

Leeching Its Way to the Top; The American Empire and Its Decline

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Abstract

After maintaining a hegemony over the world for decades, it is time for the American empire to come to an end. The main reason behind this decline is the monetary greed of the nation's leaders. This greed has permeated everything, from diluting what is meant to be an equal democracy to making imperialism synonymous with America's foreign policy. However, as the state of the nation and its international relations intensify, there seems to be no plan in place for structural changes. This is all happening while the nation's competitors are sowing the seeds to rise to the top of the hierarchy themselves. As a result, in fifty years the power of the United States will have declined, and the world will enter a new multipolar era.

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America functions like a corporation, with citizens acting as customers to buy basic needs such as food, shelter, or healthcare. And as any company would, as the number of consumers have increased over the years, so have prices. Resources, the nation's power, are harvested from foreign nations with no regard for how it may affect them. But still, customer satisfaction remains at an all-time low with Americans more distrustful than ever of their own government. The problem here is clearly visible. A government should not operate like a corporation, and yet this nation runs on the exploitation of people within and outside of it.

As the consequences of this unethical and illogical behavior catches up with the United States, it is clear that this would never have worked out in the long run. Without taking power forcefully from other nations and with citizens calling for the end of their own exploitation, America is no longer able to remain the most powerful. There is now nowhere left for the nation to turn to and steal its power. In the next fifty years, America will have two choices. It can keep accelerating the current way of life and suffer a historic fall from grace as the country implodes from national turmoil and international ostracization. Or the government can finally focus its efforts inward and heal a system that has fallen to pieces. However, even with the latter option that the country will inevitably ignore it is still too late for America to retain an unipolar position within the world after all the history that has led it here. Now that the nation is reaching a fork in the road, Americans can only cross their fingers for the nation to realize what needs to be done. This paper seeks to prove that after decades of using others to grow its power, America has now damaged its relationships within and beyond the country beyond repair, leading to an irreversible decline by the year 2076.

The Illusion of Democracy

Many say that a great building needs a strong foundation, but the United States does not have that. As this foundation only continues to weaken instead of strengthening, it is important to understand how this nation has been constructed to understand why Americans are unhappy with it. America has been built for and always controlled by the rich, and this is only intensifying and becoming more common knowledge, leading to decline within the nation.

The Constitution and formation of America's socio-economic life were carefully constructed by the rich so that the main purpose of the country was to provide more profit for them. Worryingly close to half of the delegates at the Constitutional Convention, 21 out of 55, had in fact favored a form of monarchy to rule over America, but only avoided breaching the topic due to a fear of popular opposition (Parenti, 2011, p.16). Out of the remaining wealthy men deciding the future of America, many had selfish reasons to determine their choosing of a republican government. Madison and those similar to him believed a nation without nosy nobility would allow the bourgeoisie class to be most successful in their pursuit of money (Parenti, 2011, p.16). Although the Constitution was revolutionary at the time for its upholding of individual rights, the convention was made up exclusively of the wealthiest men in the country whose criteria for decision making was strongly influenced by their own self-interests. The individuals who got these rights were all white, men, property-owning, and so on. Parenti (2011, p.14) noted that the Constitution itself had in fact faced much opposition due to its inherently elitist nature, but the extreme wealth of the rich Federalists and the resulting political and media control allowed for them to execute a successful ratification. As a result of its flawed creation, the Constitution has always been a work of progress rather than an untouchable law of the land. Slavery was only abolished 75 years later in 1865, a year later was the first year all white men

that were not property owners could vote, the 15th Amendment in 1870 granted suffrage to men of all races, women were given voting rights in 1920, and only after Congress lowered the minimum military age draft to 18 years did they lower the voting age to 18 as well. (Johnston, 2024). The people and government of America have always been aware of the nation's inequitable voting system and although progress has been made it has been at a snail's pace and always heavily opposed.

Additionally, this progress fails to address the true problems within the voting system. Yes, black Americans were given an equal right to suffrage in 1870, but that solution by itself clearly seems to be lacking as black voter turnout has historically been much lower than that of the white population (Caughey et al., 2025). Looking at racial disparities, it becomes clear how the United States has valued equality for the sake of appearances over a truly equitable society. Literacy tests and poll taxes were infamously used during the Jim Crow era to discourage black Americans from voting in elections. Paying the cost of poll taxes disproportionately affected black Americans and according to Evans (2021), in 1800 "76 percent of southern African Americans were illiterate, a rate of 55 percent points greater than that for southern white people". In fact, when these two policies were first implemented at the 1890 Mississippi State Convention legislature member James Vardaman stated openly that "In Mississippi we have in our constitution legislated against the racial peculiarities of the Negro. . . . When that device fails, we will resort to something else" (Evans, 2021). The goal of maintaining a white supremacist society was never even hidden, instead displayed publicly in a shocking manner. And to Vardaman's word America has stayed true, continuing to gatekeep democracy from its citizens of color today.

In 2024 “4 million Americans were prohibited from voting due to laws that disenfranchise citizens convicted of felony offenses” (Porter & Chung, 2021). And although this is already bad by itself, the implications of this data become worse when looking at how the prison system is structured in the United States. Porter & Chung (2021) also say 1.3 million of these citizens are black adults. But even though this is a third of all Americans disenfranchised from voting, black Americans make up only 13.7% of the nation (*QuickFacts: United States*, 2024). In total, there were more black Americans incarcerated in 2015 than enslaved in 1850. Additionally, 46% of the people whose voting rights are affected by this have in fact already served their time and are not on probation or parole (Porter & Chung, 2021).

None of this is accidental. America alone holds 25% of the global incarcerated population while having only 5% of the world's people (Cloward, 2016, p.143). There is an estimation that anywhere from 6% to 15.4% of those declared guilty have been wrongfully convicted, but this does not deter the system from pressing forward and putting people behind bars without even an attempt to reform (What Is... 2025). The purposeful targeting of one race becomes even more clear with the realization that there were more black men in prison, probation or parole in 2015 than were enslaved in 1850 (Cloward, 2016, p.144). This mass incarceration system has been carefully curated not to rehabilitate or protect citizens, but to strip their rightful power away from them in favor of the corrupt government. The United States is still denying basic rights to citizens and that system is still infused with white supremacy at its core. The only thing that has changed is how the government is going about this. When one of the main things America is known for is democracy and equality, the constant opposition to these ideals from the government through their treatment of citizens that are convicted or people of color.

According to a Pew Research study 71% of Americans feel that their political system does not allow citizens like them to have an influence. And in the same article it is detailed that 62% of Americans are not satisfied with their government, the fourth lowest rating in a group of nineteen countries. The United States government sticks out like a sore thumb amongst its peers in regard to political efficacy amongst its citizens. Government officials are meant to be public servants, listening and acting on the wants of citizens, making them feel heard. Instead, their actions make citizens feel separated from their government and unable to take action for themselves. And as this attitude occurs and it becomes clear to people that it is impossibly hard to change this situation, it will of course cause a negative view of the government as a whole (Wike et al., 2022).

The Economist has declared that “the United States now ranks not among the world’s ‘full democracies’ (such as Canada, Japan, and most of Western Europe) but among the ‘flawed democracies’ (such as Greece, Israel, Poland, and Brazil)” (Williamson, 2023). The failure of the government to perform effectively is due to how it has been set up to benefit only the most wealthy and elite citizens of the United States. Every crack in America’s democracy is now widening, threatening to cause a total collapse. If this nation continues to fail at electing politicians who can effectively serve the nation, the United States will fail to uphold its current power status. American democracy has never been truly equal, but if rapid change does not take place to fix that, the validity of this democracy as a whole will be undermined.

Imperialism Disguised as Foreign Policy

The United States has undoubtedly cemented itself as a power player within the international system due to its imperialist nature. The nation was founded upon the colonization of indigenous communities on this land, and this imperialist nature has never been separated

from America. But this focus on military power and bringing down other countries may cause America's own downfall.

The total American military budget for the fiscal year of 2026 is \$1.05 trillion (Flatoff & Liang, 2026). Ironically, this is called a defense budget when it is common knowledge that American intentions are the exact opposite. Even if every other industrialized nation is combined, the United States spends more on the military than all of them (Parenti, 2011). And even then, "The DOD's own auditors admit the military cannot account for one-fourth of what it spends, over \$100 billion a year" (Parenti, 2011). With anywhere between 750-800 global military bases, America holds around 70% to 85% of all foreign bases in the world, costing the country over \$65 billion a year (The Facts about US Military Bases Overseas, 2025). This comes at a great economic and environmental price, not to mention the human cost of crime, trafficking, and displacement of indigenous peoples (The Facts about US Military Bases Overseas, 2025). It is evident beyond question that the military seems to be America's number one priority, and if one were to assume that these efforts may be going overboard, they would be correct. America's economy is intertwined with a perpetual state of war, and this is not feasible. This current system has other countries and their innocent people as the primary source of power, which not only ignores Americans but comes at their own expense. However, even after all of these irreversible damages, American military policy has only succeeded in aiding the nation's decline.

Not even counting nations that were not necessarily directly harmed, "since World War 2, U.S. imperialism has killed at least 36 million people globally in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, the Congo, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Chad, Libya, East Timor, Grenada, Honduras, Iran, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Sudan, Greece,

Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Somalia, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Palestine” (Mapping U.S. Imperialism, 2023). Over and over again, the United States has used excuses of spreading democracy, humanitarian aid, and other forms of supposedly good intentions as an excuse to show its military might. But when so many millions of people have been killed and an immeasurable number have been harmed, displaced, or otherwise negatively impacted, these excuses no longer carry any believable validity. Furthermore, if America has not even come close to a fair democracy yet, it is clear that it is in no way qualified to protect real democracy on an international scale.

Without even examining each situation individually, it is apparent that there is no possibility that America has had any positive impact on the world through these actions. This is not even mentioning the consequences of these actions, such as how “To take down the Soviets, the CIA, in tandem with the Saudis and the Pakistanis, had armed and built up groups of extreme Islamists, who, it turned out, had no intention of going away once the Soviets were driven from Afghanistan” (Engelhardt , 2016). This forever changed Afghanistan and caused a humanitarian crisis that has lasted decades. In this way, America has caused long lasting and irreparable damage to millions globally with its imperialist foreign policy.

Decades of this behavior is now proving to have changed the entire international attitude towards the United States and its hegemony. According to Jeffrey Sachs, “If policymakers continue acting as though military pressure alone can preserve geopolitical primacy, they may deepen exactly the decline they are trying to prevent” (ScheerPost Staff, 2026). Dominance and violence in the place of collaboration can no longer grant power in today’s world. The 2026 war with Iran may embody this idea and be a historical turning point. In regard to the war, McCoy (2026) states that “When an imperial power like Athens then, or America now, is in decline, its

leaders often react emotionally by mounting seemingly bold military strikes in hopes of regaining the imperial grandeur that's slipping through their fingers", but this only serves to accelerate the decline. While America's actions have certainly been bold, Washington has only failed in its attempts at using the innocent civilians of Iran to grasp onto a hegemony that is quickly fading away. There have currently been no positive outcomes for America from this situation. Even the country's closest allies have refused to give America military support in this situation according to McCoy (2026) and international opinions of America are souring. These strategies of terror and dominance may have served America well in the past, but the country is now experiencing the consequences of being built upon imperialism. The rest of the world is standing up to these deeply flawed strategies, and the more the United States tries to stick to this strategy the more it will end up getting hurt. But the presence of war is so tied to America's identity that this behavior will not stop anytime soon, thus bringing about an international decline in American power.

It All Boils Down to Capitalism Going Too Far

Every instance that has led to American decline covered so far in this paper has been influenced by wealth. America runs on the power of money, and as the nation's economy enters into the later stages of capitalism this is only becoming more unappealing to citizens. Before America had even won independence yet, in the year 1700 "three-fourths of the acreage in New York belonged to fewer than a dozen persons" (Parenti, 2011, p.5). Today, in 2026 only 1% of the nation holds nearly a third of its total wealth, the highest proportion in history (Cunningham, 2026). While the richest have only enjoyed a growing amount of money during the 21st century, for the poorest wealth has remained almost stagnant (Pettypiece, 2026). Wealth divisions have always existed in this country; these inequalities are practically built into the fabric of America.

But in hundreds of years this situation has only intensified, especially recently. Meanwhile, the current administration of President Trump has only taken action to reduce available welfare programs and resources for lower-class citizens while giving billions to the wealthy in tax cuts and easing regulations on cryptocurrency, which he personally earns money from (Pettypiece, 2026). As if the gaping wealth inequality is not enough, the public efforts to widen the gap only serve to worsen American attitudes.

America's system worked for a while, temporary distractions preventing citizens from seeing any problems. As Bacevich (2017) said, "during the Age of Great Expectations, distinctions between citizen and consumer blurred. Shopping became tantamount to a civic obligation, essential to keeping the economy afloat". If those at the top of the nation prioritize spending money above all else, this characteristic will eventually seep into society and become a defining feature of the United States. When it is so difficult to earn money, citizens become prouder of what they can buy with it. And this constant purchasing morphed into practically a mandatory requirement, pushing the mentality that people need to earn money and must work as hard as possible to do so. But now, attitudes are changing as basic necessities are harder to reach.

Since 1999, "insurance premiums have increased at 3 times the rate of workers' earnings" along with increasing healthcare prices (Kanimian & Ho, 2025). As a result, almost half of American adults have difficulties paying for healthcare, one-third have skipped necessary care in the past year, and 43% have not taken their prescribed medication in the last year (Sparks et al., 2026). In 2024, 10.6% of the population or 35.9 million people were living below the poverty line, not to mention all those who did not make the cut but still struggle to afford basic necessities (Shrider & Bijou, 2025). Rising costs are a source of tension for any country, but in America the severity of the struggles so many people are facing without access to basic needs is

impossible to ignore. Such a staggering amount of wealth disparity could even lead to societal collapse if citizens decide they have had enough of the current system. As all of this happens, in 2026 Trump has “signed legislation to cut food stamps and Medicaid benefits and put new restrictions on low-income housing assistance and student loans. To cope with higher costs from tariffs, he has suggested Americans buy fewer dolls for their children” (Pettypiece, 2026). From the far-right perspective of those ruling the nation, such welfare programs are framed as unnecessary handouts that go against the hardworking, pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps ideals at the core of the United States. They are even framed as dangerous due to their socialist aspects, but it is worth questioning who this unwavering support of capitalism benefits. As privatization of human needs grows, people will realize capitalism with no oversight or limits is what is truly anti-American. Moreover, while taxpayer money is used to pay for an unnecessary war in Iran this year, in 2024 over 50 members of Congress made millions from wars through stock in “defense contractors, companies that receive hundreds of billions of dollars annually from congressionally crafted Pentagon appropriations legislation” (Moore, 2024). Although this can clearly be presented as a conflict of interest, there has not been any action taken to prevent this. But that is unsurprising, as who would address this when every other person in the highest positions of power is corrupted by the same money? This does not bode well for civilians.

61% of Americans think there is too much wealth inequality, and two-thirds of the people within this group say the country needs significant changes (Kochhar et al., 2020). But with the aforementioned corruption, the most realistic possibility is that this change will absolutely not occur anytime soon. It is already concerning for civilians to see such a disregard for their needs in legislation, enough to cause desperate action for change. But on top of this, politicians including even the president himself are openly showcasing their apathy towards the plights of

the people. And historically, this ‘let them eat cake’ combination of privilege and callousness from those in charge has led to their downfall. It seems as if all hope is lost for economic equality to come about in this current system, which only continues to weaken America. The current capitalist system grants America power through the exploitation of its people, but soon this well will dry out. A country is only as strong as its people, and 99% of this one are being ignored by their government. Trump, as a businessman turned ruler, is likely to be the individual symbolizing the erosion of democracy by money as the first president of this declining empire.

Rising Competitors and Predictions

Seeing the vast history of ignorance and privilege from American politicians laid out, it is hard to believe that there will be any meaningful progress from this in the next fifty years. With that assumption, the most likely prediction appears to be that the world will depart from U.S. hegemony and instead enter a multipolar international society. America has built up so many years of influence and power that it is impossible for it to drop all the way down to the bottom of the international hierarchy anytime soon. It still has cultural influence, unbeatable military power, is a central part of international trade and is a key figure in international institutions such as being in the UN Security Council. However, many other countries are now rising up to America’s level as challengers and even banding together to do so.

A significant piece of evidence for America’s declining power relative to other nations is that “between 1960 and 2020, its real GDP (i.e., in constant dollars) grew by a factor of five and a half times, but, in the same period, the GDP of the rest of the world was multiplied by eight and a half times” (Graziano, 2022). Additionally, the International Monetary Fund has stated that “the GDP of emerging markets and developing economies accounted for 58.9 percent of the global economy in 2023” (Lingling, 2025). Clearly, the American method is dwindling in

strength as other countries continue to grow and progress in their strategies, causing the U.S. to fall behind. And this is not just for already developed nations, any country that is willing to prioritize growth has a chance in this game.

BRICS is a notable competitor to American trade. Consisting of “Brasil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran. It serves as a political and diplomatic coordination forum for countries from the Global South and for coordination in the most diverse areas” (BRICS Brasil 2025, 2025). When international organizations have been so dominated by the West in the past, the fact that such a diverse institution of other countries exists is a testament to how much power is being distributed across the world. BRICS also aims to reduce financial dependency on Western institutions and countries (Brics | East Asia Forum, 2023). For example, the U.S. dollar has been the world’s central currency for years, but BRICS is attempting to change that with their own currency (Azza Tshikovhi, 2024). And although this seems far-fetched, the hope is understandable as according to Lingling (2025), “BRICS nations contribute to approximately 40 percent of global trade, as well as crude oil production and exports”. The fact that there is a united push against the dollar and American control over the global economy points to changing sentiments around the world. Perhaps in fifty years, there may be other currencies equivalent to the value of the U.S. dollar. And as America declines in power, interstate unions such as the EU or BRICS will be essential to managing a multipolar world.

Although globalization remains controversial, it has not declined at all. In fact, “since 2017 the KOF trade globalization index has fallen 5% in the US but has continued to grow 3% in the rest of the developed world” (Drum, 2024). And on both an individual and global scale, technology has made it “easier to hear about distant products, to manage far-flung supply chains,

to have services provided elsewhere, and to cooperate in matters of science and innovation” (Taylor, 2024). As the world continues to progress, globalization looks to be an inevitable and never-ending process. And as this happens, America’s power will diminish in comparison to what the rest of the world could do together. Additionally, in the most recent Climate Change Performance Index, America was named the loser for falling down eight spots to almost the bottom of the entire ranking while Chile, a country in the global south was named the winner (CCPI, 2025). A world leader is expected to at least try to harbor growth and be at the top of lists like the CCPI. But the United States is doing neither of these things, letting other nations rush ahead of it. There is a sometimes slow but growing sentiment across the world for countries to build up power for their own people to be successful, as well for other nations that are still their competitors. The American government’s strategy of leeching power off of others is not working anymore, and for this reason the world is heading off to a more diverse future.

Conclusion

Not a single American citizen remembers a time where America was not one of if not the most powerful nation in the world. As the first leader of a unipolar world in history, America’s place at the top has seemed stable for a very long time. But when considering the difference between empires that endure versus those that fall, Second Thought (2023) defined it as “in a nutshell, resilience. The ability of the system to react to, adapt to, and overcome the challenges they’re presented with”. The United States has been facing many challenges to its people, democracy, and position in the world. But when looking at what has been done in opposition to this, the answer is largely nothing. The leaders of the most powerful country in the world are too preoccupied with their own monetary desires to look at the bigger picture. Until now, the government’s power has been taken from millions of its own citizens and civilians have taken

advantage of across the globe. But the rest of the world has watched and learned to instead share that power amongst themselves, a sentiment that has let them catch up to the United States. The country does not seem to realize its mistakes or the steps needed to fix this yet, and by the time it does it will be too late. America has already started the process of decline, and maybe in fifty years' time citizens can finally hope to see justice prevail and a resurgence of power after a complete reconstruction of the current system. Resilience means to keep standing up no matter how many times you find yourself on the ground. But it seems that with just one push, America may never get back up.

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