

Policy Brief

Is the United States a Self-Perceived Superpower?

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Executive Summary

The notion that the United States of America (U.S.A.) is a self-proclaimed superpower is complex and multifaceted. While the U.S. has undeniable strengths, various factors, including military ambiguities that have influenced globalisation in the post-9/11 era - particularly its unilateralism in an increasingly interconnected world - have exposed economic vulnerabilities¹ amid China's growing influence, technological susceptibilities, and socio-political issues, which challenge the sustainability and legitimacy of its superpower status. This paper evaluates the U.S.'s role in global politics, economics, and military affairs and highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of global power dynamics and the role of the U.S. in the contemporary world.

The paper discusses several vulnerabilities that contest the perception of unchallenged American supremacy and points to the arbitrary outcomes of U.S.'s military engagements in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the economic frailties posed by rising national debt, income inequality, and infrastructural decay. It also highlights inconsistencies in U.S. policies, such as dissimilarities in nuclear policy and participation in non-proliferation treaties, along with its role as a global polluter, while presenting itself as a leader in the fight against climate change. Furthermore, the paper addresses the socio-political issues within the States, such as inefficiencies in its healthcare system, exposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and underinvestment in education, which impacts the country's future competitiveness. The brief also notes the critical role of immigrants in driving technological and scientific advancements in the U.S. The behavioural economics section sheds light on cognitive biases that perpetuate the perception of U.S. dominance. Biases such as the availability heuristic, framing effect, and confirmation bias contribute to the perception of U.S. power, often overlooking its weaknesses.

Using game theory, the paper elucidates how the U.S. maintains its perceived superpower status despite these weaknesses, and identifies key players, including other major powers, developing nations, international organisations, non-state actors, and domestic constituents, and analyses their strategies and interactions. This game theoretic approach highlights the discrepancy between the perception and reality of U.S. dominance, underlining the strategic manoeuvres that sustain the superpower narrative.

There is a need for a detailed reassessment of U.S. strategies to address these weaknesses and maintain its global standing in a rapidly evolving world. Without substantial reforms in healthcare, education, and infrastructure, and a realistic approach to international relations, the U.S. risks losing its perceived superpower status in the face of rising global competition and internal socioeconomic disparities.

¹ Ivo H Daalder and James M Lindsay, "The Globalization of Politics: American Foreign Policy for a New Century," (Brookings, January 1, 2003), Accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-globalization-of-politics-american-foreign-policy-for-a-new-century/>.

Introduction

The United States of America is often described as a superpower, reflecting its dominant position in global politics, economics, technological advancement and military strength. However, this status is sometimes perceived as self-proclaimed, suggesting that the U.S. has actively sought to assert and maintain its superiority through various means. By examining the U.S.'s war history, economic vulnerabilities, de-dollarisation trends, and other socio-political issues, a nuanced understanding emerges of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the notion of the U.S. as a global superpower. Historical context, geopolitical actions, economic policies, and military strategies all contribute to this multifaceted perception, challenging the straightforward image of uncontested American supremacy.

The concept of the U.S. as a superpower emerged prominently after World War II, when the U.S. played a pivotal role in the Allied victory, significantly enhancing its global standing. This status was solidified through the establishment of international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, all of which bore substantial U.S. influence. The U.S. further asserted its economic power and political influence with the Marshall Plan, which not only facilitated European recovery but also created a bloc of allied nations supportive of Washington's policies. Formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 cemented the U.S. as a leading military power committed to defending Western interests against communism – then-Soviet Union.

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. positioned itself as a leader of the free world, countering Soviet influence through military interventions, economic aid, and diplomatic efforts. Acting as a global policeman, the U.S. has often unilaterally or through coalitions intervened militarily in international conflicts such as those in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, reflecting its self-perceived responsibility to maintain global order. Beyond military might, the U.S. has adeptly utilised soft power to inculcate its cultural, political, and economic ideals worldwide, exemplified by the spread of American culture through media, education, and technology. These historical and geopolitical actions highlight the multifaceted strategies employed by the U.S. to claim its supremacy and maintain its status as a global superpower.

Economic dominance has been a cornerstone of the U.S.'s superpower status, with the U.S. dollar serving as the world's primary reserve currency and American financial institutions wielding significant global influence. Establishment of the Bretton Woods system positioned the U.S. dollar at the centre of international trade and finance, and even after the system's collapse, the dollar has remained the dominant currency. The U.S. has shaped global trade through agreements like North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and its role in the World Trade Organization (WTO), with its economic policies often setting the standards for global commerce.

Military strategy further augments the U.S.'s superpower status, as it maintains the most powerful and technologically advanced military in the world. In FY 2024, the Department of Defense (DoD) has earmarked \$2.13 trillion for its six sub-components (which include the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Military Sales and Space Force). In fact, the U.S. allocates more funds to national defence than the combined expenditures of China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, France, South Korea, Japan, and Ukraine. Historically, the U.S. has dedicated a higher percentage of its GDP to defence compared to many of its main allies (\$877 billion in 2022 alone). This substantial defence spending supports a vast network of military bases around the world, ensuring that the U.S. can respond quickly to international crises and assert its supremacy globally

Perceived vs. Actual Power: Illusions of U.S. Global Dominance

The U.S.'s rise to superpower status through economic and military dominance is now under increasing scrutiny. Key points such as dubious war outcomes, reliance on coalitions, challenges to dollar supremacy, and interventions in foreign sovereignties, highlight the discrepancies of U.S. power. Given below are issues that underscore the fragile foundation of America's global influence and question its capacity to maintain its hegemony in a rapidly evolving world:

The U.S. Has Never Won Any War

While the U.S. claims numerous military victories, its record is contentious. Post-World War II conflicts, such as the Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq War, and Afghanistan War, have ended ambiguously or unfavourably for the U.S. These conflicts have often resulted in prolonged engagements without clear victories, raising questions about the effectiveness of U.S. military interventions and their true outcomes. For instance, despite significant military efforts, the U.S. was unable to prevent the fall of Saigon and unification of Vietnam under communist control during the Vietnam War. Similarly, the two decade-long involvement in Afghanistan ended with the Taliban regaining control, undermining the perceived success of this project.

Reliance on Alliances during War

Historically, the U.S. has relied on alliances and coalitions in its military engagements, reflecting an unwillingness to act unilaterally. This pattern is evident in numerous conflicts.

The U.S. did not enter World War II until the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941.² When it entered World War II, it joined the Allied Powers alongside the UK, Soviet Union, and other nations, demonstrating its dependence on coalitions during war. The Gulf War saw a U.S.-led coalition of 35 countries expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait. More recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq involved NATO allies and other international partners, underscoring the U.S.'s dependence on allied support to achieve its military objectives.

Dissimilarity in the U.S. Nuclear Policy

As of 2024, the U.S. possesses 5748 nuclear weapons, the second-highest number of nuclear weapons held by a single country, while actively discouraging and imposing restrictions on other nations' nuclear programs.³ Despite having one of the most extensive nuclear arsenals, the U.S. often pressurises countries like Pakistan, which has maintained a safe nuclear programme without incident, to limit their nuclear capabilities. This contradictory stance not only highlights the U.S.'s selective enforcement of non-proliferation norms but also raises questions about its commitment to global nuclear stability.

Role in Climate Change

The U.S. is one of the world's largest contributors towards environmental degradation. In fact, while China may have been the biggest polluter in 2022, the US has been by far the largest over time. On average, an American produces nearly twice the amount of climate pollution as a person in China. The U.S. oscillation between joining, withdrawing, and rejoining the Paris Agreement reflects a cycle of commitment and retreat in its climate change efforts. Its unwillingness to ratify international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol undermines its repute in this regard. This double standard is further exemplified by its continued high greenhouse gas emissions, reflecting a reluctance to adopt stringent domestic measures to combat climate change effectively.

De-Dollarisation Movement

The dominance of the U.S. dollar is increasingly challenged by global economic shifts. Countries like China and Russia are promoting alternatives to reduce dependence on the dollar, seeking to curb U.S. economic influence. Bilateral trade agreements between these nations often use their currencies instead of the dollar. Russia has now been spearheading the development of a new currency for cross-border trade by the BRICS nations: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The growing use of the Petro Yuan

² Library of Congress, "U.S. History Primary Source Timeline," 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/great-depression-and-world-war-ii-1929-1945/world-war-ii/>.

³ Kelsey Davenport, "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," Arms Control Association, July 2024, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nuclear-weapons-who-has-what-glance>.

and digital currencies have begun to stir significant discussion, for example, of a shift towards a multi-currency oil trade system - a gradual trend which is likely to continue.

Intervening in Other Countries' Affairs and Democracy

The U.S. has a long history of interfering in other nations' internal affairs under the guise of promoting democracy, often resulting in destabilisation and long-term conflict. The U.S. supported regime changes in Latin America and the Middle East, including Chile, Nicaragua, Iraq and Libya which have led to ongoing instability. Recently, Pakistan protested the U.S.'s attempt to interfere in its internal affairs after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution questioning the credibility of Pakistan's general election. The resolution called for a "full and independent" investigation into alleged irregularities, which Pakistan rejected as an incomplete understanding of its political situation and electoral process. These actions raise questions about the true motivations behind U.S. interventions and their impact on global stability.

A Weakening Economy

Despite being one of the world's largest economies, the U.S. faces significant economic challenges, including rising debt, income inequality, and infrastructure decay. The national debt has surpassed \$30 trillion, raising concerns about long-term fiscal sustainability. High debt levels can lead to increased borrowing costs, reduced fiscal flexibility, and potential loss of investor confidence. Persistent budget deficits, exacerbated by substantial expenditures on social security, healthcare, and defence, contribute to this rising debt. As the debt grows, so would interest payments, which could crowd out other essential government spending. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), interest payments on the debt are projected to exceed \$1 trillion annually by 2030, indicating long-term fiscal problems.

Income inequality in the U.S. has reached levels not seen since the 1920s, undermining social cohesion and economic stability. The Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, indicates that the U.S. has one of the highest levels of inequality among OECD countries. The top 1% of earners hold a disproportionate share of the country's wealth, while the median household income stagnates. This disparity highlights the growing economic divide, where wealth concentration at the top continues to increase.

Research from the OECD also suggests that social mobility in the U.S. is lower than in many other developed countries.⁴ This means that economic status is more likely to be inherited rather than achieved through effort and opportunity, limiting the potential for individuals to improve their socioeconomic standing based on merit. This combination of high inequality and low social mobility shows the difficulties facing the U.S. in

⁴ "Social Mobility and Equal Opportunity," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/social-mobility-and-equal-opportunity.html>.

addressing economic fairness and opportunity for all its citizens. High levels of inequality can lead to social unrest (as shown on January 6, 2021, when a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, disrupting a joint session of Congress tasked with certifying the 2020 presidential election results), reduced consumer confidence, and increased reliance on government assistance programmes. This concentration of wealth not only creates economic inefficiencies but also poses significant social and political hurdles.

Moreover, the U.S. infrastructure, once a symbol of progress and innovation, is now aging and underfunded, hampering economic productivity and competitiveness. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has consistently graded domestic infrastructure with low scores, citing significant needs in transportation, water systems, and public buildings. Poor infrastructure leads to inefficiencies and increased costs for businesses and consumers, reducing the overall productivity of the economy. This infrastructure deficit highlights the urgent need for substantial investment to support long-term economic growth.

The U.S. economy heavily relies on consumer spending, which accounts for approximately 70% of GDP, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in consumer confidence and spending behaviour. Economic downturns, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic, illustrate how sudden drops in consumer spending can lead to recessions. High levels of household debt, including mortgages, student loans, and credit cards, underpin much of this spending, adding another layer of risk. This reliance on debt-driven consumption highlights the fragility of the U.S. economic model and the potential for significant economic disruptions.

Education Challenges in the U.S.

Education is another area where the U.S. trails behind other developed nations, particularly in terms of quality and access. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) consistently shows American students performing below average in mathematics, science, and reading compared to peers in other developed countries. For instance, in the 2018 PISA results, the U.S. ranked 13th in reading, 18th in science, and 37th in mathematics. The 2023 rankings revealed a stark decline in U.S. student performance in mathematics, with scores dropping 13 points from 2018, equivalent to a loss of nearly two-thirds of a year's worth of education. This marked the lowest math scores ever recorded in the U.S. since the inception of the PISA mathematics test in 2003. The latest results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, indicate a decline in reading scores for both fourth and eighth graders across the 2019 and 2022 testing cycles. These rankings highlight significant gaps in educational outcomes.

Furthermore, the cost of higher education in the U.S. is among the highest in the world, leading to substantial student debt burden. This financial strain limits access to

higher education and affects economic mobility. High tuition fees and associated costs force many students to take on significant debt, which can take decades to repay and can deter potential students from pursuing higher education altogether. This situation exacerbates inequality and limits the ability of the education system to serve as an engine for social mobility and economic growth.

Migrants Drive U.S.'s R&D

The U.S. benefits significantly from the contributions of immigrants in research and development (R&D), which underpin its technological and scientific advancements. Many leading tech companies, such as Google and Tesla, were founded or are led by immigrants. There is an argument that U.S. innovation is increasingly driven by immigrant talent rather than native-born Americans, challenging the notion of inherent American creativity. A large percentage of U.S. patents are filed by immigrants, and immigrant entrepreneurs play a crucial role in the country's start-up ecosystem. This reliance on foreign-born innovators questions the sustainability of U.S. leadership in global innovation without continued immigration. A significant proportion of STEM PhDs in the U.S. are awarded to foreign-born students, highlighting the critical role immigrants play in driving innovation and maintaining the country's competitive edge in technology and science.

Vulnerability of the U.S. Health System

The COVID-19 Pandemic exposed significant weaknesses in the U.S. healthcare system, highlighting critical issues of access, affordability, and preparedness. The U.S. healthcare system is one of the most expensive in the world, yet it often delivers suboptimal outcomes, creating a significant economic burden. Healthcare spending is nearly 18% of GDP, amounting to approximately \$3.8 trillion annually, far higher than in other developed countries. Despite this immense spending, the U.S. ranks 26th in life expectancy and 33rd in infant mortality rates among OECD countries.

High healthcare costs burden businesses, reducing their competitiveness, and limit disposable income for households, with nearly 25% of Americans reporting difficulty paying medical bills. Moreover, these costs contribute significantly to the national debt through programs like Medicare and Medicaid, which together accounted for about \$1.3 trillion in federal spending in 2020. A major factor in the increasing federal debt is spending on these two programs, which is expected to surge by 73% over the next decade and become the largest category of federal expenditure by 2028. By 2054, these expenses will constitute 30% of total federal outlays.

This inefficiency emphasises the urgent need for reform to enhance both economic stability and public health outcomes. The U.S. recorded one of the highest per capita death rates among developed countries during the pandemic. Millions of Americans lack adequate health insurance, aggravating the impact of the pandemic. These susceptibilities impair the U.S.'s claim to have a world-leading healthcare system.

Taliban's Impact on U.S. Perceived Power

The 9/11 attacks and subsequent Afghan war demonstrated susceptibilities in U.S. security and military strategy, contesting its superpower image. The 9/11 attacks showed that non-state actors could inflict significant impact on the U.S. homeland. The rapid Taliban takeover after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan highlighted the limitations of American military interventions and has raised questions about the efficacy of its long-term strategic objectives, ultimately impacting its global reputation and perceived power.

Social Safety Nets in the U.S.

The U.S. has relatively weak social safety nets compared to other developed countries, impacting its ability to support its citizens effectively. Countries like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden offer extensive welfare programs that provide robust support for unemployment, healthcare, education, and housing. In contrast, the U.S. social safety net is more limited and fragmented, leaving many citizens vulnerable during economic downturns or personal crises. The U.S. has higher poverty rates compared to other OECD countries. According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau statistics that came out in late 2023, the official poverty rate in 2022 was around 11.5% (almost the same as 2021), reflecting systemic issues in income distribution and social support. This disparity in social safety nets underscores the challenges faced by many Americans in accessing essential services and achieving economic stability.

Analysis of the U.S. Economy and Society

Various American analysts, including commentators like Fareed Zakaria, have critically examined the U.S. economy, highlighting significant concerns. As discussed earlier, the U.S. is grappling with staggering income inequality, where the top 1% of Americans hold more wealth than the bottom 90% combined. This disparity undermines social cohesion and economic stability, limiting economic mobility and consumer spending, which are crucial for economic growth.

In addition, the rise in tribalism, intensified by political polarisation, poses another threat to societal stability. The storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump after the 2020 presidential election is a stark example of this. Such events, reminiscent of political instability in developing nations, challenge the perception of the U.S. as a model of democratic stability and development. These incidents reveal deep-seated vulnerabilities in American society and governance, highlighting the need for substantial reforms to address these systemic issues.

Prominent voices echoing these concerns include Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz and political scientist Francis Fukuyama. Stiglitz has frequently pointed out the dangers of rising inequality in the U.S., arguing that it hinders economic growth and undermines democratic institutions. Fukuyama has warned about the erosion of

social trust and the rise of populism, which he sees as symptoms of deeper socio-economic fractures within American society. Both analysts agree that these trends, if left unaddressed, could lead to further instability and weaken the country’s global standing.

Game Theory Analysis: Perception vs. Reality of U.S. Superpower Status

Game theory provides a valuable lens for analysing how the United States maintains its status as a perceived superpower despite various underlying vulnerabilities. This analysis examines the strategies employed, key players involved and scenarios that reveal the gap between perception and reality.

Players in the Game

1. United States (U.S.)
2. Other Major Powers (China, Russia, European Union)
3. Developing Nations
4. International Organisations (United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization)
5. Non-State Actors (Multinational Corporations, NGOs)
6. Domestic Constituents (U.S. Citizens, Political Parties)

Payoff Matrix Analysis

The payoff matrix in this context would involve perceived benefits of maintaining superpower status versus the actual costs and risks associated with the strategies employed.

Table 1: Payoff Matrix Analysis

Strategy	US Payoff (Perception)	US Payoff (Reality)	Other Powers' Response
Military Dominance	High deterrence value	High cost, mixed outcomes	Regional balancing, military build-up
Economic Influence	Global financial control	Vulnerable to de-dollarisation	Push for alternative currencies
Technological Soft Power	Innovation leadership	Increasing competition	Tech development and innovation
Diplomatic Engagement	Global leadership role	Contested influence	Formation of alternative coalitions
Domestic Stability	Stable and prosperous image	Political and socioeconomic issues	Criticism of U.S. policies

Source: Author’s own.

Players, Strategies and Scenarios

Table 2 shows the complex interplay of strategies and scenarios involving different players that contribute to the perception of the U.S. as a superpower, while highlighting the underlying vulnerabilities that challenge this perception.

Table 2: Strategies and Scenarios

Players	Strategies	Scenarios	Outcomes
United States (U.S.)	Military Dominance and Alliances	Continues high defence spending and global military presence	Perceived military superpower, but actual effectiveness in asymmetric warfare and long-term occupations questionable.
	Economic Influence and Dollar Hegemony	Maintains influence over global financial systems through IMF and World Bank	Perceived economic dominance but faces long-term de-dollarisation and economic diversification challenges.
	Technological and Cultural Soft Power	Leads in tech R&D and cultural exports but faces competition	Perceived innovation hub, but growing competition from countries like China in AI and 5G technologies.
	Political and Diplomatic Engagement	Plays leading role in international bodies but encounters resistance	Perceived global leader in diplomacy, but influence is increasingly contested and depends on cooperation.
	Domestic Economic and Social Stability	Addresses internal issues but struggles with political polarisation and socioeconomic disparities	Perceived as stable and prosperous, but internal conflicts and economic vulnerabilities challenge this view.
Other Major Powers	Regional Balancing and Military Build-up	Form regional alliances to counter U.S. dominance (e.g., SCO, BRICS)	Balance against U.S. military power, creating regional power centres.
	Alternative Trade Agreements and Digital Currencies	Promote de-dollarisation and use of alternative currencies	Reduce dependency on the dollar, challenging U.S.'s economic influence.
	Tech Development and Innovation	Develop indigenous tech industries and cultural institutions	Compete with U.S. soft power and technological leadership.
	Formation of Alternative Coalitions	Create parallel institutions or reform existing ones to reduce U.S. influence	Build alternative global governance structures, diminishing U.S. diplomatic control.
Developing Nations	Alignment with Major Powers	Align with major powers (U.S. or others) based on economic and military aid	Gain economic and military support, but risk dependency and loss of autonomy.

	Leveraging International Organisations	Use international forums to voice concerns and negotiate aid	Seek to balance power dynamics, using platforms for diplomatic leverage.
International Organisations	Policy Influence and Advocacy	Influence policies of member states and promote global norms	Shape international standards and norms, balancing interests of multiple powers.
Non-State Actors	Innovation and Cultural Exchange	Drive technological and cultural advancements	Enhance global influence through innovation and cultural contributions.
Domestic Constituents	Political Pressure and Advocacy	Advocate for policy reforms and equitable economic measures	Influence national policy, addressing internal vulnerabilities and promoting social stability.

Source: Author's own.

Cognitive Biases in Perceiving U.S.'s Global Role

Behavioural economics offers valuable insights into why the United States is perceived as a superpower despite significant underlying susceptibilities. This field, which combines psychology with economic theory, helps explain how cognitive biases, heuristics, and social influences shape perceptions that often diverge from reality. Given below are key behavioural economics concepts that illustrate the misperception of the U.S. as a superpower:

The **availability heuristic** leads people to judge the frequency or importance of an event based on how easily examples come to mind. The U.S. has been prominently featured in global media for its military interventions, technological innovations, and cultural exports, making these aspects readily available in people's minds. Frequent media coverage of U.S. military operations and its role in international conflicts reinforces the perception of military supremacy, despite mixed outcomes and prolonged engagements without clear victories, such as in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Moreover, Hollywood movies, multinational tech giants like Apple, Microsoft and Google etc., and prominent universities ensure that American culture and innovation remain front and centre on the global stage.

The **framing effect** significantly influences perceptions and decisions based on how information is presented. U.S. achievements and global interventions are often framed in terms of leadership and moral responsibility, overshadowing the complexities and its failures. U.S. actions in international affairs are frequently framed as efforts to promote democracy and human rights, masking the adverse outcomes and ethical concerns associated with these interventions.

Confirmation bias leads people to favour information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs and ignore or downplay contradictory evidence. The historical narrative of the U.S. as a superpower leads individuals to seek out and remember information that supports this view. Americans and global audiences often selectively consume media that highlights U.S. strengths and successes, reinforcing the superpower narrative while ignoring signs of economic and social decline.

Status quo bias or preference for maintaining the current state of affairs, can make it difficult to recognise and adapt to changing realities. The long-standing perception of the U.S. as a global leader creates resistance to acknowledging its current challenges. Policymakers and the public may resist policy changes or acknowledge declining aspects of U.S. power because it threatens the comfortable status quo of perceived supremacy.

Overconfidence bias leads to overestimating the U.S.'s ability to manage global and domestic challenges, prevalent among policymakers and the public, reinforcing the superpower perception. Overconfidence in military and economic power has led to overextended military engagements and ambitious economic policies that strain domestic resources.

The **bandwagon effect**, where people adopt beliefs because others do, helps perpetuate the superpower narrative. As global leaders, media, and institutions continue to refer to the U.S. as a superpower, others are likely to follow suit. Global alliances and endorsements from international organisations reinforce the perception of U.S. supremacy, encouraging others to align with this view despite underlying issues.

Optimism bias leads individuals to believe that positive outcomes are more likely than they actually are, and negative outcomes less likely. This can result in an overly rosy view of the U.S.'s future prospects despite evidence to the contrary. Persistent belief in the "American Dream" and the resilience of the U.S. economy, despite rising debt, inequality, and infrastructure decay, demonstrates this bias.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a comprehensive analysis of the U.S.'s status as a self-proclaimed superpower, revealing the complexities and contradictions inherent in this perception. While the U.S. has historically asserted its dominance through economic, military, and cultural influence, the analysis underscores the fragile foundation of its global influence.

Key issues such as dubious war outcomes, reliance on coalitions, economic vulnerabilities, and socio-political challenges highlight the limitations of U.S. power. The rise of alternative global powers, de-dollarisation trends, and internal socioeconomic disparities pose significant threats to the U.S.'s ability to maintain its hegemony.

The paper indicates that unless the U.S. addresses key vulnerabilities in healthcare, education, social equity, and infrastructure, it risks not only its economic growth and social stability but also its global leadership position. The growing discrepancies between the U.S.'s perceived and actual power highlight that its problems are not just symptomatic of domestic policy weaknesses but also reflect broader shifts in global power dynamics, where traditional models of influence are increasingly being contested by other emerging players and global issues. Without reforms, the U.S. will likely see its role as a global superpower diminish, reflecting similar struggles that other nations encounter in upholding coherence and credibility on the world stage.

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