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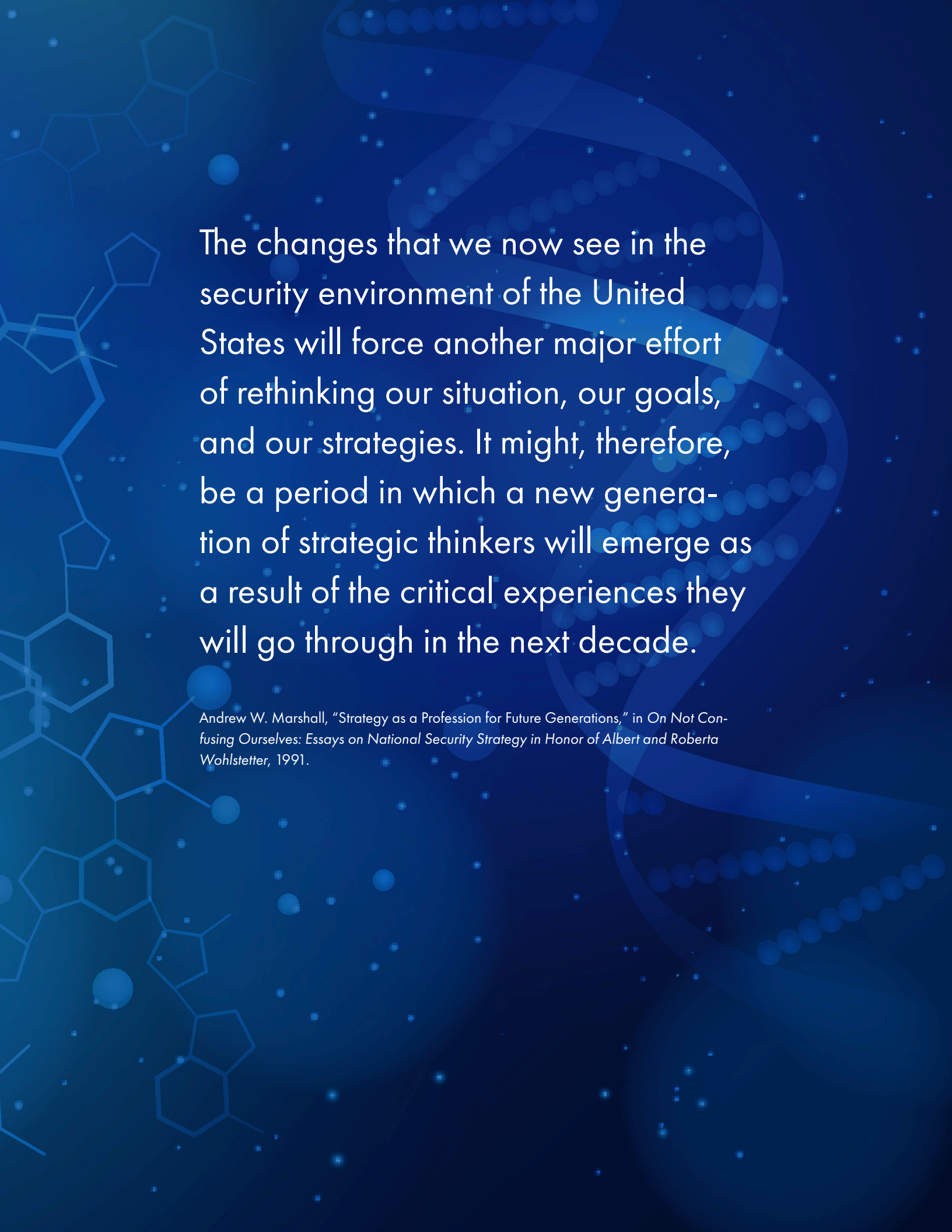
# U.S. Collapse

## A Chain-Writing Experiment

David E. Degenhardt, Patrick Hutson, Daniel R. Mahanty, Lance Menthe, Jan Osburg,  
Jason Rimmelin, Kevin L. Schwartz, Thomas J. Shattuck

FOREWORD BY THE ANDREW W. MARSHALL FOUNDATION

MARCH 2024

The background is a deep blue gradient. On the left side, there are faint, light blue outlines of various chemical structures, including hexagons and pentagons, some connected by lines. On the right side, there is a large, stylized DNA double helix structure, also in light blue, winding upwards. Scattered throughout the background are small, light blue dots and squares, giving it a molecular or scientific feel.

The changes that we now see in the security environment of the United States will force another major effort of rethinking our situation, our goals, and our strategies. It might, therefore, be a period in which a new generation of strategic thinkers will emerge as a result of the critical experiences they will go through in the next decade.

Andrew W. Marshall, "Strategy as a Profession for Future Generations," in *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security Strategy in Honor of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter*, 1991.



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# About the Authors

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Patrick attended the University of Maryland, College Park in 2016 and majored in government and politics with minors in history and global terrorism studies from Maryland's START program. Graduating in 2019, he began employment at the Department of Justice, where he remains. He is currently a graduate student at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, earning a degree in security studies. His areas of interest include intelligence history, existential risk, and forecasting and foresight, and his hobbies include reading comics, writing poetry, and roleplaying games.

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Dan is the director of research, learning, and innovation at Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), an international organization committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. He also served as CIVIC's U.S. director from 2017–21. Prior to CIVIC, Dan served at the U.S. Department of State from 1999–2016, where he developed and led the Office of Security and Human Rights. He has a master's degree from Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree in economics from George Mason University.

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Thomas is the global order program manager at the University of Pennsylvania's Perry World House. Shattuck is a nonresident research fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute and a member of Foreign Policy for America's NextGen Foreign Policy Initiative and the Pacific Forum's Young Leaders Program, where he participated in the 2022 U.S.–Philippines Next-Generation Leaders in Security Initiative. His research focuses on cross-strait relations, Taiwanese and Chinese domestic and foreign affairs, Taiwan's semiconductor industry, and the U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific. In 2022, he was one of 39 civilians selected to participate in the Department of Defense's Joint Civilian Orientation Conference.

*The authors' views are entirely their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of their employers, schools, or other affiliations.*

# Acknowledgments

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# Foreword

## ***It is 2053. The United States is no longer a superpower. What happened?***

This is the question the Andrew W. Marshall Foundation posed to the public during the summer and fall of 2023. What might occur between 2024 and 2053 for the United States to experience a “rapid, severe, and significant loss” of power? We characterized this shift as a “collapse” – but left the particulars of its definition up to the public.

The experiment was divided into three phases, each representing a 10-year increment leading to the future state of 2053, when the United States was no longer a superpower. We called for submissions exploring each 10-year increment, starting with 2024–2033. The winning submission of the first phase became the first link in the chain, the starting prompt for the second phase, 2034–2043. This continued to a third phase, thus creating a three-link chain.

More than 100 people submitted exploratory narratives. In each phase, submissions were reviewed by a panel of reviewers, who selected the top three submissions to be voted on by the public. These public votes (inspired by “up voting,” as they say on Reddit) determined the winner of each phase.

This paper presents the top submission from each period in “The Chain: U.S. Collapse, 2024–2053.” It then presents the runners-up in “Alternative Links in the Chain.” We encourage you to read this paper front to back—and then read it again as a “choose your own adventure.” How might the future play out if “A Small White Mouse in Dresden” were followed by “UPCC v. Sanchez,” for example? What other links, and ultimately, chains, are possible? What would you have explored?

Our objective in asking this question about U.S. collapse was two-fold. First, it was important to pose a question that members of the national security community – defined broadly – are not exploring directly in their daily lives. It’s a bold question, a controversial question, and it made people uncomfortable. But how can anyone proclaim to be making sound policies or thinking strategically if they understand only adversaries and competitors but not themselves?

This does not mean collapse necessarily would come from internal factors. It might arise gradually, then be realized all at once. In this experiment, we saw the limits of the United States’ ability to interact with its environment. Further studies might explore the nuances and specifics of U.S. internal dynamics that might lead to these interactions. For example, what is it about our culture, broadly, that helps or hinders us in shaping our environment? Are our institutions’ organizational cultures conducive to proactively establishing a desired reality?<sup>1</sup> Are they conducive to reacting appropriately to shocks and threats? Is our society equipped to manage rapid changes in the natural environment, demographics, health, technology, and economics? Are we devoting our attention too singularly to traditional threats when the real challenges may come from our inability to recognize or adjust to change?

<sup>1</sup> See also, Elliot M. Seckler and Travis Zahnow, “[America’s Reactive Foreign Policy: How U.S. Organizational Culture and Behavior Advantages China](#),” The Andrew W. Marshall Foundation, July 2023.

Our second objective was more practical. Our purpose, as an organization, is to build successive generations of strategic thinkers by promoting interdisciplinary thinking on long-term U.S. national security issues. What kind of question would attract the most diverse perspectives? What kind of question would reflect our goal of promoting exploratory thinking on U.S. national security? This potentially all-encompassing question on U.S. collapse was not intended to arrive at an answer, a prediction, or even a projection. It was intended to provide as many avenues for exploratory, interdisciplinary thinking as possible while provoking some bold thinking not happening elsewhere.

In addition to the question we posed, the design of this experiment—chain writing—was something we had not seen before. Inspired originally by the idea of viral Reddit threads, we pondered how we could encourage original thinking, encourage departures from the norms, and create a mechanism by which people were inspired by each other's ideas despite not being preselected or being collocated. From these goals, chain writing was born: an asynchronous, crowd-sourced writing exercise that started with boundary conditions and allowed participants to identify potential events and trends that may lead to a certain future.

Question and design combined, this experiment allowed people to rid themselves of the constraints of today. It was not about predicting the future. That—always—will be wrong. Instead, it motivated interdisciplinary, collaborative thinking. In what truly was an experiment, it raised more questions for us than answers.

We believe we have succeeded in our objectives, though there is so much more thinking that can be done. We are not a think tank, and therefore we did not set out to provide the reader with our analysis of the text you will read in this report. We want you, the reader, to interact with the text yourself. Raise your own questions, come to your own conclusions, and then, please share them with us. You can always reach us at [info@andrewmarshallfoundation.org](mailto:info@andrewmarshallfoundation.org). We hope you derive insights from the submissions' creativity and the new questions they raise.

**The Andrew W. Marshall Foundation**

March 2024

**“This potentially all-encompassing question on U.S. collapse was not intended to arrive at an answer, a prediction, or even a projection. It was intended to provide as many avenues for exploratory, interdisciplinary thinking as possible while provoking some bold thinking not happening elsewhere.”**





# The Chain: U.S. Collapse, 2024 – 2053

**2024–2033**

## **A Small White Mouse in Dresden**

*Lance Menthe*

The crisis began when a small, white mouse in Dresden failed to die. It took some time for anyone to notice. The median lifespan of a lab mouse is about 20 months, but 30 months is not unheard of, and not dying is not a singular event. It was only when a newly hired graduate student at the Max Planck Institute inventoried the mice retired from previous experiments that she realized something extraordinary had occurred.

Word spread that scientists investigating a treatment for late-stage Alzheimer's had mistakenly injected several mice with an improperly formulated drug cocktail. The error had been caught before the paper was submitted and the trial had been rerun with disappointing results. Four years later, however, one of the subjects from the original experiment was still living contentedly in her cage, free of degenerative diseases and any symptoms of advanced age.

Subsequent studies soon confirmed the safety and efficacy of similar drug cocktails as a longevity treatment for humans. Pharmaceutical giants raced to file patents in the Global North, and bootleg manufacturers began fabricating the drugs on an industrial scale in the Global South. Almost overnight, the gray wave of aging population that had been lurking on the horizon became an onrushing tsunami.

In Western Europe, decades of declining birthrates had left the social democracies vulnerable to the demographic shift yet had also given them time to prepare. The brief surge in defense spending that followed the Russian invasion of Ukraine was quietly reversed to reallocate resources for medical care. Retirement ages were lifted while the workweek was reduced, spreading the labor supply across extended lifespans. Pundits warned, however, of the coming *Verknöcherung*, the ossification of the body politic as older generations failed to pass the torch to the next.

In China, this freezing of the power structure took a more immediate form as President Xi Jinping was elected to unprecedented fourth and fifth terms by the National Congress in 2027 and 2032. To maintain their increasingly aggressive military stance and keep their economy booming, the Chinese Communist Party fully embraced a series of pro-natalist policies.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the social welfare structure teetered on its foundations. A hard-fought hike in the payroll tax had recently bolstered the Medicare and Social Security trust funds, but now they were once again slated to be insolvent within the decade. As generational warfare loomed, political gridlock and rising interest rates hollowed out the federal budget, with the axe falling hardest on national defense, foreign aid, and research investment programs.

No one knows just how far these new longevity treatments will extend human life. Some say they could add 20 years. Some say they could double human lifespans—or even more. As 2033 draws to a close, a forest of cameras now attend to an unassuming cage in a Dresden lab, broadcasting for all the world to see. Inside, a small, white mouse is still very much alive.

## 2034–2043

### The Methuselah Treatment

Patrick Hutson

They called it meth.

It was short for what scientists called “the Methuselah treatment,” but those who coined the term claimed that, for societies, it was just as addicting and destructive as methamphetamine.

Like any addict, wealthy societies were spending all their money on the source of their addiction. Budgets for defense, aid, and research were halved and halved again as wealthy states in North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific were forced to spend billions to support healthcare for their aging populations. As populations aged, political support for meth—and all its healthcare costs—grew rapidly. After all, no one wanted to be the politician who allows elderly voters to live for centuries but asks their children to drop dead at 77.


Meth’s universal approval turned these wealthy states into gerontocracies: ruled by the old, and for the old. The average age of a U.S. senator grew from 65 in 2023 to 82 in 2043. Vladimir Putin entered his fourth decade as president of Russia while a silver-haired Xi Jinping—whose pro-natalist policies never took off—served three more terms. In Germany, Angela Merkel was elected chancellor again in a stunning political comeback while the British joked that Prince William would have to wait longer than Charles III to become king.

It may have been called meth, but another metaphor for the treatment’s effects came from a writer at *The Economist* in a retrospective 20 years after its creation. “Meth turned a small mouse immortal and wealthy societies into rhinos” they wrote. “Grey, wrinkly, blind, top-heavy, and nearly extinct.”

As wealthy states in the Global North aged and declined, poorer states in the Global South kept growing. Despite the manufacturing of bootleg meth across the Global South, few in the poorer states of Africa, Asia, and Latin America could afford the drugs. By avoiding the “rhinoization” of their societies, these still-young societies were able to attract investment while increasing their spending on defense, aid, and research. After decades of colonialism, neocolonialism, and neoneocolonialism, the Global South realized the balance of power had finally changed in its favor.

In 2041, the Global North was shocked when a coalition led by Ghana and India moved to rewrite the UN charter and oust the five permanent members of the Security Council. Despite the vetoes of all five permanent members, the southern coalition successfully argued that any vetoes could be ignored and overruled by a large enough majority. “International law must be flexible—unlike their joints!” laughed a Nigerian diplomat.

A greater crisis was brewing in the Philippines. Incumbent president Paolo Duterte was looking to prove the



power of his young and growing homeland after living so long in the shadow of geezers like China and the United States. “These two has-beens have bickered over island chains for decades,” he proclaimed to the newly reformed UN. “Now we are going to decide who controls the South China Sea once and for all.”

## 2044–2053

### Reflections 100 Years After the Collapse

Thomas J. Shattuck

*Excerpt from “Reflections 100 Years after the Collapse of American Primacy,” Luna Times, July 4, 2153, Henry Kissinger, Minister for Earth Affairs, Lunar Mega-Colony 1.*

...Which brings me to why I left my adopted American home in 2053 for the safety of the first lunar colony. The United States I had known was collapsing before my eyes. I no longer recognized my home. It became less and less the America I loved—all because that damn mouse wouldn’t die!

U.S. officials were caught flat footed by the shocking and unprecedented reforms in the United Nations in 2041, and while the other ousted P5 members begrudgingly adopted their new reduced role, Washington left the organization and kicked the UN out of New York by 2045. As UN Secretary-General Modi closed the doors of the headquarters for the final time, he quipped, “America just locked itself out of relevance for the final time.”

America grew old and ornery as new superpowers emerged. A telltale sign of this cultural and geopolitical shift was the opening of new Disney World parks in Lagos, São Paulo, and Mumbai and the shuttering of the Orlando and Anaheim parks. Another mouse, not Mickey, kept Americans’ attention.

The events that truly ended American primacy began in 2051, when Vietnam and the Philippines moved to right the historic wrongs done by the then-People’s Republic of China in the South China Sea. The global security architecture created by Washington in the aftermath of World War II—underpinned by alliances and strategic partnerships—shattered in an instant.

The two Southeast Asian states secretly agreed to push Chinese military forces out and share the reclaimed resources. They finally had the strength, and Beijing was as irrelevant as Washington at this point.

How did a small Asian conflict that lasted 13 days, with no U.S. casualties, seal the end of America’s role in the world?

It’s quite simple: We did not show up. When Manila invoked the Mutual Defense Treaty almost exactly 100 years after the treaty was signed, Washington did nothing but shrug. The Philippine invocation, I believe, was intentionally done to expose American weakness and demonstrate the true rise of the new global order.

The U.S. Navy was a rusted flotilla that could perhaps have mustered a few destroyers if it had the sailors. The carrier fleet had been decimated by defense cuts. Our once-shining fleet could not leave port.

Our oldest ally toppled American dominance to reclaim a few islands in the South China Sea. For years, I raised the alarm to get American leaders to change course, but our fate as a rhino was sealed. Our military extinct. Our leaders blinded by hubris and cataracts.

We were replaced by younger and more dynamic countries who bided their time and knew exactly how to show the world that America was no longer relevant. America was not conquered or destroyed; it simply became a bystander.

The mouse lives on, but it killed America.



# Alternative Links in the Chain

**2024–2033**

## **Compacts and Crisis**

*Patrick Hutson*

Just like after every collapse, historians never completely agreed on the exact date the United States ceased to be a superpower. Some considered the mid-2010s too early, but most agreed that dates in the 2060s were too late. What they could agree on, was that it began—as most bad things do—simply enough.

As culture war issues divided the United States during the 2020s, red states and blue states began creating alliances in the form of interstate compacts. These compacts were permitted at the time under the U.S. Constitution but were obscure to most Americans. After all, until the 2020s they were largely used to manage rivers and transportation hubs—not exactly breaking news material. This changed in 2025 when a coalition of states announced they were creating The Free States of America, a compact that would coordinate state policy between themselves while thumbing its nose at the federal government.

Cable news and social media exploded into endless praise or endless condemnation, depending on its partisan affiliation. Not to be outdone, the states on the other end of the political spectrum created their own compact, Equal America, again to widespread joy and anger.

As the United States continued its game of partisan one-upmanship, few noticed a crisis brewing in Mexico. After succeeding Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2025, Mexico's new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, was unable to solve the challenge that had plagued the country for a generation: the cartels. As gang violence escalated across the country, Sheinbaum attempted to negotiate a peace deal with the cartels in 2027, as suggested by Obrador in 2023. Unfortunately, these talks went nowhere, as evidenced by the assassination of the Mexico City mayor by suspected cartel forces later that year. The cartels were gaining power, and there was little anyone in Mexico could do to stop it.

The violence continued into the early 2030s and into the term of the next Mexican president. As violence increased between cartels and the state, as well as among cartels, migrants began making the dangerous trek to the U.S.–Mexican border. In 2032, encounters between migrants from Mexico and the U.S. Border Patrol reached 2.5 million. It was a record year, just like every other year since 2028. Despite its best efforts to ignore it, the United States gradually began to notice the growing crisis next door. It couldn't have come at a worse time. 2032 was a presidential election year, and tensions between opposing partisan state compacts were at an all-time high.

Meanwhile, around the world, countries observed strange rumblings in the Western Hemisphere. The crisis in Mexico was worsening, but for the first time in its history the United States was too divided to respond immediately. The stakes were high. But for any country bold enough to move, the potential opportunity was greater.

## No Single Event

David E. Degenhardt

No single event reduced the United States to a shell of a superpower in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead, the country gradually declined as a series of smaller crises multiplied each other's effects. Each event could have been dealt with alone, but between 2024 and 2033 a combination of pandemics, climate change, and natural disasters drove demographic changes in an increasingly partisan political landscape, resulting in a paralyzed government.

These problems began with a contentious 2024 election, which saw multiple legal challenges and widespread accusations of election interference. This tendency continued in the midterm elections of 2026. As a result, when the first post-COVID pandemic struck in 2027, the government's response was muted to minimize potential backlash ahead of the next election cycle. The 2027 pandemic was an encephalitic fever that was less transmissible than COVID but had a higher fatality rate and caused severe long-term disabilities. One third of the country refused to be vaccinated, even though a vaccine was available within months, and more than a million people died.

The Republican Party split into two factions ahead of the 2028 elections. Both factions won seats in Congress, resulting in a three-party legislature that struggled to manage basic functions of government. In 2029 Hurricane Franklin made landfall on Florida's Gulf Coast with wind speeds above 180 miles per hour and crossed into the Atlantic Ocean. Over the next week, the storm retained hurricane status and ripped up the Eastern Seaboard. The governor of Florida, already at odds with the federal government, refused to declare a disaster or request federal relief funds.

In 2030, Hurricanes Isaac and Leslie struck Texas and Louisiana, damaging oil infrastructure and causing widespread destruction in Houston and New Orleans. Major insurance companies, forced to pay out historic sums, either went bankrupt or ceased offering coverage in high-risk areas. Thousands of refugees did not return, starting a pattern of migration away from coastal regions.

In the western United States, a historic drought resumed after a short reprieve in the winter of 2022–2023. Reservoirs reached critical levels in 2031, leading to widespread water shortages and disruptions to hydroelectric power generation. The Great Salt Lake in Utah dried out the same year, only a little later than originally predicted. Toxic dust storms drove some residents to migrate to safer environments, although a significant population remained behind.

The political and economic consequences of these migrations affected the 2032 election, which saw the president elected without a plurality of the vote. Popular support for the government dropped, particularly in states that lost population or businesses due to shifts in population. In 2033 the United States experienced its first fungal pandemic after years of increasing fungal infections in hospitals. For the first time in 257 years, the population of the United States shrank.

Before any of its great power rivals mounted a serious challenge, the United States was weaker than it had been in nearly a century.





## 2034–2043

### UPCC v. Sanchez

Kevin L. Schwartz

The 2034 landmark Supreme Court decision in *Upper Peninsula Cares Corps (UPCC) v. Sanchez* solidified the rights of enclosed living communities to discriminate according to age, wealth, and other demographic factors. It also accelerated the trend of states restricting interstate migration in an effort to accrue, protect, and profit from their natural resources.

UPCC, like other communities along Michigan's borders, was not a typical gated development where retirees idly spend their twilight years. It was founded, and now largely occupied, by a group of Americans over 85 who several years earlier had prospected for and discovered massive lithium and manganese deposits next to which the community, and its production facilities, now reside. Sanchez, a 35-year-old IT professional from neighboring Wisconsin, applied for entry to the community and claimed he was denied admission based on age discrimination. UPCC contended that according to its admissions algorithm, predicated on 385 demographic, lifestyle, and genetic data points, Sanchez's application did not meet the minimum threshold for "the economic betterment and fair development of the community."

Michigan and several other states with a high percentage of WARRDs (water and resource rich districts) filed *amici curiae* briefs in support of UPCC, recognizing the demographic impacts set off by breakthroughs in human longevity treatments. Older, wealthier Americans were leveraging their disposable income by flocking to states rich in water, mineral resources, and underdeveloped land in hope of accruing greater wealth and insulating themselves and their loved ones from the impacts of climate change. Many younger Americans and the most economically disenfranchised were left to fend for themselves in overpopulated states with crumbling urban infrastructures, inadequate health care facilities, and a rising cost of living. As *The New York Times* opined in 2038, "The great American divide is no longer defined by the cultural touchstones of reproductive rights and school curriculums but by the intersection of demographic trends associated with a rising life expectancy and climate politics." The federal government, dominated by the preferences of older Americans, was furthering the divide by providing massive subsidies to WARRD-heavy states.

The Supreme Court decision made it clear that states must protect their internal assets at all costs so they could compete domestically and on the global market. In 2040, a gated community in Wyoming sent a delegation of retired engineers to help the Taliban capitalize on its vast mineral reserves under the guise of exploring Afghanistan's natural wonders, while several Chinese companies began negotiations with Washington state over glacier rights. The more populous states are witnessing a greater percentage of younger workers seeking employment from Nairobi to Urumqi and sending remittances home to support family members living longer than before. As for UPCC, a 2043 ProPublica investigation revealed a deal was finalized with a Dubai-based company that promised the "latest in private security and management for local communities in these uncertain times." Similar communities are following suit.

## A World Behind

Jan Osburg

Blame the mouse. Or bless the mouse. However one looked at it, this humble creature was heralding the dawn of a new era, one in which the old ways would clearly no longer work. Not that the old ways had been working all that well before, but like any good Ponzi scheme they had worked just well enough to allow those in charge to kick the can ever further down the road. Now that road had come to an abrupt end.

While doubled lifespans were great news at the individual level, the societal impact of this instant increase in net population growth meant that, given the limited resources and physical space available on Earth, less would be available for each human—as long as humanity continued the old zero-sum game of limiting itself to Earth. The consequences of doing so would be serious. As Robert Zubrin had pointed out decades earlier:

If the idea is accepted that [humanity's] resources are fixed with only so much to go around, then each new life is unwelcome, each unregulated act or thought is a menace, every person is fundamentally the enemy of every other person, and each race or nation is the enemy of every other race or nation. The ultimate outcome of such a worldview can only be enforced stagnation, tyranny, war, and genocide.... Only in a world of unlimited resources can all men be brothers.  
(*The New Atlantis*, 35, Spring 2012)

Thus, a new approach would be needed, ideally one that would leverage those older and (on average) wiser humans, enabling them to utilize their skills and experience rather than being burdens to be managed. Luckily, a new frontier was present for all those extra humans to conquer for everyone's benefit: outer space, with its unlimited resources and its unlimited room to expand.

The timing would have been right. Large affordable launch vehicles had become available, and decades of experience had refined the technologies essential to keeping humans alive in space, a task made easier with the "mouse cocktail" now boosting the body's self-repair capabilities. America had returned to the Moon, laying the foundation for exploiting the rich ice deposits near its south pole, and millions of highly skilled people around the globe were clamoring to become space workers and space colonists.

However, too many of those in power in the United States benefitted from the zero-sum game and thus were sabotaging this future in space. Their tools were many: hobbling launch vehicle development with regulatory red tape, imposing draconian liability and taxation regimes on space activities, and stoking jealousy and resentment of space achievers among the have-nots and can-nots. India, China, and others were forging ahead, knowing there was a significant first-mover advantage when it came to unlocking the bounty of the solar system. As space resources started affecting Earth economies, the global balance of power shifted and the United States started falling behind.



## 2044–2053

### The Sick (Old) Man of the West

Daniel R. Mahanty

Review: Barbara Woo, *The Sick (Old) Man of the West: The Fall of the American Empire*, Singapore University Press, 2053, 987 pp. Euro 475.89.

A century ago, students learned that World War I started with gunshots in Sarajevo. Asked for the precise moment America fell from its position as global superpower, students today will point to the rapid defeat of U.S. forces during the 2045 Taiwan invasion or UN upheaval.<sup>1</sup> In *The Sick (Old) Man of the West*, Barbara Woo offers a provocative but persuasive alternative, touching on these events without dwelling on them. Woo instead suggests the country's rigid political system, its insularity, and its vestigial allergy to collectivism made its demise, once unthinkable, all but predictable. Woo concedes that the Methuselah drug was quite literally a poison pill. But to her, the drug merely hastened the inevitable.

Woo persuades by using less memorable events to illustrate structural weaknesses. Take the abortive cyberattack on the U.S. banking system in 2046, just after global breakthroughs in quantum computing. The episode seemed to showcase international cooperation at its finest when South Korea came to the rescue with a new recipe for quantum cryptography. But to Woo, the event illustrates the shortsightedness of American economic theology. Twenty years prior, when the longevity crisis forced cuts to the military, the American public was unwilling to replace its R&D functions with any meaningful civilian alternatives. In retrospect, this could have been done at relatively low cost despite the spike in entitlements. Once-middling economies responded to American protectionism and public spending cuts with investment in research and high-tech manufacturing. By the time of the attack, the United States had fallen too far behind to catch up. Soon thereafter, the few remaining holdouts officially weaned themselves from the U.S. banking system and U.S. dollar reserves for good (see Marvin Wood's excellent new book, *Death of the Dollar*, Palgrave, 2052).

Using several episodes to similar effect, Woo tells the story of a country that, even when faced with crises and outpaced by friend and foe, always preferred fatal gradualism to radical solutions. She details the conspiracy of interests that forged the great immigration bargain of 2048, perhaps the last best hope for restoring the American economy after the financial crisis of 2047. Retold with a flourish of comic villainy, a cohort of the oldest senators forced through a measure that stripped immigrants of entitlements and made it a felony for them to possess longevity drugs. Those with the most promise were welcomed by other aging powers with better jobs and benefits to offer. Through Woo's deft eye, the reader bears witness to the "sick old man" slowly boiling in a broth flavored by little more than the bleached bones of America's once vital spirit. In the short epilogue, she draws on candidate interviews from the 2024 primary to show just how clear the road to salvation had been, if only the country had taken it.

1. See the author's review of the 2049 film *Straits of Hell*, starring Ella and Alexander Clooney.

## The Global North Strikes Back

Jason Rimmelin

Though it would have been considered impossible 30 years before, the United States and the People's Republic of China suddenly found themselves on the same side. Both top-heavy governments led by an increasingly elderly elite, these unlikely allies decided to push back against the young, aggressive countries that sought to upend the old-world powers. Working together, each country strove to reassert control in its respective region and maintain dominance within East Asia and the Americas.

India, thanks to its large, youthful population and booming economy, had emerged as the new leader of the Global South. Heading up a new coalition of countries, primarily from outside the United States and China's shrinking spheres of influence, India began taking control of international institutions and establishing its own, including a new development bank and trade organization. Other countries in South America and Southeast Asia began shifting allegiances to this growing association.

Meanwhile, half a world away, the small, white mouse that started it all began exhibiting unusual behavior. Though still physically healthy, Dorian, named after the famous and immortal Oscar Wilde character, was showing signs of mental decline. After further study, the scientists tasked with observing Dorian concluded her mind had been slowly deteriorating for a few years.

This revelation lent newfound credibility to a study that had been considered fringe. The paper, written by a research team from the National University of Singapore, highlighted a correlation between the increasing average age of a country and incidences of cognitive disease.

Critics of meth and the countries binging on it used these two discoveries to levy attacks on their leadership. Senior leaders who displayed any erratic behavior began to be questioned, and an undercurrent of frustration at a system with no hope for upward mobility began to emerge.

Younger generations, both in the United States and abroad, began to question the appeal of meth, with many choosing to follow the old school way of living. This decrease in demand, coupled with a teetering healthcare system, began a chain reaction that shook the economy.

Many businesses began moving to younger countries where innovation and dynamism still existed, further impeding economic vitality. China experienced many of the same issues as the United States, but its demographic decline, caused by its one-child policy, exacerbated tensions and led to massive protests against the Chinese Communist Party.

Seizing an opportunity, India and its allies took advantage of weakened U.S. and Chinese economies to deal a final blow to the former world powers, effectively cutting them off from the vast majority of global resources. One delegate of the new coalition was quoted saying: "It is time for our resources to reside with our people."

The little influence the United States had left in Central and South America faded as those countries lost faith in the power of the United States. America's youth, disillusioned by the course of events over the last three decades, returned to a strategy favored throughout American history: isolation.

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