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THE NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE US IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER: THE DIPLOMACY OF WAR AND PEACE

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Abstract

The changing international order has altered how the United States exercises global power. This article examines how the US strategic priorities have adapted to the diffusion of military, economic, technological, and institutional power and asks whether contemporary policy represents a restoration of post-Cold War primacy or an adaptation of American leadership to a more competitive international system. Drawing on realist and liberal institutionalist perspectives and soft power, the article develops the concept of "transformed hegemony." Using qualitative comparative case analysis and process tracing, it examines US support for Ukraine, NATO enlargement and burden-sharing, and US controls on strategically significant technologies and outbound investment involving China. The analysis finds that US influence increasingly operates through alliance mobilization, institutional coordination, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and diplomatic networks rather than through unilateral action alone. These mechanisms convert US capabilities into collective strategic capacity while distributing costs among allies and partners. At the same time, their effectiveness is conditional on allied cohesion, technological leadership, domestic political continuity, and the responses of competing states. The article concludes that US strategy is better understood as a networked and adaptive form of strategic primacy than as a restoration of classical unipolar hegemony.

Keywords: *changing world order, US grand strategy, transformed hegemony, strategic primacy, alliance activation, economic statecraft.*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the international system has undergone a redistribution of material capabilities, strategic influence, and institutional weight rather than a straightforward transition from one stable international order to another.[1] The post-Cold War period provided the United States with an unusually broad margin of strategic freedom and enabled Washington to exercise predominant influence across security, economic, technological, and institutional domains. However, the subsequent rise of China, Russia's renewed resort to military force, the diffusion of advanced technological capabilities, and the growing strategic autonomy of regional actors have progressively constrained the feasibility of unilateral management of international affairs. The 2022 US National Security Strategy explicitly identifies intensified strategic competition as a defining characteristic of the contemporary environment while simultaneously emphasizing alliances, partnerships, and cooperation in addressing transnational challenges. The central analytical problem, therefore, is not whether US power has disappeared, but how the United States seeks to transform its substantial material and institutional capabilities into sustainable international influence under conditions of intensified systemic competition.[2]

This question is particularly important because contemporary US foreign policy cannot be adequately explained through a purely military or capability-centered conception of power.[3] The strategic environment increasingly combines cooperation, competition, coercion, and limited conflict across interconnected domains.[4] Consequently, the exercise of US power involves the simultaneous use of military deterrence, economic statecraft, technological regulation, diplomatic coordination, institutional influence, and partnerships. The 2022 US National Defense Strategy placed integrated deterrence at the center of American defense planning, linking military capabilities with allied and partner contributions and coordinated action across domains.[5] This shift suggests that contemporary US strategic influence increasingly depends on coordinating multiple instruments and actors rather than relying exclusively on unilateral material superiority.[6]

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[1] Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2015/16): 8–9, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00225.

[2] The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 2022), https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

[3] Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 39–41, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050010.

[4] Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

[5] US Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, October 27, 2022), 1, 8, https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF.

[6] Michael J. Mazarr and Ivana Ke, *Integrated Deterrence as a Defense Planning Concept*, PE-A2263-1 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, June 2024), 1–3, https://doi.org/10.7249/PEA2263-1.

Alliance policy provides one of the clearest empirical manifestations of this transformation. Contemporary US alliance management is increasingly concerned with interoperability, burden-sharing, operational coordination, capability development, and political alignment rather than with the preservation of inherited institutional arrangements alone.[7] NATO developments following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provide a particularly important empirical reference point. Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, while Sweden became a member on March 7, 2024, bringing the Alliance to 32 members.[8] These accessions reflect both NATO's institutional enlargement and the renewed demand for collective security generated by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At the 2024 Washington Summit, NATO further reported that more than two-thirds of its members had reached the two percent of GDP defense spending benchmark, while NATO estimated an eighteen percent increase in defense expenditure by European Allies and Canada for 2024.[9] Together, these developments indicate stronger alliance capacity, broader burden-sharing, and deeper coordination within US-led security cooperation.[10]

The transformation is also visible in forms of strategic cooperation extending beyond formal alliance structures. US foreign policy increasingly relies on overlapping bilateral, multilateral, and minilateral arrangements through which partner states contribute military capabilities, intelligence, diplomatic support, technological capacity, economic resources, or geographic access.[11] This pattern can be understood as networked leadership, in which US influence is exercised through the coordination of multiple actors whose participation expands the material capacity and political sustainability of strategic initiatives.[12]

The response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides a significant case in this regard. By January 2025, the US Department of State reported approximately $65.9 billion in US military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, while nearly 50 Allies and partner countries had also provided security assistance. This evidence shows that US

[7] Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 705–6, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551343; NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," July 10, 2024, paras. 6–7, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/washington-summit-declaration.

[8] Louisa Brooke-Holland, *NATO Enlargement: Finland and Sweden*, Research Briefing 9574 (London: House of Commons Library, March 11, 2024), 2–3, https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9574/CBP-9574.pdf.

[9] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 6.

[10] Joseph Clark, "Biden Meets with Fellow NATO Leaders at Washington Summit," US Department of Defense, July 10, 2024, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3834908/.

[11] Luis Simón, Alexander Lanoszka, and Hugo Meijer, "Nodal Defence: The Changing Structure of U.S. Alliance Systems in Europe and East Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2021): 360–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1636372.

[12] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 570–72, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309090195.

strategic leadership in a major security crisis has relied on coalition mobilization and coordination rather than direct unilateral military intervention.[13]

Soft power also remains relevant to contemporary US influence. Cultural influence, higher education, scientific cooperation, international communication, and the attractiveness of US institutions can contribute to the formation and durability of international coalitions. Nevertheless, contemporary US influence cannot be sufficiently explained through soft power alone.[14] The empirical developments examined in this article suggest an increasingly integrated combination of hard power, soft power, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and institutional coordination. These instruments can reinforce one another: military capabilities can strengthen diplomatic bargaining power; alliances can facilitate economic measures; technological restrictions can complement deterrence; and institutional cooperation can reduce the political and material costs of unilateral action.[15]

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: How are the mechanisms of US strategic influence being transformed under conditions of intensified great-power competition and an increasingly multipolar international environment? The central argument is that the United States is not simply attempting to restore the unilateral form of post-Cold War primacy. Rather, it is adapting its leadership through a combination of alliance mobilization, institutional coordination, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and selective deterrence. The article conceptualizes this emerging pattern as transformed hegemony, a form of influence in which US material capabilities remain central but are increasingly translated into strategic outcomes through networks of allies, institutions, and economic and technological instruments.

Methodology and Analytical Framework

This study combines qualitative comparative case analysis with process tracing to examine how the mechanisms of US strategic influence have evolved under conditions of intensified great-power competition.[16] This approach addresses a limitation of purely descriptive analyses of US foreign policy: the tendency to identify changes in strategic behavior without sufficiently demonstrating the mechanisms through which policy instruments are translated into political, institutional, economic, and strategic outcomes. Accordingly, the study focuses not only on what instruments the United States employs, but also on how these instruments are coordinated,

[13] US Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine," January 9, 2025, https://2021-2025.state.gov/bureau-of-political-military-affairs/releases/2025/01/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/.

[14] Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 110–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618.

[15] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

[16] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

through which institutional and relational channels they operate, and under what conditions they generate or constrain US influence.

The analysis covers the period in which the transformation of the international security and economic environment became particularly pronounced, with primary attention to developments following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the intensification of strategic and technological competition between the United States and China. This temporal focus makes it possible to examine contemporary changes in US strategy through identifiable policy decisions, institutional developments, and measurable milestones rather than relying exclusively on long-term structural assumptions. At the same time, the analysis incorporates relevant earlier theoretical and historical developments where they are necessary to establish the conceptual background for understanding changes in American power and hegemony.

Three cases are selected for comparative analysis because they represent distinct but interconnected dimensions of contemporary US statecraft: (1) security and alliance mobilization in response to Russia's war against Ukraine; (2) institutional adaptation through NATO enlargement and burden-sharing; and (3) geo-economic and technological competition through advanced-technology export controls and outbound-investment restrictions directed toward China. The cases are selected analytically to capture three distinct mechanisms through which US capabilities are converted into influence: US coalition mobilization, institutional coordination, and the strategic use of economic and technological regulation.[17]

Process tracing is used within each case to identify sequences of policy decisions, institutional responses, and observable outcomes. This method is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to identify mechanisms of influence rather than establish simple correlations.[18] The analysis therefore traces the sequence from strategic assessment and policy decision to institutional or coalition response and observable strategic outcomes. For example, in the alliance cases, the analysis examines how changes in the perceived security environment contributed to new commitments and institutional developments; in the technology case, it examines how strategic assessments concerning advanced technologies were translated into increasingly comprehensive regulatory measures.

The evidence base combines primary and secondary sources. Primary evidence includes US strategic documents, official statements, Department of Defense and Department of State materials, Department of Commerce export-control regulations, Department of the Treasury investment regulations, and NATO declarations and institutional documents. These sources are supplemented by established international relations scholarship addressing hegemony, power transition, alliances, institutions, economic statecraft, and strategic competition. The use of official

[17] Jason Seawright and John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 294–308, https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077.

[18] David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 823–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429.

policy and regulatory sources is particularly important because it enables the analysis to distinguish between general interpretations of US strategy and formally articulated policy objectives and measures. Secondary scholarship situates these developments within broader theoretical debates and provides the context necessary to interpret individual policy decisions.

The analytical framework distinguishes between material power, leadership, and hegemony. Material power refers to the aggregate military, economic, technological, and institutional resources available to the United States. Leadership refers to the capacity to mobilize these resources in cooperation with other actors and to shape collective responses to international problems. Hegemony, in contrast, concerns the broader capacity to establish or influence the rules, institutions, expectations, and strategic choices within which other actors operate. This distinction is important because superior capabilities translate into political influence through effective strategic conversion, while political influence can also operate through coordination, institutions, and indirect forms of leadership.

The framework consequently evaluates contemporary US strategic influence through four interconnected analytical dimensions: (1) capacity, encompassing available military, economic, technological, and institutional resources; (2) coordination, concerning the ability to mobilize allies, partners, and institutions; (3) strategic conversion, involving the translation of resources into concrete policy instruments and collective action; and (4) constraints, including the responses of other states, economic interdependence, institutional limitations, domestic political factors, and the costs associated with sustained strategic competition. These dimensions allow the analysis to assess the extent of US power, how effectively its capabilities are converted into influence, and where that process encounters structural or political limits.[19]

The Prospects and Constraints of Reasserting US Hegemony

The position of the United States in the contemporary international system remains central to theoretical and empirical debates concerning hegemony, primacy, and international leadership. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States possessed an exceptional concentration of military, economic, technological, and institutional capabilities. This concentration enabled Washington to exercise substantial influence over international security arrangements, global economic governance, and major international institutions. However, the structural conditions that characterized the immediate post-Cold War period have changed considerably. The rise of China as a major economic and technological power, Russia's renewed willingness to employ military force, the increasing strategic autonomy of regional powers, and the diffusion of advanced technologies have reduced the ability of the United States to translate its material advantages automatically into unilateral political outcomes.

[19] David A. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 163–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/2009941.

The theoretical literature provides several complementary but distinct explanations of this process. Offensive realism, particularly in the work of John Mearsheimer, emphasizes the structural incentives facing great powers to maximize relative capabilities and prevent the emergence of peer competitors. From this perspective, the US efforts to preserve a favorable distribution of power and constrain potential challengers are consistent with the logic of great-power competition. Joseph Nye's approach places greater emphasis on the distinction between hard and soft power and on the ability of states to combine coercive capabilities with attraction, persuasion, and agenda-setting. John Ikenberry, meanwhile, emphasizes the institutionalization of American power and the capacity of the United States to embed its influence within international institutions and rules rather than relying exclusively on coercion. These perspectives are better understood as complementary approaches to different dimensions of US power. Taken together, they suggest that contemporary US influence is best examined through the interaction of material capabilities, institutional structures, strategic networks, and forms of attraction and persuasion.[20]

This theoretical synthesis has an important methodological implication. US hegemony cannot be assessed adequately through indicators such as military expenditure, force projection, or the global distribution of military bases alone. These indicators capture material capabilities more readily than their conversion into sustained political influence. A more comprehensive assessment must also consider the ability of the United States to organize collective action, sustain alliances, shape institutional rules, influence technological ecosystems, coordinate economic measures, and persuade other states to contribute resources toward shared strategic objectives. The distinction between capacity and strategic conversion is therefore central to this study. The United States may retain substantial material capabilities while simultaneously experiencing greater difficulty in converting those capabilities into predictable outcomes because other states possess greater autonomy and bargaining power.

The European security environment provides an important illustration. Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, followed by Sweden on March 7, 2024, bringing the Alliance to 32 members. These accessions illustrate NATO's institutional adaptation to the transformed European security environment. Their significance for the analysis of US hegemony lies both in NATO's enlargement and in the continued centrality of the United States within a security institution whose strategic relevance has increased in response to heightened threat perceptions. At the same time, the accessions should not be interpreted as evidence of unilateral US control. Finland and Sweden made sovereign strategic decisions, and their participation demonstrates that contemporary alliance structures are shaped through interaction between US leadership and the strategic preferences of other states.[21]

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[20] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001); Nye, *Soft Power*; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[21] NATO, "Finland Joins NATO as 31st Ally," April 4, 2023, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2023/04/04/finland-joins-nato-as-31st-ally; NATO, "Sweden Officially Joins NATO," March 7, 2024, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2024/03/07/sweden-officially-joins-nato.

The Ukraine case provides further evidence of this networked form of strategic leadership. Following Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, the United States became the principal military and diplomatic supporter of Ukraine within a broader coalition of states. By January 2025, the US Department of State reported approximately $65.9 billion in US military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, while nearly 50 Allies and partner countries had also provided security assistance. These figures indicate considerable US capacity for coalition mobilization. More importantly for the present argument, they show that US strategic influence was exercised through a distributed network of states rather than through direct military confrontation between the United States and Russia.[22]

The three cases therefore reveal a common mechanism: the United States increasingly seeks to convert its material advantages into strategic outcomes through institutionalization, coalition-building, and regulatory leverage. In the security domain, this occurs through alliances and military assistance; in the institutional domain, through NATO enlargement and burden-sharing; and in the technological domain, through export controls and investment restrictions. These instruments differ substantially in their immediate objectives and modes of operation, but they share an important characteristic: each attempts to shape the strategic behavior of other actors without requiring direct territorial control or continuous unilateral coercion.

However, networked hegemony also faces important structural limitations. First, dependence on alliances and institutional networks means that US leadership is conditioned by the preferences and capabilities of partners. Broader participation can increase coordination costs, sharpen divergent interests, and intensify bargaining over the distribution of burdens. Second, economic and technological restrictions may generate unintended consequences, including incentives for competitors to develop alternative supply chains, domestic technological capabilities, financial mechanisms, or institutional arrangements. Third, the increasing autonomy of China, Russia, and other regional powers limits the ability of the United States to determine outcomes independently. Consequently, networked influence may increase the efficiency and legitimacy of collective action while simultaneously reducing the degree of unilateral control available to Washington.

Strategic Competition with Major Powers and the US International Agenda

The contemporary international environment is increasingly shaped by strategic competition among major powers, but the nature of this competition differs significantly across issue areas and adversaries. For the United States, the most consequential challenge arises from the interaction of geopolitical rivalry, technological competition, economic interdependence, and the contest over international rules and institutions. The 2022 US National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly distinguishes between the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC)

[22] The White House, *National Security Strategy*.

and the Russian Federation. China is identified as the only competitor possessing both the intention to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities to do so, whereas Russia is characterized as an immediate and persistent threat requiring containment and deterrence. The distinction provides an important analytical basis for understanding contemporary US strategic priorities: Washington treats China primarily as a long-term systemic competitor while responding to Russia principally through deterrence, alliance defense, sanctions, and crisis management.[23]

This differentiation is also reflected in the evolution of US policy since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russian case has generated a predominantly security-centered response. The United States has sought to strengthen NATO's eastern deterrence posture, impose extensive economic and financial sanctions on Moscow, provide military and economic assistance to Ukraine, and increase allied burden-sharing. NATO's 2022 Madrid Summit Strategic Concept identified Russia as the Alliance's "most significant and direct threat," while simultaneously describing China as a systemic challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. By the Washington Summit of July 2024, this distinction had developed into a broader strategic framework in which Russia remained the most immediate military threat, while China's growing capabilities, coercive policies, and partnership with Russia were treated as interconnected elements of the wider strategic environment.[24]

The Ukraine war therefore provides an important empirical case for examining how the United States has mobilized its alliance network as a broader strategic instrument extending beyond traditional military commitments. The July 2024 Washington NATO Summit, for example, produced decisions to strengthen deterrence and defense, increase defense-industrial capacity, expand support for Ukraine, and deepen cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand.[25] NATO also reported that 23 Allies had reached the two percent of GDP defense spending benchmark in 2024.[26] These measures demonstrate that what may be termed the "activation" of the US alliance system involves concrete mechanisms: increased defense spending, coordinated military planning, industrial cooperation, intelligence and technological cooperation, sanctions coordination, and the distribution of the costs of strategic competition among partners. Thus, alliance politics combines its military function with a broader role in strengthening the political and institutional legitimacy of US strategic action.

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[23] The White House, *National Security Strategy*.

[24] NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (Brussels: NATO, 2022), paras. 8, 13, https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/publications-and-reports/strategic-concepts/2022/290622-strategic-concept.pdf; NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 3–4, 26–27.

[25] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 5, 7–11, 15, 30.

[26] Jens Stoltenberg, "Press Conference," NATO, July 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2024/07/10/press-conference.

The China challenge is structurally different. Unlike Russia, China combines economic scale, technological capacity, military modernization, diplomatic influence, and deep integration into global production networks, giving Beijing the capacity to shape the distribution of power across multiple dimensions simultaneously. The 2022 NSS therefore defined US policy toward China in terms of "responsibly managing competition" while investing in US domestic capabilities, strengthening alliances and partnerships, and defending a free and open international system. The resulting strategy is neither conventional containment nor simple economic decoupling. Rather, it increasingly resembles a policy of selective de-risking and strategic constraint focused on sectors considered critical to national security.[27]

The policy was further expanded on December 2, 2024, when the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) introduced new controls covering 24 categories of semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, three categories of software tools, and high-bandwidth memory (HBM), while adding 140 entities to the Entity List.[28] The stated objective was to constrain China's capacity to produce advanced-node semiconductors relevant to artificial intelligence, advanced computing, and military applications. The scope of this measure is particularly significant: US policy increasingly targets US-finished chips and also the equipment, software, memory technologies, and industrial capabilities necessary to produce advanced semiconductors domestically. The case therefore illustrates a shift from conventional export restriction toward strategic management of technological dependencies and supply-chain chokepoints.

A comparable logic has emerged in the area of capital flows. On August 9, 2023, the Biden administration issued Executive Order 14105 establishing the framework for regulating certain US outbound investments involving sensitive national-security technologies in countries of concern. The subsequent Treasury Department final rule, issued on October 28, 2024 and effective from January 2, 2025, established restrictions covering three principal technological areas: semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum information technologies, and artificial intelligence. Certain transactions were prohibited, while others became subject to notification requirements.[29]

The resulting strategic pattern can therefore be understood as a form of multidimensional balancing. Against Russia, the United States relies heavily on military

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[27] Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution," The White House, April 27, 2023, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/04/27/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-renewing-american-economic-leadership-at-the-brookings-institution/.

[28] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, "Commerce Strengthens Export Controls to Restrict China's Capability to Produce Advanced Semiconductors for Military Applications," December 2, 2024, https://media.bis.gov/press-release/commerce-strengthens-export-controls-restrict-chinas-capability-produce-advanced-semiconductors-military.

[29] US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Issues Regulations to Implement Executive Order Addressing U.S. Investments in Certain National Security Technologies and Products in Countries of Concern," October 28, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2687.

deterrence, forward defense, sanctions, and alliance solidarity. Against China, it combines military deterrence in the Indo-Pacific with technological restrictions, economic risk management, industrial policy, investment controls, and coalition-building. These approaches are different but increasingly interconnected. The 2024 NATO agenda illustrates this convergence: support for Ukraine, strengthening European defense capabilities, and deeper engagement with Indo-Pacific partners were treated as mutually reinforcing components of a broader strategy for managing strategic competition.[30]

At the same time, this strategy faces significant structural limitations. Extensive export controls can accelerate technological substitution by encouraging China and other competitors to develop indigenous alternatives; sanctions can generate incentives for alternative financial and trade arrangements; and greater reliance on allies requires sustained political coordination and willingness to share economic and security costs. Consequently, the effectiveness of US strategic competition depends on material capabilities as well as the ability to maintain coalition cohesion, technological leadership, institutional legitimacy, and sufficient economic resilience. The 2022–2024 period shows that contemporary American influence increasingly rests on the capacity to mobilize networks of allies and partners and translate technological and economic advantages into coordinated strategic outcomes.

US Responses to Global Crises and Issues

The United States' response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides one of the clearest empirical cases for examining how contemporary US foreign-policy instruments operate in combination. In response to the invasion on February 24, 2022, Washington employed multiple instruments of state power. It combined military assistance to Ukraine, extensive economic and financial sanctions against Russia, intelligence and information cooperation, diplomatic coordination, humanitarian assistance, and the mobilization of US allies and partners. This combination reflects a shift from predominantly bilateral crisis management toward a coalition-based model in which military, economic, diplomatic, and institutional instruments reinforce one another.

The scale of US military assistance provides measurable evidence of this approach. By January 9, 2025, the US Department of State reported that the United States had provided $65.9 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion.[31] The assistance included air-defense systems, artillery, ammunition, anti-armor capabilities, unmanned systems, training, and other military equipment. The United States has also used Presidential Drawdown Authority on 55 occasions since August 2021, providing approximately $27.688 billion in military assistance from US Department of Defense stocks.[32]

[30] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 4–7, 29–30.
[31] US Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine."
[32] US Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine."

The crisis also demonstrates that US leadership increasingly depends on the capacity to mobilize and coordinate external partners.[33] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became a principal institutional mechanism for transforming bilateral US support into a broader coalition framework. At the July 2024 Washington Summit, Allied leaders established NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training, while also advancing the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC) to strengthen interoperability and institutional learning.[34] NATO leaders additionally adopted a long-term security-assistance pledge with a minimum baseline of €40 billion for Ukraine for the following year.[35]

These measures give concrete empirical content to the concept of alliance activation. Alliance activation extends beyond treaty commitments and political declarations. In operational terms, it involves the conversion of existing commitments into coordinated military planning, capability provision, financial contributions, training, defense-industrial cooperation, intelligence sharing, institutional coordination, and political burden-sharing. The Washington Summit provides evidence of each of these dimensions. The establishment of NSATU created an institutional mechanism for coordinating military assistance; JATEC was intended to strengthen military interoperability and the exchange of lessons learned; and the €40 billion financial baseline introduced a measurable mechanism for distributing the costs of long-term support among Allies.

The evolution of NATO defense spending provides additional evidence of this process. At the Washington Summit, Allied leaders reaffirmed the commitment to invest at least two percent of GDP in defense and noted that more than two-thirds of Allies had reached that benchmark. NATO subsequently reported that European Allies and Canada had increased defense expenditure substantially in response to the changed security environment.[36] These developments suggest that the war in Ukraine has increased US assistance to Ukraine while also contributing to a redistribution of defense responsibilities within the transatlantic alliance. The United States' leadership role therefore increasingly operates through a combination of direct national capabilities and the mobilization of allied resources.[37]

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[33] US Government Accountability Office, *Ukraine: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Tracking of Authorized U.S.-Origin Defense Article Transfers Requested by Foreign Donors*, GAO-24-106745 (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, August 2024), 9–11, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106745.pdf.

[34] NATO Allied Command Transformation, "Advancing NATO-Ukraine Defence Cooperation and Interoperability," May 30, 2025, https://www.act.nato.int/article/nsatu-jatec/.

[35] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 15.

[36] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 6; NATO, *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2024* (Brussels: NATO, April 2025), 2, 16–17, https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/legacy-wcm/media_pdf/2025/4/pdf/sgar24-en.pdf.

[37] Kiel Institute for the World Economy, "Ukraine Support after 3 Years of War: Aid Flows Remain Low but Steady—Shift towards Weapons Procurement," February 14, 2025, https://www.kielinstitut.de/media/news/ukraine-support-after-3-years-of-war-aid-flows-remain-low-but-steady-shift-towards-weapons-procurement/.

A second dimension of US crisis and strategic policy can be observed in the technological sphere. The United States increasingly treats advanced technologies as both economic assets and national-security capabilities. This is particularly evident in policies concerning advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and semiconductor-manufacturing equipment. The December 2024 semiconductor-control package provides a concrete example. The US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security introduced controls covering 24 categories of semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, three categories of software tools, and high-bandwidth memory (HBM). The package also added 140 Asian entities to the Entity List and introduced additional measures intended to address diversion and circumvention risks.

The significance of these measures extends beyond conventional trade regulation. Semiconductor-manufacturing capacity is strategically important because advanced chips and the technologies required to produce them contribute to artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, and advanced military systems.[38] The US policy therefore seeks to constrain access to selected capabilities that Washington considers strategically sensitive. At the same time, the measures are targeted rather than equivalent to a comprehensive economic embargo. It is therefore more analytically accurate to describe them as strategic technology controls, technological risk management, or selective technological containment rather than as a complete "technological blockade."

This development suggests that contemporary US responses to global crises increasingly transcend the traditional distinction between military and economic instruments. Washington increasingly employs a multidimensional approach in which military power, economic statecraft, technological regulation, diplomacy, intelligence cooperation, and alliance coordination operate as complementary instruments. The effectiveness of this approach, however, depends on the ability of the United States to maintain technological advantages, sustain domestic political support, coordinate allied interests, and manage the risks of escalation arising from strategic competition.

The New Vision and Prospects for the Development of US Foreign Policy

This study suggests that the emerging US foreign-policy vision is best understood as a form of adaptive leadership under conditions of constrained primacy. The United States continues to possess exceptional military, economic, technological, diplomatic, and institutional capabilities; however, the international environment in which these capabilities are exercised has become considerably more competitive and interdependent. China has emerged as a long-term systemic competitor, Russia has generated a major security challenge to the European order, and middle and regional powers increasingly seek greater strategic autonomy. Under these condi-

[38] Karen M. Sutter, *U.S. Export Controls and China: Advanced Semiconductors*, CRS Report R48642 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 22, 2025), 1–3, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R48642/R48642.2.pdf.

tions, the central question for Washington concerns how predominant US power can be converted into sustainable political influence when unilateral action is increasingly costly and coalition support is increasingly necessary.

On this basis, the concept of transformed hegemony offers a more useful analytical framework than a simple restoration of post-Cold War unipolarity.[39] Classical unipolarity implied an exceptionally favorable distribution of material capabilities in which the United States could exercise considerable freedom of action.[40] The contemporary environment is different. US power remains substantial, but it operates within a system characterized by greater economic interdependence, technological diffusion, strategic competition, institutional pluralism, and the increased capacity of other major powers to resist or modify US preferences.[41] The transformation of American leadership therefore concerns both the scale of US power and the mechanisms through which that power is organized, transmitted, and converted into political outcomes.

The Ukraine case provides particularly strong evidence for this transformation. Since February 2022, the United States has supplied extensive military assistance to Ukraine while simultaneously coordinating sanctions, diplomatic initiatives, intelligence cooperation, humanitarian support, and allied contributions. The creation of NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) at the 2024 Washington Summit further institutionalized the coordination of military assistance. These developments indicate that US leadership is increasingly exercised through coalition structures in which American capabilities catalyze broader collective action.[42] The United States remains the most consequential actor within this system, but the effectiveness of its strategy depends on the willingness and capacity of other states to contribute resources and accept associated costs.

NATO's post-2022 development reinforces this conclusion. Finland's accession on April 4, 2023 and Sweden's accession on March 7, 2024 expanded the Alliance to 32 members.[43] Their accession was particularly significant because both states had historically maintained military non-alignment and reconsidered their strategic positions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The enlargement therefore reflects a broader shift in strategic calculations generated by the war and a further consolidation of the transatlantic security framework. From the perspective of US strategy, this strengthens the importance of alliances as instruments through which American security preferences can become embedded in a broader institutional order.

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[39] G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (March 2009): 80–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592709090112.

[40] William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 7–10, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560031.

[41] Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order," *Ethics & International Affairs* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 271–85, https://doi.org/10.1017/S089267941700020X.

[42] US Government Accountability Office, *Ukraine: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Tracking*, 9–12.

[43] NATO, "Finland Joins NATO as 31st Ally"; NATO, "Sweden Officially Joins NATO."

The technological dimension provides a second indicator of transformed US leadership. The export-control measures introduced in October 2022 and subsequently strengthened in 2023 and 2024 demonstrate that Washington increasingly seeks to influence the international distribution of power by regulating access to strategically sensitive technologies.[44] The December 2024 semiconductor package, which expanded restrictions on semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, software tools, high-bandwidth memory, and designated Chinese entities, shows how national-security strategy increasingly extends into global production networks. The US outbound-investment regime similarly shows how strategic competition has expanded beyond trade to encompass the regulation of capital flows in strategically sensitive technologies.

Transformed hegemony therefore describes a relational form of influence in which US power depends on coordination with other actors rather than unilateral control. The effectiveness of networked leadership is inherently relational. Alliance partners retain their own national interests, domestic political constraints, economic dependencies, and strategic priorities. The experience of NATO since 2022 illustrates both the strength and the limitations of coalition-based leadership. Although the war encouraged greater defense spending and strengthened transatlantic cooperation, Allies have differed over the scale, timing, and form of military assistance to Ukraine and over the appropriate balance between deterrence, escalation management, and long-term support. Consequently, US leadership within alliances should be understood as a process of coordination and bargaining rather than hierarchical command.[45]

The economic dimension presents a comparable dilemma. Sanctions and financial restrictions can impose high costs on adversaries and reduce their access to markets, capital, and technologies. However, extensive use of economic coercion may also encourage affected states to seek alternative payment mechanisms, trading partners, financial institutions, and reserve assets. The strategic effectiveness of sanctions is therefore shaped by both the economic weight of the United States and the degree of international participation in the relevant financial and commercial system. US economic power remains considerable precisely because it is embedded in global networks; at the same time, those networks create opportunities for adaptation by states seeking to reduce their dependence on US-dominated structures.[46]

Transformed hegemony operates through several distinct but interconnected modalities of US influence. First, alliance-based leadership enables the United States to multiply its security capabilities through partners and distribute the costs

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[44] Gregory C. Allen, *Understanding the Biden Administration's Updated Export Controls* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 11, 2024), 1–2, https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-biden-administrations-updated-export-controls.

[45] Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 463–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010183.

[46] Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 42–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.

of deterrence. Second, institutional leadership allows Washington to influence rules, standards, and collective decision-making through multilateral frameworks and coordinated action. Third, geo-economic leverage allows the United States to pursue strategic objectives through financial measures, trade policy, investment controls, and sanctions. Fourth, technological leadership provides influence over critical infrastructures and future sources of economic and military power. Finally, normative and diplomatic influence remains important for sustaining the legitimacy and attractiveness of the broader order that Washington seeks to preserve.[47]

The interaction of these modalities is more significant than any individual instrument. Military power can deter aggression, but alliances increase its political and operational effectiveness. Economic power can impose costs, but coordinated sanctions increase their reach.[48] Technological advantages can generate strategic leverage, but partnerships and supply-chain coordination determine whether that leverage can be sustained. Diplomatic influence can facilitate coalition formation, but institutional credibility affects whether partners are willing to accept long-term commitments. US power is therefore increasingly network-dependent: its effectiveness derives from the interaction between American capabilities and the capabilities, interests, and choices of other states.[49]

The prospects for this model remain uncertain. Its sustainability will depend on whether the United States can reconcile strategic ambition with domestic political constraints, preserve technological leadership while limiting economic fragmentation, maintain alliance cohesion while accommodating divergent partner interests, and use economic and military power while preserving the institutional legitimacy of the order it seeks to influence.[50] If Washington succeeds in managing these tensions, the United States may retain a central position in the international system even without restoring the degree of dominance associated with the immediate post-Cold War era. If it fails, the same processes of technological diffusion, strategic diversification, and institutional pluralism that currently constrain US primacy may accelerate the emergence of a more fragmented international order.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the principal transformation of American hegemony is based on the changing mechanism through which it is exercised. The cases of Ukraine, NATO, and strategic technology controls demonstrate that US capabilities increasingly generate strategic outcomes through networks of allies, institutions,

[47] Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 255–70, https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345.
[48] US Department of the Treasury, *The Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Treasury, October 2021), 5, https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Treasury-2021-sanctions-review.pdf.
[49] Anne-Marie Slaughter, "America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 94–113, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20699436.
[50] Jake Sullivan, "The Sources of American Power: A Foreign Policy for a Changed World," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 6 (November/December 2023): 10–14, 26–29, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/sources-american-power-biden-jake-sullivan.

and economic and technological dependencies. Transformed hegemony therefore should not be understood as a weaker form of hegemony, but as a different mode of hegemonic power, in which influence depends simultaneously on material capabilities and the capacity to organize collective action, shape institutional rules, and regulate strategically significant networks. At the same time, this form of hegemony is inherently more conditional, because outcomes depend on the cooperation of other actors and the growing autonomy of competing powers. The changes in the contemporary international order have reconfigured the mechanisms through which US power is converted into international influence. The movement from the relatively unipolar structure that characterized the post-Cold War period toward a more contested and increasingly multipolar environment has reduced the scope for unilateral dominance while simultaneously increasing the importance of alliances, institutional cooperation, economic statecraft, technological capabilities, and diplomatic coalition-building. Accordingly, the US strategic priorities increasingly favor networked, adaptive, and multidimensional forms of leadership over predominantly unilateral power projection.

The comparative analysis of the cases examined in this study supports the argument that current US leadership is increasingly characterized by what may be termed "transformed hegemony." This concept does not imply the restoration of the unipolar order of the 1990s, nor does it assume the possibility of absolute American hegemony. Rather, it refers to a form of international leadership in which the United States seeks to preserve its structural advantages by combining material capabilities with alliance networks, multilateral institutions, economic instruments, technological regulation, and normative influence.

The response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides a particularly significant illustration of this transformation. Since February 2022, the United States has combined military assistance, economic sanctions, diplomatic coordination, and alliance mobilization rather than relying on direct military intervention against Russia. The scale and multilateral character of this response demonstrate that contemporary US power is increasingly exercised through coalition-based mechanisms. In this sense, alliance activation involves the operationalization of existing commitments through coordinated capabilities, burden-sharing, deterrence, and political alignment. Technological policy further illustrates the changing character of US strategic power. Export controls and outbound-investment restrictions show how Washington increasingly integrates economic and technological policy with national-security objectives. Competition with China now extends beyond military capabilities to critical technologies, supply chains, and investment flows. These measures represent targeted efforts to constrain access to strategically sensitive capabilities while preserving broader economic interdependence.

It may be argued that the United States possesses substantial structural advantages, but these advantages do not translate automatically into unrestricted strategic freedom. The rise of China, Russia's capacity to challenge the European security order, the growing autonomy of regional actors, economic interdependence, and the institutional constraints of multilateral governance limit the possibility of restoring an earlier form of unilateral American primacy. Consequently, US leader-

ship is increasingly dependent upon the ability to persuade, coordinate, and mobilize other actors rather than simply compel them.

Thus, changes in the international order are reconfiguring the form and mechanisms of US leadership. The United States remains a central actor in the international system because of its military capabilities, economic weight, technological advantages, institutional position, alliance network, and capacity for diplomatic coalition-building. Nevertheless, these resources increasingly operate through interdependent and negotiated structures rather than through unilateral dominance. The future effectiveness of US foreign policy will consequently depend less on its ability to reproduce the conditions of post-Cold War unipolarity and more on its ability to manage strategic competition, sustain alliances, preserve technological and economic advantages, and participate effectively in institutions of global governance.

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The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.
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The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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