theory: the US has been increasing the cost of patronage to maintain hegemony in the Middle East but the strategic benefits continue to diminish. This structural imbalance of cost-benefit has led to the reversal of the US relative power position in the Middle East, and the failure of hard power and the collapse of soft power have formed a resonance effect, causing the decline of hegemony to embark on the process of accumulating quantitative changes into qualitative changes.

3.2 Global Climate Governance

Picture 3: Logical Chain of Assumptions in the Case of Climate Governance



The Obama administration pushed for the Paris Agreement in 2015, committing to a 26%-28% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 compared to 2005, establishing U.S. climate leadership, but was severely constrained by domestic constraints. Domestic fossil energy industry interests provided \$35.4 million in political contributions to the 114th Congress to push for the Clean Power Plan to be organized through an agreement. The federal Supreme Court intervened in February 2016 to freeze the EPA's Clean Power Plan and weaken the administration's functions. The Trump administration announced in 2017 that it was pulling out of the Paris Agreement, repealing the Clean Power Plan, and easing shale gas extraction restrictions. The international system reacted immediately to this event, with the EU joining forces with China to launch the China-EU Joint Declaration on Climate and set up a Green Partnership Fund, and the IEC approving a Chinese-led standard for photovoltaic wafers, which subverts the U.S.-based SEMI system and replaces it with a technological standard (for more details, see Table 5). The International Council for Sustainability Standards (ICSU) also rejected the U.S. SASB standard and instead adopted the framework of the EU Sustainability Reporting Directive (SRD). These events show a mismatch between domestic political factors and economic resources, accelerating the U.S.'s shift from being a "rule maker" to a "rule taker" in the global climate governance system, and changing the role of international actors.

The Biden administration returned to the Paris Agreement in 2021, but domestic policies have repeatedly weakened its international credibility. 2022 Inflation Reduction Act to \$369 billion in climate investment to strengthen local subsidies, but because of the violation of the WTO principle of non-discrimination triggered by the European Union, China and other 32 countries to jointly litigate, the reality of the U.S. strategic resources exposed the shortcomings.

All in all, as the U.S. climate policy continues to regress, resulting in a serious lack of realization of the promised goals. The U.S. in the process of global energy green transformation of the discourse power and guiding force continues to decline, resulting in a series of subsequent chain reaction. The collapse of the hard power of the United States on the issue of global climate governance focuses on the two levels of resources and technology, while the collapse of soft power is reflected in the transfer of rule-making power and the loss of leadership recognition. The combined erosion of hard power and soft power has led to an increase in the cost of upholding U.S. hegemony and has put the country in a difficult position.

Table 5: Technical Standard Substitution Results

Technology Sector	U.S. Market Share (2016)	China Market Share (2023)	Data Source
PV			
polysilicon production	28%	87%	Bernreuter Research
Wind turbines	18%	55%	GWEC Global Wind Report

Indicators	2016	2020	Comparison	Data Source
Iranian oil Exports	15%	7%	53% decline	IEA
Non-U.S. Dollar Transaction share	20%	45%	125% increase	World Bank

4. Conclusion

This paper constructs a two-dimensional resonance framework of “hard power and soft power” and a multi-dimensional interaction framework of “domestic and international” factors to answer the questions of “why the US hegemony declines under the great changes” and “the specific mechanism of the decline of US hegemony”. “The specific mechanism of the decline of U.S. hegemony”. After combining the classic assertions of past experts and scholars with specific information from case data, this paper concludes that the gradual decline of U.S. hegemony under the macro background of the Great Changes is mainly attributed to the combined effect of the accumulation of domestic political and economic problems and the relative weakening of its influence in the international arena. Specifically, political polarization, veto-based political mechanisms, significant generational differences and money politics in the United States have combined to undermine the effectiveness of its domestic political leadership. In addition, structural imbalances in the economy, the contradictory relationship between the financial and industrial spheres, and the imbalanced strategy adopted in the international economic order have adversely affected the strength of the U.S. economic development. At the same time, the continuous rise of emerging forces in the international arena, the gradual weakening of the relative strength of the United States, the increasing diversification of the international governance system, as well as a significant decline in the international credibility of the United States and other factors, also pose a serious challenge to U.S. hegemony. Under the background of the era of unprecedented changes, the domestic factors of the United States and the international situation interact with each other, resulting in the decline of the relative strength of the United States and the decline of American hegemony.

Compared with the mainstream theory, this paper transcends the unidirectional thinking of “external determinism” and “internal determinism”, and believes that the decline of U.S. hegemony is the result of the common role of the two, deeply intertwined, and emphasizes that the endogenous dimension of the United States is the key factor of the hegemonic decline when analyzing. Key factors. The deep contradictions and structural defects of the U.S. hegemonic system itself are the internal causes of the decline, while the external pressure exposes, amplifies and accelerates the outbreak of endogenous problems. The degradation of domestic conditions has greatly weakened the ability of the United States to cope with external pressures, which is very different from the idea of attributing the challenges only to the rise of external forces, and provides stronger explanatory power for the phenomenon of U.S.

hegemonic decline. The concept of “resonance” suggests that policymakers should avoid internal and external policy fragmentation, and that a more strategically coordinated and holistic response is needed.

This study is based on the theoretical framework of dual resonance. It comprehensively examines the process of the decline of American hegemony, the internal governance capabilities of China, and the interplay between the international power distribution system and the systemic decline of the United States. The study reveals the inherent decline of the system as a whole. However, the study also identifies three areas that require further exploration.

Firstly, the verification of the model’s theoretical framework is required. The current research is mainly based on the interpretation of hard and soft power through case studies, which is effective in capturing the dynamic logic of complex variables at the national and international levels. However, there is a lack of quantitative evidence to support the dynamic relationship between core indicators and the heterogeneity of variables. Subsequent research will require the introduction of a more advanced method for studying the theoretical framework, to further examine the causal chain and to conduct a systematic review of the mechanisms of multiple cases. This will improve the effectiveness of the theoretical framework’s causal inferences.

Secondly, the theoretical framework has yet to be expanded in depth. Despite the integration of the core tenets of the theory of hegemonic stability and the theory of power transfer, the dual-axis model has room for improvement in its incorporation of the interventionist school of thought. This is particularly evident in its failure to adequately address how domestic institutions can filter international pressures, and its lack of exploration of the dissipation of hegemonic legitimacy from a constructivist perspective. This means that the domestic political decline must be understood through the lens of competing discourses to be able to understand the value that the international community places on liberal international order. Future research should focus on developing a model that can quantify the influence of the House of Representatives on the political landscape, and provide specific data on the transmission of the strategic intentions of the international system. This will help to improve the theory of hegemonic stability and power transfer.

Thirdly, the challenge of evaluating the historical relevance of the present moment is significant. The conclusions that have been reached are rooted in the geopolitical and economic practices of the post-Cold War era, and their explanatory power is being challenged by the strategic introspection of the Trump administration in the current era. As the phenomenon of populism accelerates its de-internationalisation and weaponisation, the existing analytical framework must be updated through longitudinal research to ensure its relevance. The structural transformation of the variables that are being monitored is likely to have a significant impact on the logic of the underlying forces of hard and soft power.

In conclusion, the present text is characterised by a tension between theoretical abstraction and empirical evidence, while concomitantly offering a novel analytical perspective on the mechanisms that underpin the rise and fall of great powers. Subsequent research may be based on the following machine,

with the aim of expanding our understanding of the complex dynamics of emerging order formation, and deepening our comprehension of the intricacies of international political systems.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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