

The Contradictions of U.S. Neo-Imperialism and the Path Toward Decline

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the possible future of the United States through three major theoretical perspectives: American exceptionalism, neo-imperialism, and declinism. The main argument is that, if current trends continue, the United States is more likely to follow a declinist path through a neo-imperialist model. This does not mean that neo-imperialism is the most effective or sustainable way to preserve power, but that the political and economic interests behind it remain too powerful to easily change direction. The paper examines three major areas: the growth of military spending and militarization abroad and at home, the use of sanctions, tariffs, and financial pressure against countries such as China, and the internal distress affecting ordinary Americans. The analysis suggests that the United States increasingly tries to keep its influence abroad and control at home through military force, sanctions, tariffs, surveillance, and policing, while the country itself struggles with rising debt, declining living standards, weakened education, inequality, and public distrust. These patterns challenge the idea of American exceptionalism, especially the belief that U.S. leaders are uniquely capable of adapting to global change and defending democratic values. Overall, the evidence suggests that neo-imperial strategies may preserve U.S. influence in the short term, but they also contribute to long-term internal decline and weakening global legitimacy.

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The United States has changed the way it projects power over time. In the past, U.S. dominance was expressed more openly through territorial control and direct intervention, as seen in the occupation of the Philippines and the control of Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Today, while military force remains part of its strategy, the United States exercises global power more broadly through a combination of military force, economic pressure, financial influence, and indirect political control. In other words, the U.S. has not stopped acting as an empire; it has simply adapted its methods. After important global events such as World War II and the end of the Cold War, scholars began to question what the future of the United States as a global empire would be. From this debate emerged three main schools of thought: American exceptionalism, declinism, and neo-imperialism. American exceptionalists argue that the United States will remain strong because of its unique institutions, values, and ability to adapt. Declinists argue that the country is already facing deep internal and external weakening that will continue in the future. Neo-imperialists, on the other hand, argue that the United States will likely continue along its current path, one based on modern forms of domination rather than only direct occupation. For the purposes of this paper, however, the evidence suggests that declinism, both at home and abroad, will best describe the future of the United States over the next 50 years. This decline will be driven in part by current and likely future neo-imperialist policies. By “future,” I mean that the country is likely to maintain these policies until the point of decline, not because they successfully secure lasting control, but because the oligarchy that benefits from them will continue to promote them for individual and corporate interests rather than for the interests of the nation and its people. In addition, as the world changes more rapidly every day, the U.S. government has shown little ability to adapt and shift with the times. Instead, it

continues to rely on past measures even when they no longer produce real returns, contrary to what American exceptionalists argue.

To develop this argument, the paper will begin by analyzing the some of the main sectors and institutions the United States has used to expand its empire abroad. It will then examine the current condition of those sectors and institutions, as well as whether they have benefited or harmed the country's global position and the well-being of people within the United States.

Military and Law Enforcement Agencies.

We all know and agree that countries need military force to defend themselves from external threats and, in some cases, to avoid conflict by projecting strength. The United States is, of course, no exception. Even more so, as a growing colonial empire first and a neo-imperialist power later, it was essential for the country to maintain a strong military force. However, after 9/11, the United States' so-called War on Terror and the funds used to finance it went far beyond any critical need. As Lindsay and her colleagues point out in their article "*State of insecurity: The cost of militarization since 9/11*", the events of "9/11 contributed to the deep militarization of both foreign and domestic policy, at a cost of \$21 trillion over the last two decades. Of those \$21 trillion, \$15 trillion went to the military, including \$7.2 trillion for military contractors, \$3 trillion for veterans' programs, \$949 billion for Homeland Security, and \$732 billion for federal law enforcement" (Koshgarian et al., 2021). One would expect that such massive spending would have produced major gains, or at least a meaningful return on investment. However, the human cost suggest otherwise. "The costs of the global War on Terror have been staggering: about 900,000 lives lost to violence, many thousands more gone due to the loss of critical infrastructure like hospitals, and 37 million people displaced. From 2018 to 2020, the U.S. conducted counterterror operations in 85 countries." Additionally, these endless wars have helped discredit

U.S. strength as a military power, as shown by the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021, an unsuccessful Ukraine against Russia after constant U.S. economic support, and more recently, a war with Iran that has caused the U.S. to spend billions in munitions and once again ridiculed our president's decision-making. As a consequence at home, "There are 19 million veterans in the U.S., 14 million of whom served during wartime, and 3.5 million of whom served during the global War on Terror... have been subject to nonstop deployments over the last 20 years, taking a toll on physical and mental health, family stability, and civilian career opportunities"

(Koshgarian et al., 2021). I can relate to the data presented by Koshgarian as a partner of a veteran; while serving in the military, he hurt his lower back and knees. The VA hospital has been useful only for drug prescriptions, but not for meaningful recovery treatment. It acts more like a public hospital in poor communities. The social workers take so long to resolve veterans' issues and ask for a ton of paperwork. Many veterans do not know how to navigate the bureaucracy and end up giving up. Many of our war heroes are homeless, suffer from the risk of suicide, and experience family violence. Between 2002 and 2021, the Office of Management and Budget accounted for \$3.07 trillion in veterans' services, which is still not enough to provide them with the attention and support they need. Today, in 2026, I am sure those numbers have grown with the continuity of U.S. conflicts around the world, such as the present one with Iran.

These numbers of military expenditure do not only reflect military conflicts abroad, but also the expansion of domestic institutions and law enforcement agencies created to support the War on Terror, which extended counterterrorism into immigration, crime, and drugs. It is reasonable to expect lower crime, fewer immigration-related legal violations, a major reduction in drug-trafficking-related violence and consumption, and, as a consequence, a stronger and more stable society. Instead, the costs of this evolution have also been severe, affecting citizens "in terms of

surveillance and the costs to individual privacy, growing xenophobia and racism and their costs to immigrants and people of color, mass incarceration, ... and violence” (Koshgarian et al., 2021). Rather than producing greater national security, these outcomes have only contributed to deeper political polarization and internal instability in the U.S. Moreover, discrimination against immigrants and people of color has long been an ongoing reality in the United States.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s demonstrated that America was not as democratic and inclusive as it presented itself to the world. Some important social gains were achieved, such as the desegregation of public institutions, greater work opportunities for people of color, some of them in executive positions, the possibility of acquiring a home without former housing discrimination, and the progress many have made as business owners. However, the numbers suggest that U.S. institutions still carry deeply internalized discrimination as part of their foundation. The agencies under the Department of Homeland Security, rather than only fighting terrorism, have increasingly become part of America’s internal repressive apparatus. Earlier, it was mentioned that the DHS budget from 2002 to 2021 was \$949 billion. With that level of investment in one of the country’s largest agencies, which oversees institutions such as U.S. CBP, ICE, USCIS, the Secret Service, and others, one would expect improvements in operational efficiency and stronger ethnic and cultural training for employees who interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Yet instead of bringing safety for all Americans, “According to a 2018 report to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, 34 percent of federal sentences were for immigration offenses, marking the federal prosecution system as a key component of the war on immigrants. Another 28 percent of sentences were for drug crimes. Federal arrests were also dominated by immigration offenses, which made up 56 percent of all federal arrests in FY 2018. Just 1.9 percent of federal arrests were for violent offenses. Likewise, by 2018, ‘Black and

Latinx people bear the brunt of federal law enforcement. Hispanic people were the subjects of 54 percent of federal sentences in 2018, and Black people another 20 percent. Black people make up 38 percent of the federal prison inmates, far greater than their share of the population”

(Koshgarian et al., 2021). Talking about prison, makes sense to mention that under the U.S. Constitution, slavery is illegal except as punishment for a crime, and many inmates are required to work for little or no pay, which makes it very convenient to have the biggest prison system in the world, right? The fact that 74% of them are people of color says a lot about the growing and continuing racial inequalities surrounding the national system.

Furthermore, to tackle terrorism, “Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act” was created. However, rather than using taxpayer money for its foundational aim, it has been used by the NSA to collect phone conversations, texts, emails, web searches, and social media messages, providing data to the CIA and the FBI to investigate individuals in the country without the need for a warrant (Second Thought, n.d.) This has created a growing concern among the population about privacy rights and trust in the government. Moreover, the past Biden administration “characterized its support for border surveillance and technology funding as a gentler alternative to Trump’s border wall. But high-tech surveillance systems, known as ‘smart borders’ or ‘virtual walls,’ ... are environmentally destructive, threaten privacy and civil liberties, and can lead to more migrant deaths as individuals are funneled into more dangerous routes. Far from ‘humane,’ these technologies only perpetuate militarization and mass surveillance in the borderlands and beyond” (Koshgarian et al., 2021). Trump and his wall first, costing \$16.3 billion, and Biden and surveillance later, suggest that leaders, no matter what party they belong to, lack creativity or informed decisions to overcome the country’s crises. Their approach is more likely to be a form of overspending taxpayers’ money. It is also important to note that “U.S.

Customs and Border Protection 2002 to 2021 spending alone was \$267 billion, which include their “smart wall” technologies. DHS agencies have deported 5.8 million people (2002-2019), but even when illegal immigrant crossings have decreased exponentially, they have employed 10,000 more agents, more than double the agents they had in 2002” (Koshgarian et al., 2021). Other contradiction in our budget allocation, because with “smart wall” and less immigrants illegally crossing, we should require less agents perhaps, but the agency spending keeps growing up and its number of employees.

In addition, through the “Pentagon 1033 Program,” domestic law enforcement agencies receive weapons of war and equipment from previous wars. After the end of the Iraq War, this program peaked at a value of \$386 million by 2014 (Koshgarian et al., 2021). The author also mentions that mine-resistant vehicles, aircraft, drones, military weapons, and ammunition are part of the equipment and that they have been used more than anything to violently target and surveil minorities of color. Adding to that, we have seen that domestic terrorism has not stopped. Mass shootings in schools and public areas were common for a long time and continue today. Political violence has increased in recent years, with major examples being the January 6 Capitol insurrection and the assassination attempt against Charlie Kirk. At the same time, conflict between opposing political groups has also become more violent, showing how militarization and political polarization are creating deeper instability inside the country. Law enforcement violence adds another layer to this instability, increasing Americans’ uncertainty about their own security and weakening respect for the U.S. Constitution when the institutions that are supposed to enforce it are the ones violating it. As a consequence, peaceful citizen protests have grown, but many of them have been met with violence by police and opposing ideological groups.

Now my question is: why, if there are no real results showing benefits from militarization, and we have a surplus of military equipment, do we keep raising the military budget? Why do we keep spending money that could be used in other sectors such as health, education, and housing, which are underfunded and constitute basic needs that Americans struggle to achieve today? Who is benefiting from this?

Well, “[i]n a typical year, around half of the DoD budget goes to contractors. Over the last 20 years, the contractors took in more than \$7.2 trillion in DoD funds. In FY 2020, with a total DoD budget of \$753 billion, \$422 billion went to military contractors” (Koshgarian et al., 2021). In simple words, defense companies made a lot of money from the War on Terror, and their stock value grew much more than the general stock market. Following the same logic, the war on immigrants is also a business. Private prison companies like CoreCivic and The GEO Group operate detention centers and also make money from electronic monitoring programs by acquiring ICE detention contracts. Most of those facilities are fully operated by private, for-profit companies. A report from the Office of Inspector General points out that “in fiscal year 2016, ICE received about \$2.3 billion to house detainees at 203 detention facilities nationwide. ICE owns and operates five of these detention facilities. It secured the remainder by contracting directly with private companies, establishing intergovernmental agreements with the U.S. Marshals Service, or negotiating intergovernmental service agreements with state and local governments” (OIG, 2018). The source continues by explaining that, after its inspection, it concluded that “ICE may have overpaid for detention services at the South Texas Family Residential Center, as well as other detention facilities. Moreover, ICE has no assurance that it executed detention center contracts in the best interest of the Federal Government, taxpayers, or detainees” (DHS, OIG, 2018). Private detention facilities continued even after Biden’s January

26, 2021 executive order on “Reforming Our Incarceration Systems to Eliminate the Use of Privately Operated Criminal Detention Facilities” (FBOP, 2022), because that order applied to federal criminal detention facilities and did not fully end private immigration detention under ICE.

Overall, the data presented in this section suggests that the expansion of the U.S. military system has not produced the level of security, stability, or global strength that one would expect from such massive spending. Instead, the evidence points to a pattern where war abroad continues, veterans return home without enough support, and military logic expands into domestic institutions like DHS, ICE, Border Patrol, and local law enforcement. Through programs like the Pentagon’s 1033 Program, the tools of war have entered American communities, turning social issues such as immigration, drugs, crime, and protest into security threats that are managed with surveillance, detention, and police force. Therefore, the problem is not only that the United States spends too much on the military, but that militarization has become a way to manage political and social problems. While ordinary taxpayers, veterans, immigrants, and communities of color carry the costs, private defense contractors, detention companies, and security corporations receive the profits. In this sense, the growth of the military institution under a neo-imperialist model supports the declinist argument because it reflects a nation that is losing sight of what actually creates stability.

International Economic Influence.

Another important part of U.S. neo-imperialism is economic power. Instead of relying only on direct military occupation, the United States can also pressure other countries through trade restrictions, banking systems, and control over global markets. The next section will help to

understand how the U.S. uses economic pressure against countries that challenge its interests, especially China, and how those strategies can create consequences that weaken the U.S. itself.

James Petras' article *US Empire: Global Imperialism and Internal Colonialism* explains that the U.S. trade deficit with China should not be understood only as China taking advantage of the United States. Petras argues that Trump blamed China for unfair trade, investment, and technology relations, but that "the trade deficit has everything to do with the perverse economic structure and policies of the US, which its ruling elites created" (Petras, 2018a). Petras explains that the trade deficit is partly the result of multinational corporations moving production to China and then exporting those products back to the United States. This connects to the same pattern seen in the military section, where powerful elites and corporations benefit first while the broader interests of the nation and its people are pushed aside. We do not have to be economists to understand that this process also affected the United States internally, is like a domino effect, when factories and manufacturing jobs move overseas, many American workers lose stable employment. As a result, families lose their social and economic mobility, and entire communities lose part of their economic foundation. Detroit represents a micro example of this broader pattern of deindustrialization. As the auto industry declined in the country and companies moved jobs elsewhere, the city suffered major economic and social consequences, including unemployment, poverty, abandonment, and population loss. The same is happening gradually to U.S today, which makes the neo-imperialist economic model contradictory because while it tries to dominate global markets, damage the economic base of the country itself.

Petras also gives several reasons why the U.S. trade deficit grew, among those he argues that the "U.S. restricts exports of high-tech and military technology to China to further the interests of the warlord economy", which causes the U.S. to lose markets that could help reduce

the deficit. He also explains that the “U.S. blocks Chinese investment in sectors that could help finance export industries, using “national security” as the justification... At the same time, ‘U.S. multinational corporations are allowed and even encouraged to keep trillions of dollars abroad in tax havens, reducing the country’s ability to invest in its own export sector” (Petras, 2018a).

Petras also points out that the U.S. accuses China of forcing technology transfers, but he describes this relationship as a “win-win situation”: U.S. corporations make profits, and China gains knowledge. It is interesting to learn that Petras’s reasons for trade deficit are also U.S. economic pressures that should be securing control abroad and uplifting the country economically, again more contradictions. If the government continues allowing or encouraging corporations to keep trillions of dollars in tax havens, instead of pushing that money back into the country to rebuild manufacturing, create employment, and strengthen innovation, then the problem is not only foreign competition. The problem is also the lack of long-term planning inside the U.S. government itself. These policies do not seem to consider how they will affect workers, the national debt, or the country’s economic stability in the future. In this sense, the U.S. is helping create its own decline by protecting corporate profit while failing to rebuild the productive base that could make the country stronger.

Hermeto’s article *China’s AI Breakthroughs Show How It Is Outcompeting Western Monopoly Capitalism* presents another example of how U.S. actions do not benefit its interests. The article argues that China’s recent progress in artificial intelligence challenges the old belief that the West is naturally more innovative or technologically superior. It explains that DeepSeek’s R1 model became a major AI breakthrough, and it quotes the Financial Times saying, “With DeepSeek, China innovates and the US imitates”. The article also argues that,

“China has overcome impediments imposed by the West that were meant to slow its development. Instead, China has continued developing in artificial intelligence, smartphones, electric vehicles, and automobile production (Hermeto, 2025). One example is the chart showing that China’s share of global car production increased from about 1% in 2000 to 39% by 2024, while the U.S. share declined to only 3% by 2024. This data suggests that the United States has lost part of its global industrial presence and reflect the deindustrialization we were discussing previously, at the same time shows how China has expanded its role in the world economy doing exactly what U.S stop doing, growing its industries and large-scale productions.

The Huawei example supports this same point. The article states that “although US bans against Huawei in 2020 caused an enormous disruption for the company, the launch of Huawei’s Mate 60 Pro series phone in 2023 demonstrated that the flagship Chinese company came out of it stronger and more independent than before” (Hermeto, 2025). This shows how U.S. economic pressure can backfire. Instead of making China more dependent, restrictions can push Chinese companies to become more self-sufficient and develop their own technology. The article, just like Petra’s did, also argues that Western companies helped create this situation by moving production to China in search of profit. While doing business there, companies entered agreements that involved technology and knowledge transfer. Later, when China became a stronger competitor, the U.S. accused China of stealing technology, using that argument to justify bans, tariffs, and sanctions.

Together, Petras and Hermeto suggest that U.S. economic pressure against China reveals the limits of neo-imperial power. The U.S. tries to maintain control through tariffs, sanctions, technology restrictions, and financial pressure, but these tools do not always produce the results

expected. In some cases, they push targeted countries to become more independent and confident that U.S. is no longer a threat, and furthermore, make our government look weak. What are we doing playing dirty instead of competing by achieving? Where are our pride and values?

Richard Wolff's article *United States in 2025: Social Problems Denied via Rhetoric of Refusal* helps build further into the larger decline of U.S. global influence. He argues that other world leaders have already recognized the decline of the United States as both an empire and a capitalist system. This is evident in the systematic growth of the economic bloc BRICS, which, as of January 2025, had nine members and nine partners that together accounted for nearly half of the world's population and 41% of the world's GDP in purchasing power parity terms. Wolff also notes that four other nations, Vietnam, Turkey, Algeria, and Nigeria, had been invited and were likely to join in 2025, while Indonesia had already joined as a full BRICS partner. In contrast, the G7, the second-largest economic bloc and the one that includes the United States, accounts for about 10% of the world's population and 30% of its GDP, also in purchasing power parity terms. Moreover, Wolff explains that data from the International Monetary Fund shows a widening gap between the annual GDP growth rates of the G7, led by the United States, and BRICS, led by China and India. Meanwhile, U.S. leaders deny these problems and create rhetoric that blames foreigners through "America First" ideas, tariffs, trade wars, and claims that other countries are cheating the United States (Wolff, 2025). This dynamic can be seen in the growing hostility toward immigrants and foreign students. Wolff explains that "the advisory many major U.S. colleges and universities are sending to enrolled students from other countries (over a million last year) ...suggests they consider the likelihood of great visa difficulties in completing their degrees amid increasing U.S. government hostility toward foreigners. A reduced foreign

student presence will undercut U.S. influence abroad for years to come U.S. higher education institutions, already facing serious financial difficulties, will find them deepening as paying foreign students choose other nations for their degrees. “America first” rhetoric risks the self-destruction of the United States’ global position” (Wolff, 2025). If we think about this more deeply, foreign students are not only students, they are also part of U.S. soft power. They come to study, build professional relationships, and often return to their countries with cultural, academic, and economic connections to the United States. If nationalist policies make the U.S. less attractive or less welcoming, the country does not only lose tuition money for its universities; it also loses future relationships, influence, and possible investment opportunities abroad. If we add Trump’s constant attacks on neighboring countries like Canada and Mexico, Wolff’s argument makes even more sense. Economic nationalism does not necessarily restore U.S. strength; it can also isolate the country further from the rest of the world. This also affects the pride that used to come with being American. In the past, being from the United States often carried respect and admiration abroad, but today that image has been damaged. Instead of being automatically welcomed, Americans may increasingly be viewed with distrust or even hostility because of the country’s aggressive foreign policies and nationalist rhetoric. All this challenges the American exceptionalist idea again that U.S. leaders are capable of responding quickly to change, and also the neo-imperialist theory that belief these strategies of economic pressures are the way to go to maintain our global presence.

Internal Factors.

“Imperial rivals in Europe and Asia competed for overseas markets, forcing the US to increase productivity, lower labor costs, relocate abroad or reduce profits. The US chose to

reduce domestic living standards and relocate abroad” (Petras, 2018b). There are no better words than these from Petras in his article *Imperial Recovery and “Disappearing Workers”*:

Imperialism Expands, Living Standards Decline to begin this section of the analysis about what the reduction of living standards looks like for a regular American citizen. Everyone who lives in America today, in April of 2026, is feeling some of the country’s weird, confusing, and, why not, scary times. These are times where working is no longer enough to live; now, people are required to live working just to make enough money to get to the end of the month.

Safeway was my former employment. As a manager making \$30 an hour, my salary was about \$3,600 after taxes. A two-bedroom apartment in one of the less desirable areas of the California Bay Area is around \$2,400. Gas is around \$4.50 per gallon, and my commute was around \$350 per month. Electricity prices have skyrocketed, and I have received bills of more than \$400. Subtracting from my pay check, I would have around \$450 left, and I had not even counted the phone bill, water, food, insurance, or car payment. I cannot even imagine how people making minimum wage, around \$18 an hour, are able to pay even half of what I listed above. Moreover, the health insurance plan my employer provided through Kaiser Permanente required me to pay a deductible of \$950 before receiving any meaningful discount. So, you can imagine my surprise when I received a bill of \$250 from my doctor just because she referred me to a specialist. It has become almost impossible to live without another person helping with expenses. These are the kinds of struggles millions of Americans face every day. We pay high taxes, but we don’t receive enough benefits in return. It is sad to see how tired and irritated many of my coworkers were, working two jobs until exhaustion, asking for extra hours, and showing visible signs of stress and desperation. Petras highlights these same issues by pointing out that “accessibility to home ownership for Americans under 45 years has fallen dramatically from 24% in 2006 to 14% in

2017. At the same time, rents have skyrocketed especially in large cities across the country, in most cases absorbing between a third and half of monthly income” (Petras, 2018b). This connects directly to the lived reality of many Americans today, where even fulltime work does not guarantee housing stability or the possibility of building long-term wealth.

Petras continues pointing out that in general “living standards of Americans have declined precipitously. Employers have ceased paying for pensions; reduced or eliminated health coverage; reduced corporate taxes thus lowering the quality for public education” (Petras, 2018b). That decline is also visible in the AP News publication about the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Ma and Feathers reported that U.S. high school students continued losing ground in math and reading, with 32% of 12th graders scoring below basic in reading and 45% scoring below basic in math (Ma & Feathers, 2025). We can see how the relationship between the U.S. government and the privileged class has consequences that deeply affect the country’s future. Lowering corporate taxes may benefit the wealthy, but it also reduces the money available for public schools, teachers’ salaries, school materials, building conditions, and the different resources and services that students need to thrive academically. The internal decline of the U.S. economy also influences these outcomes. When heads of households struggle to pay bills, many adolescents have to step in and work to help at home or at least pay for their own expenses. This leaves them with less time to study. If we add the stress that comes with inequality, lack of opportunity, tiredness from poor sleep, and parentification, the result is a student who has too much to handle and cannot always come to school ready to learn. Of course, this burden is not carried equally by all Americans. As Petras explains, while the working class suffers, “competing elite factions monopolized budgets, taxes and expenditures driving labor living standards downward. Imperialist classes formed pacts – but only among themselves – but

the quality and quantity of workers decreased – through impoverished health care and educational systems. In contrast Elite offspring attended the best schools and secured the highest posts in government and economy” (Petras, 2018b). The evidence suggests that we are not only facing economic inequalities but also political. Let’s think, if the people making decisions come from privileged backgrounds, attend the best schools, and move directly into the highest positions of government and business, then it is difficult to believe they fully understand the needs of ordinary working people. The huge gap between the top 1% and the rest of the population is not an accident, it is connected to a system where national leaders often represent the interests, values, and relationships of their own class. This helps explain why policies often protect profits, tax advantages, and elite interests while public education, health care, housing, and wages continue to decline.

Another indication of American society internal distress is also the country’s growing debt. In the 2024 article *Five Reasons American Decline Appears Irreversible*, Adams describes the U.S. debt problem as one of the main “ticking time bombs” of American decline. According to Adams, the U.S. government’s total unfunded liabilities, including promises connected to Social Security, Medicare, federal employee pensions, veterans’ benefits, and federal debt held by the public, stood at \$212 trillion and were projected to reach \$288.9 trillion by 2028 (Adams, 2024). This means the government has made enormous financial promises without having enough funds secured to cover them. “The second ticking bomb is the U.S. debt. At \$34 trillion, it has increased more than six-fold from \$5.6 trillion in 2000. Of that \$34 trillion, \$731 billion has been accumulated through interest payments — the fourth-highest annual U.S. budget item” (Adams, 2024). Whoever reads this data will probably find it hard to believe that one of the “richest countries in the world,” and one of the most technologically advanced, has trillions of

dollars in debt, and that the debt keeps growing every year. These numbers are really scary, because when you hear the word debt, it is usually a sign that things are not going well, even more when the interest makes the country borrow more each time just to be able to pay what it already owes. What makes even less sense is that while the country is drowning in debt, the government continues cutting taxes for corporations and allowing wealthy elites to keep more money, instead of asking them to contribute more to the country that made their wealth possible. How does that make sense? How can a government say there is not enough money for education, health care, housing, childcare, or Social Security, while at the same time protecting the profits of corporations and the privileged class? Again, contradictions. Contradictions that I, as a simple college student, can see and analyze; contradictions that scholars inside and outside the U.S. are writing about; and contradictions that other countries are perceiving as weaknesses in our economic and political models. But somehow, our own government is not taking them seriously. The answer is that the U.S. has surrendered its power to elites who do not know how to rule for the people, do not care about empathy, solidarity or democracy, and do not feel responsible for the struggles of others. They think like their class, protect their class, and govern for their class. That is why the same contradictions keep repeating: debt keeps growing, living standards keep declining, and ordinary people keep carrying the burden while the privileged class remains protected.

Conclusion

After analyzing the evidence presented in this paper, the prediction is that the United States is moving toward decline through a neo-imperialist path. The people and institutions gaining from war, sanctions, financial pressure, detention, surveillance, and cheap labor are not likely to give up that power easily. On top of that, the population is so busy surviving that there is

not much hope for the kind of civic organizing and activism needed to produce the leaders the nation urgently needs. For that reason, it is difficult to imagine the country quickly changing direction toward a model that truly prioritizes ordinary people, democracy, and long-term stability.

This conclusion is difficult to accept because the United States has been my home, and I love this country as my own. But love for a country should not mean ignoring what is happening to it. What worries me the most is not only the decline itself, but the lack of serious reaction to it. Even while I am writing this paper, the country is facing another violent political incident involving President Trump at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 25, 2026. Events like this show how deep political tension and instability have become. Yet the media and political leaders often continue focusing on enemies, parties, scandals, and divisions, while the deeper problems remain unresolved. Because of that, this prediction is not hopeful, but it also was not made with satisfaction. I hope I am wrong, and that in the next fifty years the United States finds a way to change direction before decline becomes irreversible.

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