



# FRACTAL SECURITY DILEMMA IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: US-CHINA SECOND COLD WAR

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## Abstract

This work aims to present “Power-traps framework” complexity-based framework to demonstrate the existence of the fractal security dilemma that triggers endless fractal warfare between international actors. The fractal security dilemma highlights the shift, in international politics, from the military security dilemma and territorial warfare to security risk escalation across international fields and fractal warfare—a broader concept—to foster the emergence of international symbolic capital, referred to as global influence in the context of the Second Cold War between the United States and China.

**Keywords:** power trap, fractal security dilemma, fractal warfare, field, international symbolic capital, global influence, Second Cold War.

## Introduction

*Albert Einstein once said, in a good mystery story, the most obvious clues often lead to the wrong suspects. In OUR attempts to understand the laws of nature, we find, similarly, that the most obvious intuitive explanation is often the wrong one.*

The intertwining of various forms of capital and national identities has led to an environment where compromise is increasingly challenging. Each side strives to maintain its power and prestige, causing the fractal warfare to spread across international fields and evolve into a struggle for global dominance between two rival world powers.

The US-China fractal warfare exemplifies the perilous outcomes of power traps within a complex system—scenarios where power struggles become self-reinforcing, driven by the accumulation and defense of different forms of capital. Once initiated, this cascade of power traps across competitive fields becomes nearly impossible to escape without significant, often destructive and creative, consequences, as described in the Schumpeterian sense.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for recognizing the risks of future conflicts and identifying situations where disparities in capital monopolies across various international fields may lead to a fractal security dilemma instead of fostering cooperation.

To do so, a paradigmatic change in the framework and methodology is necessary to look at the old phenomenon from a new perspective.

This work proposes “Power-traps framework”, a complexity-based framework that establishes a bijective relationship between fractal capital gaps and emerging social behavior over time.

Research on fractal capital gaps reveals significant insights into power relations—cooperation, domination, and confrontation—across market, national, and international dynamics.

Fractal capital gaps represent self-repeating resource gaps across various social fields among actors. These gaps play crucial roles in determining whether cooperative or competitive behaviors emerge among social actors in different spaces:

- Market space
- National space
- International space

Understanding how the self-repeating capital gap escalates across international fields and causing endless security dilemma and fractal warfare in the case of the Second Cold War in the international society can provide valuable perspectives on how international actors interact, and the implications of their interactions for global security risk and the dominance of global influence.

This work intends to use the “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology” that will help to see beyond the paradigmatic limitations of variables linearity of statistical model.

## Theoretical Framework: Power-traps Framework

According to Bourdieu (1989), social space is structured according to the distances that separate social agents, who are positioned within it according to their endowment of “capital.” Pierre Bourdieu argues that the social space functions as an arena of power relations and struggles between social agents, which develop around specific issues within what are called “fields.”

On the basis of Bourdieu's social space, which is a space of struggles and power relations, it was deduced that power relations are measured through the capital endowment that each social agent possesses in a specific field. It is this capital endowment in a specific field that Bourdieu calls "Social Position" and "Social Distance"—the difference in capital endowments in a specific field between social agents.

According to Lafaye (1996), each field has a specific capital that does not have the same uses.

Bourdieu's social space, which is structured by social distance, raises a logical question: what happens in the power relationship between social agents in two extreme situations, where the social distance takes the values zero (0) and infinity ( $\infty$ ):

- 0, in the case where two or more social agents have the same capital endowment in a specific field or occupy the same social position, the situation of capital equality.

-  $\infty$ , in the case where the difference in capital endowment between one social agent and the rest of the social agents is very large in a specific field, situation of capital monopoly.

According to Hobbes (1651), peace occurs not naturally but through a social contract where individuals surrender their absolute freedom to an absolute sovereign (Leviathan), creating a commonwealth with enforced laws, thereby escaping the chaotic, war-like "state of nature" and ensuring security and order. This peace requires powerful, undivided authority to prevent disputes from returning to conflict. The "state of war" occurs in the state of nature, a condition *before* organized government, characterized by a known willingness to fight rather than constant actual combat, stemming from natural equality, fear, and self-preservation in a world of scarce resources and no overarching authority.

In Hobbes' theory, peace is achieved through an absolute sovereign monopoly on violence, a necessary transfer of individual rights in the social contract to escape the chaotic "state of nature," where life is a "war of all against all". This sovereign power, which holds indivisible authority, uses its monopoly on force to enforce laws, prevent internal conflict, and secure the safety and property of citizens, making order possible and incentivizing obedience through rational self-interest.

Following Thomas Hobbes's logic, war emerges from a situation of equal capital between social agents without a social contract transferring the monopoly on violence to a single social agent responsible for guaranteeing peace.

On basis of this distinction made by Thomas Hobbes between the state of nature, which is a state of permanent war, and the civil state, which is a state of peace guaranteed by the monopoly on violence transferred to a single social agent through a social contract, the two extreme situations of Bourdieu's social space have been associated with the two states of Thomas Hobbes:

- Zero social distance, associated with the state of nature or war

- Infinite social distance, associated with the civil state or peace through a social contract

This social reality can be presented quantitatively as a binary system where the situation of war which is a situation of capital equality, corresponds to binary number 0 and the situation of peace, which is a situation of capital monopoly, corresponds to binary number 1.

Two social states emerge from Bourdieu's social fields, depending on two capital endowment configurations:

- Social State of War, in the situation of capital equality

- Social State of Peace, in the situation of capital monopoly

From the above considerations, it was assumed that peace and war in Bourdieu's social space stem from the capital gap between social agents in a field or across fields.

Considering that Bourdieu's social space is structured only by social distance, it was considered that, it is a self-organized space.

According to Spykman (1942), international society is inherently anarchic, a realm of self-interested states constantly vying for power and security, making survival the primary goal, achieved through geographic position, and resources, and maintaining a balance of power rather than relying on morality or international law; it is a system of latent conflict driven by relative power and strategic advantage, not inherent cooperation.

According to Waltz (1979), international society is anarchic because there is no central, higher authority (such as a world government) above sovereign states to enforce rules or protect them; this fundamental absence of overarching power forces states into a self-help system where they must rely on their own capabilities for survival, leading to competition and the constant possibility of war, as there is "nothing to prevent them". Anarchy, for Waltz, is not necessarily chaos, but the ordering principle, which defines states as similar, autonomous units facing similar challenges, drives them to balance power for security.

Drawing from Kenneth Waltz, it also appears that international society is a self-organized social space, that depends only on a self-help system where each nation-state relies on its own capabilities for survival or capital endowment.

According to Allison (2017), Thucydides' Trap is defined as the moment when war between Sparta and Athens became inevitable because of Athens' rise and the fear it inspired in Sparta.

In their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued that two key concepts—antagonism and hegemony—are necessary to understand the nature of politics. Both authors emphasized the importance of recognizing the dimension of radical negativity, which manifests itself in the ever-present possibility of antagonism.

This dimension, they proposed, prevents the totalization of society and precludes the possibility of a society beyond division and power. This, in turn, requires accepting the lack of a final foundation and the undecidability that permeates all orders. In their vocabulary, this means recognizing the “hegemonic” nature of all types of social order and conceiving of society as the product of a series of practices whose objective is to establish order within a context of contingency. They call “hegemonic practices” the articulating practices through which a particular order is created, and the meaning of social institutions is fixed. According to this approach, all order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always be different, “and all order is based on the exclusion of other possibilities”. Any order is always the expression of a particular configuration of power relations. What is accepted at any given moment as a “natural” order, along with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of entrenched hegemonic practices.

According to Bourdieu (1986), symbolic capital, emerges from the monopoly of capital owned by one social agent across all the competitive fields of social space.

Drawing from Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of radical negativity, which explains that any social order is achieved by the exclusion of any other possibility, from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of symbolic capital, from Allison's (2017) definition of Thucydides trap, from the two social states that emerge from Bourdieu's social, depending on the capital endowment configuration, a broad concept called the "power trap" is proposed.

The "power trap" is defined as the "point of inevitability of emergence of war or peace between two or more social agents within a Bourdieu social space."

The "power trap" in Bourdieu's social space is a space-time point from which the nature of the power relationship between social agents shifts from cooperation to antagonism and vice versa, or from cooperation to hegemony and vice versa, which has two variants:

- **Tie power trap:** This is the point of maximum proximity, minimum distance, or zero (0), sometimes an overlap of the social positions of two or more social agents in Bourdieu's social space. Space-time points of the inevitability of war.

- **Monopoly power trap:** This is the point of maximum distance between one social agent and the rest in Bourdieu's social space; the difference in capital endowment between one social agent and the rest is very large or tends toward infinity ( $\infty$ ). Space-time points of the inevitability of peace or domination.

According to the above description, power traps in Bourdieu's social space are two inflexional space-time points where alternate trust that triggers cooperation and peace and that fear that triggers distrust, rivalry and war depend on Bourdieu's social distance between social agents across fields.

Therefore, the power traps repeatedly repeat themselves endlessly across fields, revealing Bourdieu's social space as a complex system<sup>1</sup>, which is a self-organizing system.

A complex system is a network of many interacting components from which collective behavior emerges.

Applying the definition of the complex system to Bourdieu's social space, it was deduced that Bourdieu's social space is a complex system composed of multiple social fields from which symbolic capital emerges.

Therefore, the non-emergence of symbolic capital from Bourdieu's social space corresponds to the "social state of war" that occurs when two or more social agents possess equal social value derived from their contested capital shares at a given time in one or across various fields.

The emergence of symbolic capital corresponds to the "social state of peace", which prevails when a single social agent holds the greatest social value of all contested capital shares at a given time and across all competitive social fields.

Thus, according to the above theoretical framework, the dynamics of peace and war within a social space are influenced by the extent of differences in the social value of contested capital over time across various fields. Therefore, the relationship between peace and war can be understood as an emergent phenomenon shaped by the distribution of capital among social actors across various fields.

Therefore, the "**Power-traps Framework**" can be used as a predictor of the evolution of the dynamics of peace and war or trust and distrust in Bourdieu's social space by analyzing the distribution of the social value of contested capital across various social fields over time.

The concept "fractal" is used in Bourdieu's social space to emphasize the occurrence of "power traps" across various fields, which show pattern similarities over time.

The fractal security dilemma approach in this work is justified by the fact that, the evolution of power in international politics has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from Aron's (2003) concept of factors of power specific to the nation-state—defined by territory, resources, and the capacity for collective action—to the notion of overall capital monopoly with the end of the first Cold War when the United States emerged as hyperpower. The concept of "hyperpower" in international relations was popularized and given its specific meaning by the French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine in the late 1990s, who described the United States' unparalleled dominance across military, economic, technological, and cultural spheres after the Cold War, a term he used to highlight American unilateralism. While earlier ideas of superior power existed, Védrine's use of the French "hyperpuissance" in 1998/1999 defined the unique, comprehensive global sway of the United States<sup>2</sup>.

The emergence of the United States as hyperpower after winning the arms race against the USSR, highlights the importance of other forms of capital in the construction of international symbolic capital. Therefore, the emergence of hyperpower in international society is dependent on the extent of the overall capital gap between international actors across various competitive fields of international society, not only the military field.

The exigence of a global social state of peace through the monopoly of overall capital by a single international actor in international society shifts the focus from the monopoly of military capital to the monopoly of symbolic capital, where global power derives from the emergent international symbolic capital granted to a single international actor within international society, on the basis of the social value of that international actor's overall capital across various international fields.

This paradigm shifts underscores that power, in international society, is no longer limited to the monopoly of violence but is increasingly emerging from the international symbolic capital related to the largest share of overall capital that is held by an international actor across various international fields.

The fractal security dilemma highlights the need for the monopoly of international symbolic capital within international society, where the image projected by an international actor, stems from its possession of the greatest share of overall capital across various competitive international fields. The dynamics of global power now reflect the imbalances of international symbolic capital over time among international actors, shifting from a military-centric conception of global power based on the monopoly on violence to one centered on the international symbolic capital given to an international actor by other international actors.

As a result, international actors struggle across various international fields for the acquisition of the largest share of overall capital, transforming the one-dimensional paradigm of the security dilemma related to military capital monopoly into a

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex\\_system#:~:text=A%20complex%20system%20is%20a,their%20independent%20area%20of%20research.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_system#:~:text=A%20complex%20system%20is%20a,their%20independent%20area%20of%20research.)

<sup>2</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/book/28401/chapter-abstract/228797292?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

multidimensional security dilemma related to the international symbolic capital monopoly. This multidimensional security dilemma thus takes the form of fractal security risk, where the security dilemma is escalating across various fields of international society.

The security dilemma<sup>3</sup> in international relations describes how one state's efforts to increase its own security (like building arms or forming alliances) are perceived as threatening by other states, causing them to respond in kind, which ultimately *reduces* the first state's security, creating a spiral of tension and conflict that no one wants. It stems from the anarchic international system, where there is no world government: thus, states must rely on self-help. However, states cannot perfectly know if another state's defensive actions are truly defensive or hiding aggressive intent. Fractal warfare derives from the fractal security dilemma.

The endless occurrence of “power traps” across fields in Bourdieu’s social space, promotes pattern similarities over time, making social structures more comprehensible and predictable. This allows for accurate predictability of emergent behavioral trends arising from the random distribution of capital among international actors across various international fields.

Understanding how the extent of overall capital disparities across various international fields influences international behavioral trends or triggers the emergence of symbolic capital from international society is crucial for addressing fractal security risks in international politics.

The “Power-traps Framework” offers a fascinating perspective on the escalation of the security dilemma across various international fields, linking it to the competition for international symbolic capital monopoly in international society. This approach suggests that the security dilemma is not limited to one international field but manifests itself fractally, simultaneously across various international fields. Understanding this interconnectedness can shed light on the complexity of fractal security risk and fractal security dilemmas in an increasingly competitive international environment.

The “Power-traps Framework” allows fractal security risk analysis across various international fields, on the basis of localization of the two space-time inflexional points across fields.

Bourdieu (1989) defined social position as the share of capital held by a social agent in a competitive social field. Therefore, quantitatively, Bourdieu’s social position can be expressed as follows:  $SP_A = C_A/C_T$  (1), where  $SP_A$  represents the quantitative value of the social position of a social agent A,  $C_A$  represents the share of capital held by the social agent A, and  $C_T$  represents the total capital available in the social field.

The social position of B can also be quantified as follows:  $SP_B = C_B/C_T$  (2).

Bourdieu's social distance can be estimated quantitatively via the following formula:  $BSD = SP_A - SP_B$  (3)

(1) and (2) in (3)  $\rightarrow BSD = (C_A/C_T) - (C_B/C_T) \rightarrow (C_A - C_B)/C_T$ , where  $C_T = C_A + C_B$  (4)  $\rightarrow BSD = (C_A - C_B)/(C_A + C_B)$  (5)

It is assumed that the social distance at a given time between A and B is  $k_t$  (6).

(6) = (5)  $\rightarrow k_t (C_A + C_B) = (C_A - C_B) \rightarrow k_t C_B + C_B = C_A - k_t C_A \rightarrow (1 + k_t)C_B = (1 - k_t)C_A \rightarrow C_B/C_A = (1 - k_t)/(1 + k_t)$  (7)

$k_t = (C_A - C_B)/(C_A + C_B)$  (6) is considered Bourdieu's social distance (BSD) at a given moment and represents the quantitative value of the capital gap between social agents A and B.

$C_B/C_A = (1 - k_t)/(1 + k_t)$  and  $C_A/C_B = (1 + k_t)/(1 - k_t)$  (8) are considered the behavioral trend, that is, a qualitative value (power relation, domination, cooperation, conflict).

If  $k_t = 0$ ,  $C_B/C_A = 1$ , and  $C_B = C_A$ , this indicates a behavioral trend toward war (distrust), which is a situation of tie power trap, where social agents with equal capital are trapped in an inevitable confrontation until one achieves a capital monopoly.

If  $k_t = 1$ ,  $C_B/C_A = 0 \rightarrow C_B = 0$  and  $C_A = \infty$ , it indicates a behavioral trend toward peace (trust), which is a situation of monopoly power trap, where one social agent concentrates the largest share of capital and therefore imposes its will. Other social agents are trapped in a gravity force from which they cannot escape. Like the gravitational force of a black hole in astrophysics.

If  $k_t$  is between 1/2, and 1/3,  $C_B/C_A = 0.5$ , which indicates a behavioral trend toward cooperation (peace).

$C_B/C_A$  and  $C_A/C_B$  are noted as behavioral trends (BTs) or security risks.

As shown above, the window for social cooperation is very narrow compared with the window for domination or war.

The “Power-traps Framework” is applied in this work to confirm quantitatively the theoretical assumption of Thomas Hobbes related to the equality of capabilities as an inevitable cause of war and a monopoly on the capital of a single social actor as a cause of peace. To demonstrate the nature of the fractal security dilemma, through the escalation of security risk across various international fields and the inevitability of fractal warfare between the United States and China from 1990-2026.

## Materials and Methodology

This work will show how “power traps” are progressively occurring across fields of US-China Bourdieu’s social space from 1990–January 2026, causing fractal security dilemmas and inevitable fractal warfare.

Three fields are considered.

**Intellectual property rights:** Intellectual Property Rights(IPRs) are legal protections for creations of the mind, such as inventions, literary works, designs, and symbols; grant creators exclusive rights to use and profit from them for a set time; prevent others from unauthorized use; covert types such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, and trade secrets; and balance creator rewards with public access.

The secondary source of data is the World Bank:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IP.PAT.RESD>.

**Export of goods and services:** Export of goods and services occurs when a country sells products (such as electronics, and food) and intangible services (such as tourism, software, finance) to buyers in other countries, forming a key part of international trade to increase domestic revenue, access new markets, and grow economies.

The secondary source of data is the World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.CD>

**Military Expenditures:** Military expenditure refers to the financial resources a government allocates to its armed forces, encompassing personnel, operations, equipment, R&D, and infrastructure, covering all current and capital spending for defense, including peacekeeping and military space activities.

The secondary source of data is the World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD>

## Methodology: Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology

This work presents the “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology”, which seeks chronological pattern similarity over multiverse.

Space-time in this work is understood as an observation made in a field (space) by an observer (time) and chronology is the watch time that is conventional.

Each space-time is understood as a particular universe (field-time); therefore, Bourdieu’s social space composed with multiple subspaces called fields, where capital gaps and correspondent behavioral trends can be observed over time is considered as a multiple space-time system or a multiverse.

The “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology” is used in this work to establish chronological pattern similarity between the observed behavioral trend in the real universe of facts and the estimated behavioral trend in the theoretical universe of “Power-traps Framework”, across U.S. and China international fields. The “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology” seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend across fields. The “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology” allows step-by-step analysis of the progressive chronological fractal propagation of the “power traps” across fields.

The “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology” is a paradigmatic approach based on pattern similarity over multiverse that is different to the statistical paradigmatic approach based on variables linearity over time.



### Fractal Security Dilemma in International Trade, Intellectual Property and Military Expenditures between the United States and China

Figure 1: United State' and China' security dilemmas in goods and services exports  
 Source: Author's calculations based on estimates by the World Bank

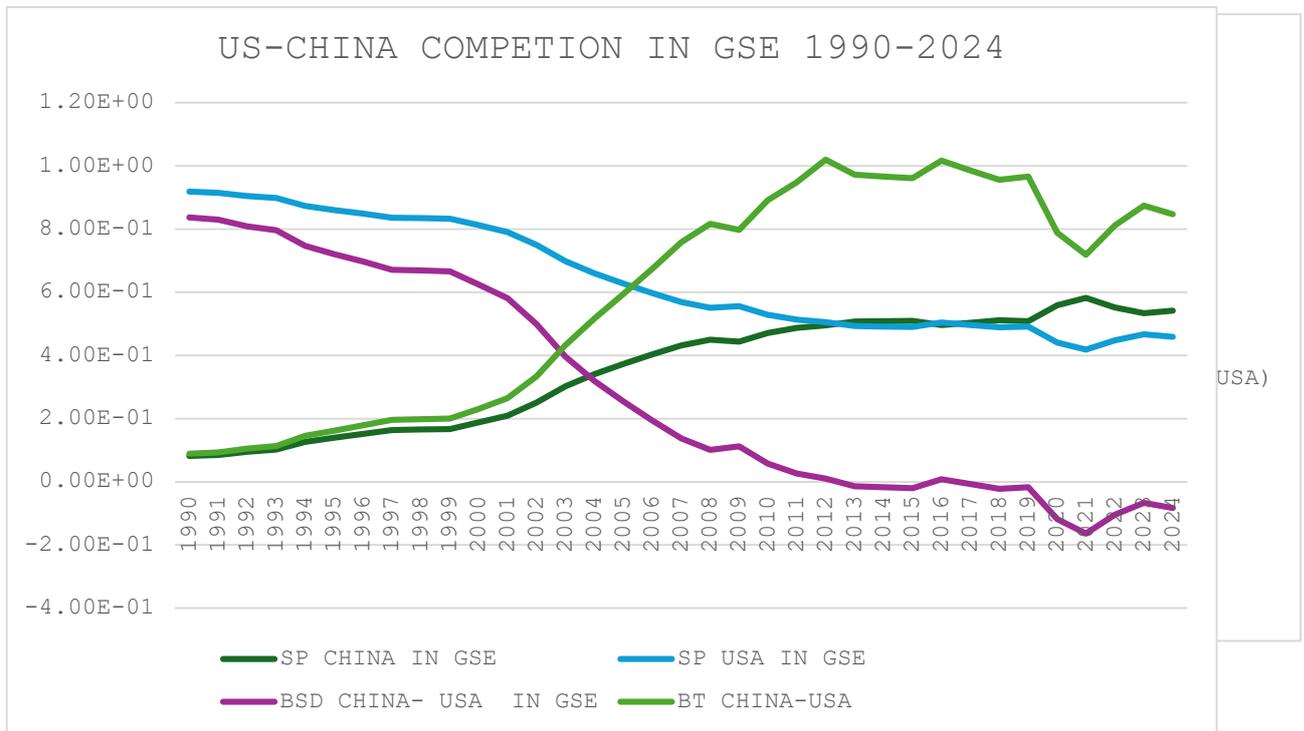


Figure 2: Linear correlation between Bourdieu's social distance and the behavioral trend in GSE  
 Source: Author's calculations based on estimates by the World Bank

Figure 1, drawn from the "Power-traps Framework", shows that the more Bourdieu's social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward 1, the point of maximum-security risk or maximum distrust between United State and China.

Figure 2, drawn from the statistical framework, confirms that the more Bourdieu's social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward 1, with a high linearity coefficient of -0.96292.

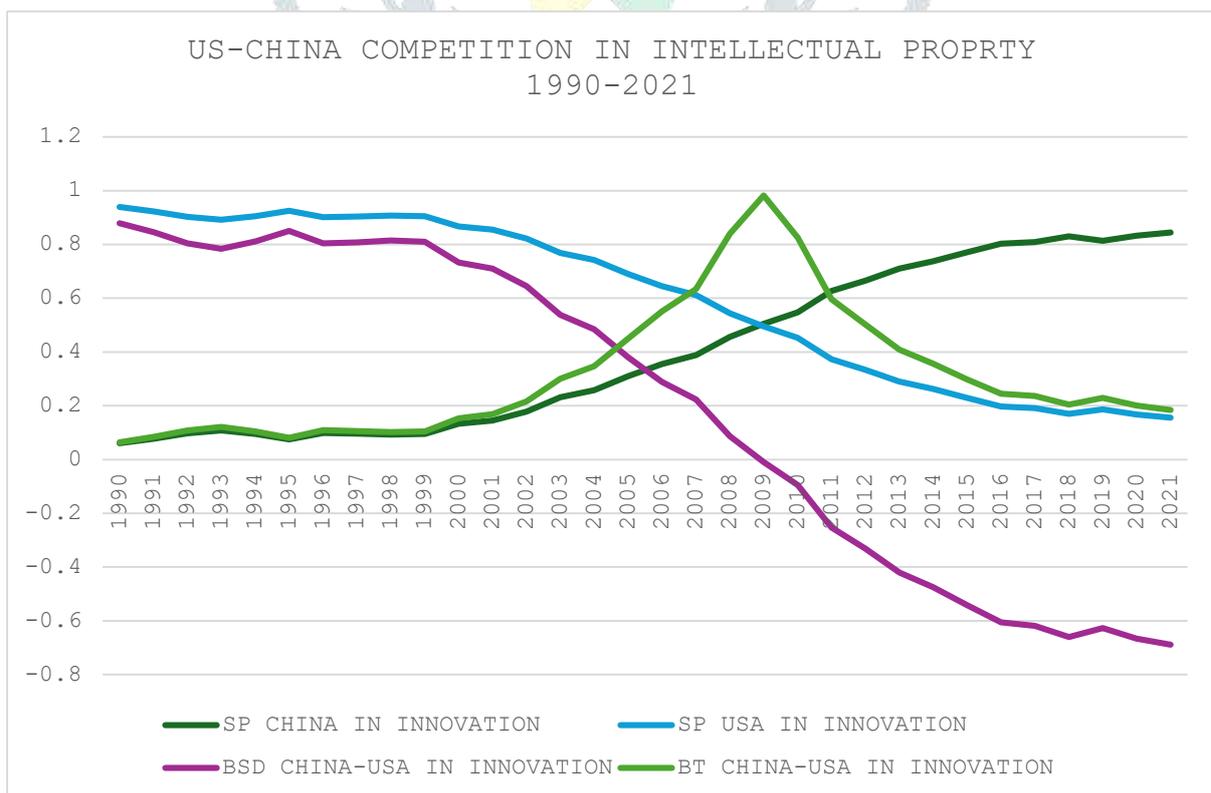


Figure 3: United States' and China's security dilemmas in intellectual property rights (IPRs)

Source: Author’s calculations based on estimates by the World Bank

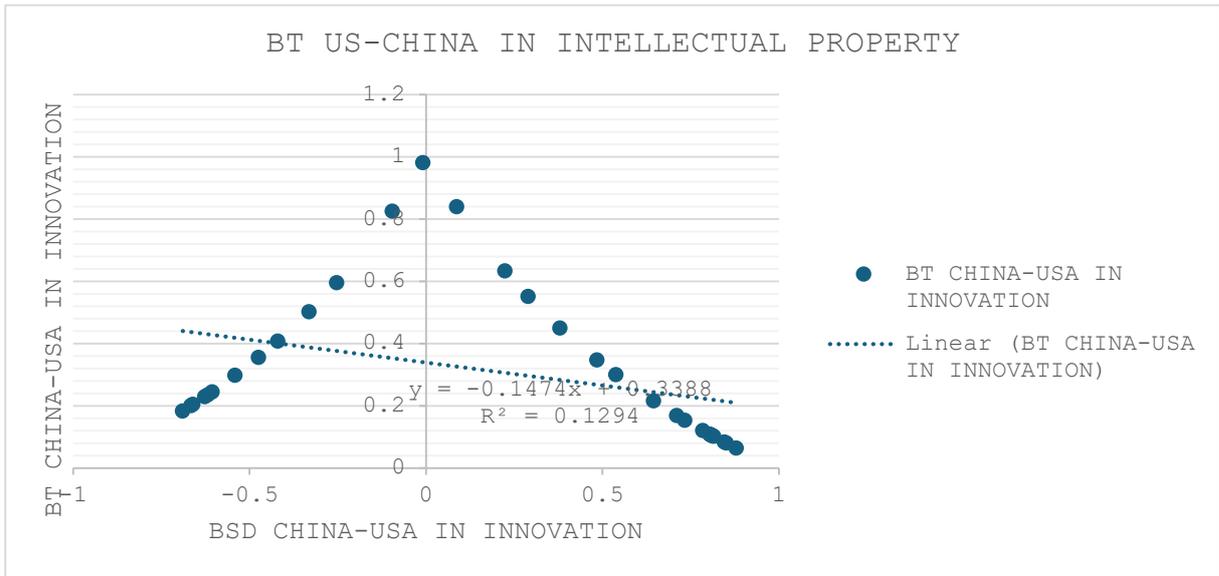


Figure 4: Linear correlation between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend in IPRs  
 Source: Author’s calculations based on estimates by the World Bank

Figure 3, drawn from the “Power-traps Framework”, shows that the more Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward 1, the point of maximum security risk or maximum distrust.

Figure 4 shows that the greater the Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward +1, and the greater the Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward -1, the greater the behavioral trend tends toward 0. The linearity coefficient between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend in the intellectual property rights field in Figure 4 seems to be weaker at approximately -0.35978 than the linearity coefficient between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend in the goods and services exports field in Figure 2. This emphasizes the difference between the statistical framework and the “Power-traps Framework”. The statistical framework works for a system with a single degree of freedom, that is, a system in which there is proportionality between input variables and output or linearity.

The “Power-traps Framework” is applied to complex systems with multiple components, that is, a system from which emerge a collective behavior at a time or over time from the dynamic of its components. Linearity occurs in a complex system when the emergent behavior becomes permanent over time, and the nonlinearity occurs when the emergent behavior is changing over time.

Figure 4 shows the pattern similarity on the right and left. When Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward 0 on the right, the behavioral trend tends toward 1, and when Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward -1 on the left, the behavioral trend tends toward 0. The value -1 represents, Bourdieu’s social distance from China, which indicates that the capital share owned by China in the field is greater than the share owned by the United States.

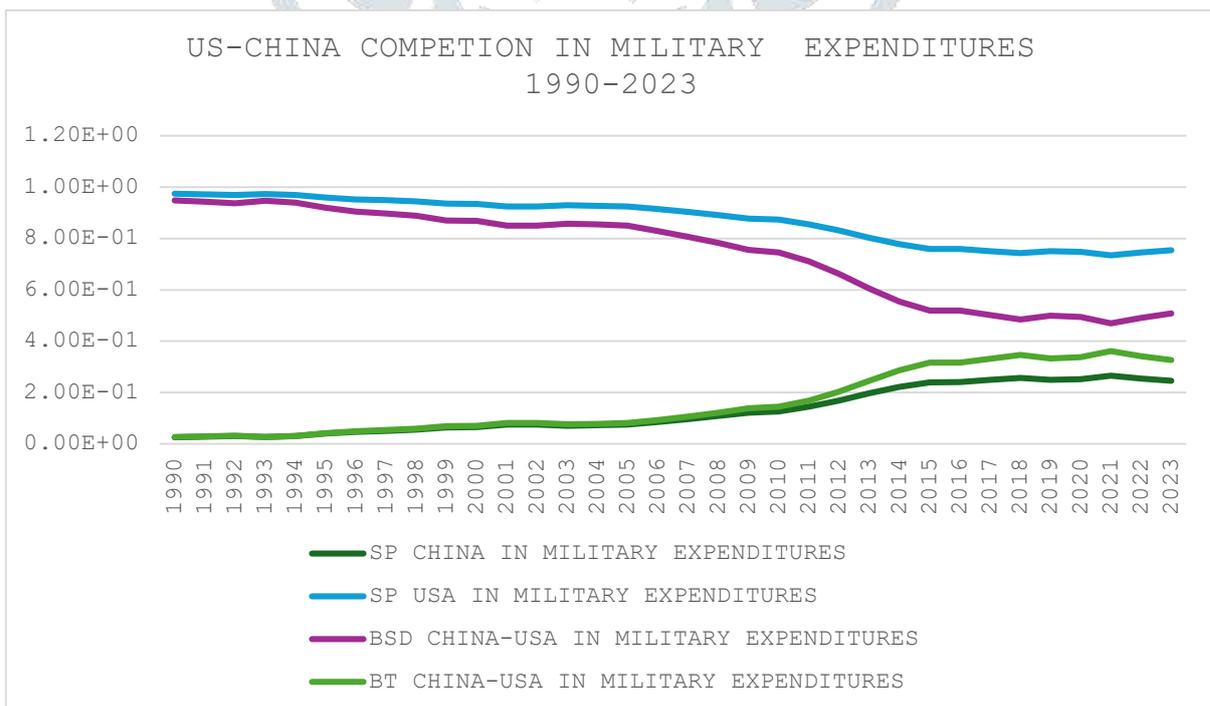


Figure 5: United States’ and China’ security dilemmas in military expenditures (ME)  
 Source: Author’s calculations based on estimates by the World Bank.

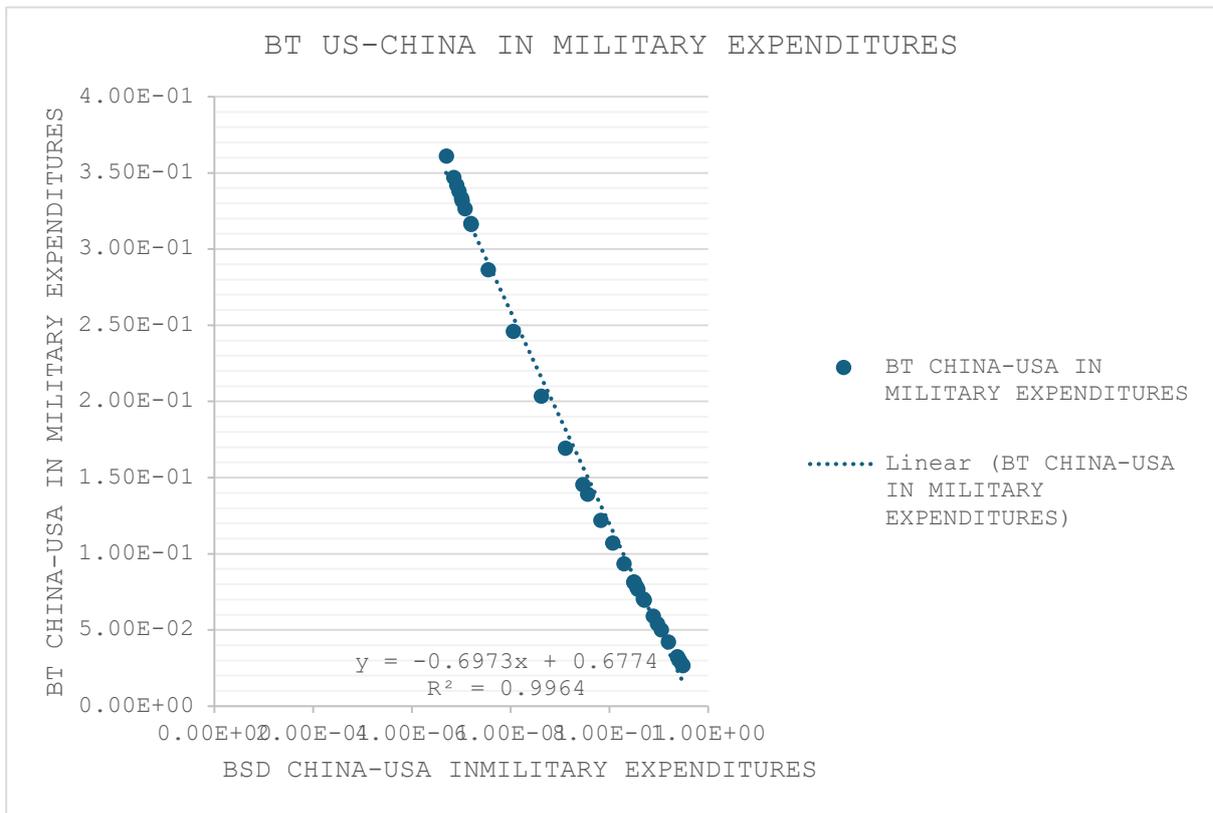


Figure 6: Linear correlation between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend in military expenditure  
 Source: Author’s calculations based on estimates by the World Bank

Figure 5, drawn from the “Power-traps Framework”, shows that the more Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward 1, the more maximum security risk in military expenditure. The security dilemmas in military expenditure still, fares, and the United States still has monopolies in this field but has declined over time.

Figure 6, drawn from the statistical framework, confirms that the more Bourdieu’s social distance tends toward 0, the more the behavioral trend tends toward 1, with a high linearity coefficient of -0.99822.

From the pattern similarities between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend across the three fields shown in Figures 1, 3 and 5, a general quantitative relation between Bourdieu’s social distance and the behavioral trend across US—China international fields is established:  $BT = 1/BSD$  (9)

When the BSD tends toward 0, the BT tends toward  $\infty$ , the security risk is at a maximum, the degree of distrust is increasing, and the probability of war is 1, inevitable war: “Tie power trap”

When the BSD tends toward  $\infty$ , the BT tends toward 0, the security risk is minimal, and the probability of war is 0, inevitable domination: “Monopoly power trap”.

## Results and Interpretations

Table 1: Evolution of the Behavioral Trend 1990–2021

	1990	2000	2002	2004	2009	2013	2017	2018	2021
BT IN IPR	1,13752933	1,363516411	1,551180775	2,063208081	-108,5105163	-2,380136896	-1,617571877	-1,514277726	-1,450436276
BT IN GSE	1,20E+00	1,60E+00	2,00E+00	3,13E+00	8,89E+00	-7,00E+01	-1,34E+02	-4,42E+01	-6,12E+00
BT IN ME	1,05E+00	1,15E+00	1,18E+00	1,17E+00	1,32E+00	1,65E+00	1,99E+00	2,06E+00	2,13E+00

Source: Author’s calculations based on estimates by the World Bank.

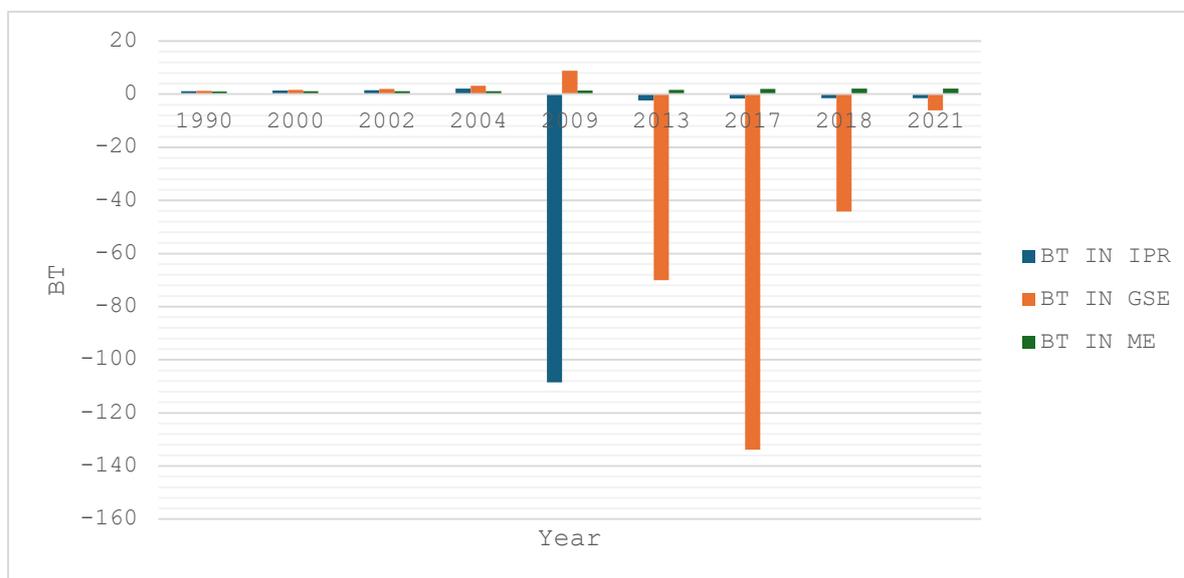


Figure 7: Evolution of the Behavioral Trend 1990–2021  
Source: Author's calculations based on estimates by the World Bank.

The data in Table 1 and Figure 7, show that there was trust between the United States and China until 2009, where the first inflection point in intellectual property rights was observed, the behavioral trend value was negative and high, indicating that Bourdieu's social distance was small in favor of China.

In 2013, another inflection point occurred in the goods and services exports, resulting in fields showing a propagation of inflection points across fields over time.

### Chronological pattern similarity between the estimated behavioral trend in “Power-traps Framework” universe and the observed behavioral trend in factual universe 1990 —2021

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 7, in 1990, China was not a threat to the United States but an indispensable partner.

Chronologically, 2001 in factual universe corresponds to China's accession to the WTO, an accession not only desired but also welcomed by the United States, as evidenced by the lengthy speech delivered on March 9, 2000, at Johns Hopkins University by President Bill Clinton<sup>4</sup>. This speech outlined the objective reasons why the United States strongly desired China's accession to the World Trade Organization. An excerpt from the March 9, 2000, President Bill Clinton's speech is reproduced here, as it will be used later to demonstrate that the security risk in international politics is inversely proportional to Bourdieu's social distance across various international fields.

Here is an excerpt of the text of the speech delivered by President Bill Clinton at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, as recorded by Federal News Service, a transcription company:

*Finally, as you all know, the U.S. signed an agreement to bring China into the WTO, in terms of opening its market to American products and investments. When China concludes similar agreements with other countries, it will join the WTO. However, as Lee has indicated, to benefit from this, we must first grant China permanent normal trading status, similar to that which we have granted to other countries within the WTO. Before coming here today, I submitted a bill to Congress to that effect, and I again publicly urge Congress to adopt it as soon as possible.*

*I want to reiterate what has already been said: Congress will not vote on China's accession to the WTO. It can only decide whether the United States will benefit from the resulting economic advantages. A vote against the Nonreputation Principle (NRP) would result in job losses in the United States, as our competitors in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere would seize the Chinese markets that we would otherwise have failed to serve.*

*However, Supporting China's entry into the WTO, goes beyond mere economic interests; it is clearly a matter of greater national interest. This represents the most significant opportunity we have had to bring about positive change in China since the 1970s, when President Nixon first visited, and later that decade, when President Carter normalized relations. I am working to convince Congress and the American people to seize this opportunity.*

*The WTO agreement will steer China in the right direction. It will advance the goals that America has been pursuing in China for three decades.*

*And of course, it will serve our own economic interests. Economically, this agreement is one-sided. It requires China to open its markets—representing one-fifth of the world's population, potentially the largest markets in the world—to our products and*

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/Full\\_Text\\_of\\_Clinton's\\_Speech\\_on\\_China\\_Trade\\_Bi.htm](https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/Full_Text_of_Clinton's_Speech_on_China_Trade_Bi.htm)

services in unprecedented ways. All we are doing is agreeing to maintain the access China currently enjoys. Chinese tariffs on telecommunications, automobiles, and agricultural products will be cut in half or more in just five years.

For the first time, our companies will be able to sell and distribute products made here in the United States in China without being forced to relocate production, sell through the Chinese government, or transfer valuable technology. We will be able to export products without offshoring jobs.

At the same time, we will have important new safeguards against any sudden surge in Chinese imports. We are already preparing for the most extensive screening ever conducted for a trade agreement.

President Bill Clinton advocated opening the Chinese economy to American investors, goods, and services, but this was key to the triggering of US—China fractal security dilemma. This landmark speech and the China Trade Act had beneficial effects on China. Its accession to the WTO in 2001 increased its ability to increase its capital shares, as shown in Table 1 on the estimated behavioral trend on goods and services exports since 2002—just one year after its WTO accession.

As shown in Table 1 and in Figure 7, the behavioral trend in theoretical universe between the U.S. and China in the intellectual property rights field crossed the value of 2 in 2004 and reached the point of maximum-security risk and the inflection point in 2009.

China then faced a security dilemma regarding goods and services exports with the United States and reached an inflection point in 2013, as shown in Figure 7.

For the first time, as shown in Table 1, the behavioral trend between the U.S. and China in terms of military expenditures reached a value of 2 in 2018, indicating a reduction in Bourdieu's social distance in the field.

The observed behavioral trends in factual universe, recorded through international press articles, thinkers, and officials' speech's, confirms the chronological pattern similarity between the estimated behavioral trends in the theoretical universe and the observed behavioral trends in the factual universe. The estimated behavioral trends are estimated on basis of "Power-traps Framework", which establishes an inversely proportional relationship between Bourdieu's social distance and the behavioral trend of war or peace over time and the propagation of security risk across US—China international fields, demonstrating the theoretically the multidimensional nature of the security dilemma or fractal security dilemma in international society.

Table 1 and Figure 7 show that from 2002–2018, security risk escalated from one field to another over time, revealing what is considered in this work as a fractal security dilemma:

- Table 1 illustrates a steady decline in the United States' capacity to produce more intellectual property than China did, which led to the intellectual property dilemma of the United States, which started formulating accusations of intellectual property theft against China that reached the tipping point in 2017.

- Table 1, shows that in 2013, four years after the inflection point in the intellectual property rights field was reached, the security dilemma escalated from the United States and China to the goods and services exports field, creating a zone of fluctuation that persisted until the factual declaration of the fractal warfare in 2018 by President Donald Trump, (see Figure 1).

According to Table 1, the point of no return or the starting point of the fractal security dilemma is 2002, when the theoretical behavioral trend between the U.S. and China crossed for the first time the value of 2 in the goods and services exports field, just one year after China's accession to the WTO.

The theoretical data analysis reveals that the overall capital of the United States across the three international fields analyzed has been in constant decline relative to that of China since 2002, escalating the security dilemma, from one field to another, a phenomenon that President Clinton did not anticipate in his speech of March 9, 2000.

These theoretical observations of the escalation of the security dilemma from one field to another field are dependent on the value of the Bourdieu's social distance value between the United States and China across international fields over time, justify the theoretical concept of the fractal security dilemma.

The factual behavioral trend reported on press publications and theoretical behavior trend estimated from data analytics based on estimates by the World Bank, when observed through the "Power-traps Framework", show a perfect pattern similarity between the two universes. The evolution of the distribution of capital across three international fields from 1990–2021 trapped the two countries in an escalating "security dilemma" from one field to another, which they cannot escape. In factual universe since 2018, the fractal security dilemma has created fractal warfare environment between the U.S. and China. This fractal security dilemma, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 7, stems from the decline in the United States' overall capital and the increase in China's overall capital across the three international fields, which are essential to the international symbolic capital monopoly or global influence of both countries.

In light of factual events, it is clear that political actors in both countries only became aware of the inevitability of fractal warfare, which erupted in 2018, only beginning in 2011.

The first public stance against China dates back to September 21, 2011. Long before launching his presidential campaign, President Trump tweeted: *China is not an ally or a friend: They want to defeat us and invade our country.* This tweet is one of several statements in which he criticized China's trade practices before his presidential candidacy<sup>5</sup>.

The news site [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)<sup>6</sup>, in an article dated January 25, 2012, wrote:

*"A year ago, US President Barack Obama cited China as an example of what a country can achieve by investing in infrastructure, education, and innovation.*

*However, at the beginning of this election year, his State of the Union address painted a radically different picture of China, portraying it as a country that does not play fair, steals intellectual property, and provides substantial subsidies to its industries.*

*The United States, President Obama declared, will not stand idly by and has promised to take action.*

*It is tempting to attribute this sharp change in tone toward China to American election politics.*

*However, it also seems motivated by a desire to reverse the image of a manifest decline of the United States, while China is experiencing a meteoric rise."*

*In his two states of the Union addresses in 2011 and 2012, China featured prominently, being mentioned four times each time.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16727625>

A year ago, his references to China were positive in relation to the United States. This year, his mentions of China were almost... an exclusively negative speech.

"I will not stand idly by when our competitors break the rules. We have filed trade lawsuits against China at nearly twice the rate of the previous administration, and it has paid off," Obama said to applause from the audience.

The idea that China is an unfair competitor and a threat to American jobs and businesses resonates strongly with the United States.

Judging by this speech, this theme will likely be a recurring theme in the next US presidential election.

"More than 1,000 Americans are employed today owing to our efforts to curb the rise of Chinese tires. However, we must do more. It is unacceptable that another country allows the piracy of our movies, our music, and our software. It is unfair that foreign manufacturers benefit from a competitive advantage simply through large subsidies," the president stated.

Obama's Republican opponents have already criticized China and its trade practices, but he is now also addressing this issue.

Perhaps to demonstrate his willingness to act, the president announced the creation of a new agency tasked with investigating unfair competition.

In that same speech, Obama announced the creation of a Trade Monitoring Unit tasked with investigating unfair trade practices in countries such as China.

In the timeline of events, the news site [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)<sup>7</sup> was published on September 26, 2015:

"The so-called Thucydides Trap does not exist. However, if major powers make repeated strategic mistakes, such traps could be created." President Xi Jinping, in his speech in Seattle in 2015, directly addressed the threat of strategic rivalry between the two nations.

On May 2, 2016, while campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination, President Trump declared, "We can no longer allow China to plunder our country, and yet that is what they are doing. This is the greatest theft in history." This statement is one of many made by President Trump during his election campaign regarding China's trade practices<sup>8</sup>.

In 2017, G. Allison published his prescient book, "Destined for War: Can the United States and China Escape the Thucydides Trap?", in which he noted American discontent with a 2015 IMF report that ranked China first by comparing GDP from the perspective of purchasing power parity.

The chronology of speeches by political actors in both countries shows that, between President Bill Clinton's speech on March 9, 2000, regarding China's accession to the World Trade Organization, and President Donald Trump's speech during the 2016 campaign, including the statements of Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping, the tone of the discourse shifted from friendship to hostility, coinciding to the Bourdieu's social distance dynamic in intellectual property, the goods and services exports and military expenditures fields—triggering security risk, security dilemma escalation from one field to another field that caused the ongoing fractal war between the two countries.

The statements by Presidents Trump and Obama, beginning in 2011, seemed to reveal a sense of disappointment, even betrayal, on the part of China toward the United States, following allegations of intellectual property theft and trade practices deemed detrimental to the American economy. President Xi warned against strategic errors that could lead to what he called the "Thucydides Trap," while simultaneously denying the very existence of such a trap. Was he deliberately trying to sow confusion while adopting a provocative tone?

According to data and calculations conducted as part of the theoretical "security risk" analysis above, it can be argued that the strategic error committed by President Bill Clinton during his campaign for China's rapid accession to the WTO precipitated the inflection point of the inevitable fractal security dilemma between the two countries since 2002.

Importantly, for the first time in 2013, China held larger capital share in goods and services exports than did the United States.

## The Second Cold War Since June 2018

In 2017, Bourdieu's social distance between US and Chinese goods and services exports reached its maximum in favor of China (see Figure 7). This means that, according to the "Power-traps Framework", for the United States and China, the security dilemma in this field was maximal. The United States attempted to halt its decline by officially launching the Second Cold War in 2018, which was, in fact, fractal warfare.

This decline in the overall international capital of the United States and the increase in the overall international capital of China triggered the emergence of a hostile behavioral trend of the United States toward China, which, in turn, sowed seeds of doubts about the values that the United States claimed to defend.

In an interview with CNN<sup>9</sup> journalist Jake Tapper, on January 6, 2026, Stephen Miller, the US Homeland Security Advisor, stated, *We live in a world in which you can talk all you want about international nicety and everything else, but we live in a world, in the real world Jack, that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power. These are the irons laws of the world since the beginning of time.*

As shown in the theoretical universe, since 2009, China has been ahead of the United States in the intellectual property rights field, notably due to an increased number of patents secured by China.

The United States officially hardened its public stance regarding Chinese intellectual property rights (IPRs) theft, with a major investigation launched in August 2017 under the presidency of Donald Trump. This investigation, conducted by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) under Section 301, focused on China's technology transfer practices. However, concerns and reports about Chinese IP theft have already been well established, with NSA director Keith Alexander calling it "*the greatest transfer of wealth in history*" approximately 2009.

Factual chronological events in IPRs field:

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-34368249>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://youtu.be/kLFkQbPWWDI?si=gvYZUm4RdaEvjLDdr>

- Early warnings (before 2017): U.S. officials, including Keith Alexander, identified massive IP theft by China in the late 2000s, estimating annual losses of several hundred billion dollars.
- Official investigation (August 2017): President Trump signed a memo directing the USTR to investigate China's IP practices, citing annual losses of several billion dollars.
- USTR report (2018): The USTR published a report quantifying losses due to Chinese IP theft between \$225 billion and \$600 billion annually, leading to the imposition of tariffs.
- Complaint to the WTO (March 2018): The United States formally accused China of patent theft and forced technology transfers before the WTO.
- High-profile cases (2020s): The U.S. Department of Justice indicted companies such as Huawei for alleged intellectual property theft over a decade.

In essence, although the problem had been brewing for years, the Trump administration's 2017 investigation marked the first major, official, and public action by the United States to challenge China directly with respect to systemic patent theft and forced technology transfers, resulting in significant trade measures.

To date, the United States has not yet managed to catch up with China in the intellectual property rights and goods and services exports fields. This explains, according to the "Power-traps Framework", why, despite the change of administration on January 6, 2021, between Presidents Trump and Biden, the policies of hostility between the United States and China remained unchanged, as evidenced by the statement made by Mike Pompeo, former Secretary of State under Donald Trump, on July 23, 2020<sup>10</sup>: *and if we do not act now, ultimately, the CCP will erode our freedoms and subvert the rule-based order that our societies have worked so hard to build. If we bend the knee now, our children's children may be at the mercy of the Chinese Communist Party, whose actions are the main challenge in the free world today.*

Since 2018, all American administrations have maintained the same hostile policy toward China, as demonstrated by the speech given by Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State under Joe Biden, on May 26, 2022<sup>11</sup> at George Washington University: *Even as President Putin's war continues, we will remain focused on the most serious and enduring challenge to the international order: the People's Republic of China.*

*China is the only country that intends to reshape the international order and increasingly possesses the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so. Beijing's vision would take us away from the universal values that have underpinned much of the world's progress over the past 75 years... but we cannot trust Beijing to change course. Therefore, we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision of an open and inclusive international system.*

On April 2, 2025, President Trump invoked unprecedented tariff power under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose "reciprocal tariffs" on imports from virtually every country, exacerbating the fractal warfare between the United States and China.

China implemented significant restrictions on rare earth exports starting in April 2025, strengthening them in October 2025 in the name of national security and in response to the U.S. tariffs. These restrictions impose licenses for certain elements (such as dysprosium and terbium) and related technologies, control know-how, and extend extraterritorially. However, a significant set of measures, initially planned for October 2025, was suspended until the end of 2026, making this a strategic strengthening of controls rather than a complete reversal.

Rare earth elements constitute 17 essential components for green and digital transitions, as well as for the defense industry. They are used, for example, in wind turbines, artificial intelligence systems, electric vehicles, and fighter jets. Like the rest of the world, the United States is heavily dependent on China for its supply, which controls 60% of global rare earth production and 90% of its refinement, a situation that is unlikely to change, as shown in Figure 8,

<sup>10</sup> <https://cl.usembassy.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-remarks-communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://au.usembassy.gov/secretary-blinken-speech-the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

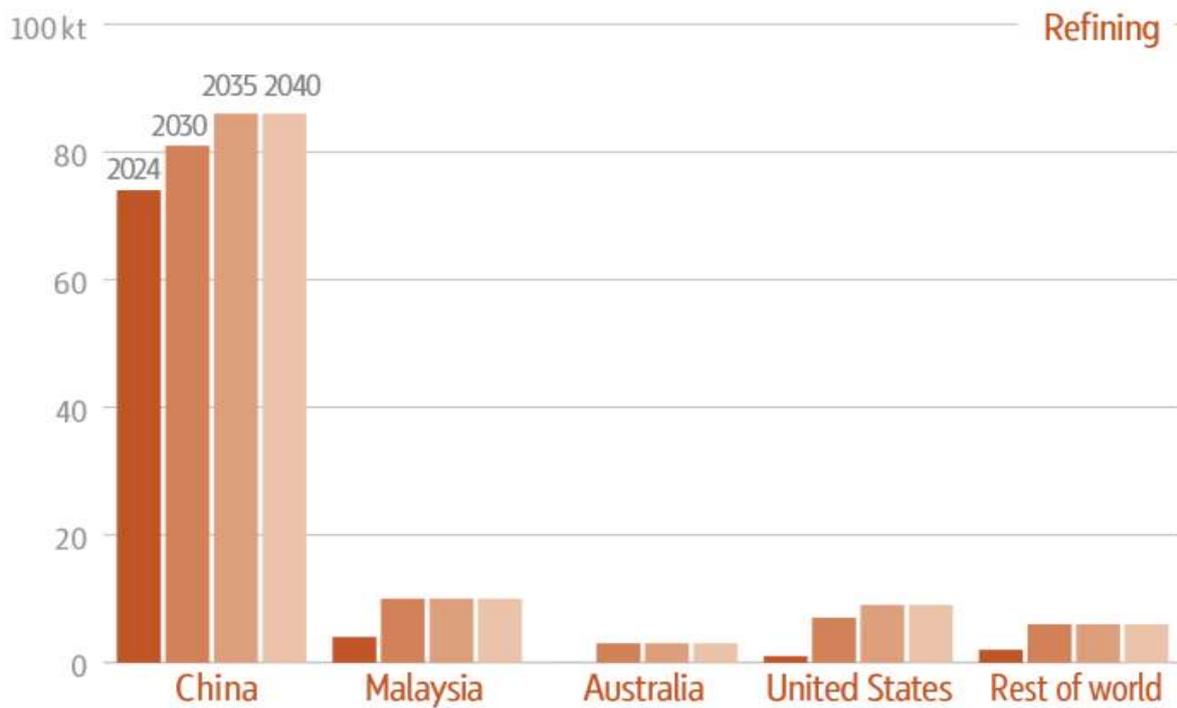


Figure 8: Rare Earth Monopoly

Source: International Energy Agency, 2025. Graphic by Nadejda Kresnichka-Nikolchova, EPRS.

China's rare earth restrictions have a significant impact on the United States economy: they drive up costs; disrupt supply chains for electric vehicles, defense, and technology; potentially slow AI growth; and increase strategic vulnerability. They force the United States to invest heavily in domestic development despite its short-term impact on GDP and exacerbate trade tensions, harming the competitiveness of American products. On October 16, 2025, *bbc.com* wrote<sup>12</sup>: *A report from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) indicated that between 2020 and 2023, the United States relied on China for 70% of its rare earth and metal imports.*

*This is why the export restrictions imposed by Beijing are likely to hit the United States hard.*

*Washington accused China of treason regarding these restrictions.*

*U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent called the restrictions 'economic coercion' and a 'takeover of the global supply chain.' He did, however, leave the door for negotiation.*

China held a major military parade in Beijing on September 3, 2025, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (World War II), showcasing new advanced weaponry and military capabilities to project power and commitment to peace. The event, held in Tiananmen Square, featured large formations of troops and military hardware, with President Xi Jinping reviewing the forces.

## Greenland and Venezuela

On January 12, 2026, aboard Air Force One, en route from Florida to Washington, President Trump told reporters:

*If we don't take Greenland, Russia or China will, and I won't allow it... but one way or another, we're going to get Greenland.*

The fractal security dilemma intensified on multiple fronts, from intellectual property rights in 2009, goods and services exports in 2013, and military expenditures in 2018 to territories in Venezuela, Greenland, and more. Moreover, as Bourdieu's social distance decreases across international fields, the fractal security dilemma between the United States and China is increasing.

The way events have unfolded since President Donald Trump's return to the White House on January 6, 2025, seems to indicate that Beijing's vision does not take us away from the universal values that have underpinned much of the world's progress over the past 75 years, as Blinken said, but Washington's vision.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1drqeev36gq>

From the perspective of the “Power-traps Framework” and the “Multiverse Pattern Similarity Methodology”, all the arguments put forward by Pompeo, Blinken, and President Trump in their speeches about the danger that China poses to democratic countries due to ideological differences or supposed Western values (according to the United States) seem to be deliberately designed to veil their public opinion about the factual scientific cause of hostility. Indeed, President Clinton's speech of March 9, 2000, swept aside these arguments, demonstrating that the United States' support for China's entry into the WTO was motivated by the monopoly of international symbolic capital. The fractal security dilemma that has triggered fractal warfare since 2018 between the United States and China is motivated by the fractal security dilemma of the international overall capital monopoly for acquisition and conservation of the international symbolic capital. The existence of escalating “inflexional points” across international fields, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 7, emphasizes the shifting of international politics from military security dilemma and territorial warfare to the broader concept of fractal security dilemma and fractal warfare to achieve the emergence of the international symbolic capital of a single international actor, known as global influence.

### Conclusion

There is a perfect chronological pattern similarity between the theoretical behavioral trend estimated via the “Power-traps Framework” and the factual behavioral trend observed and described in newspapers, political speeches and implemented policies.

The theoretical assumption of Thomas Hobbes and Pierre Bourdieu about the relationship between capital distribution configuration and the state of war or peace in an anarchic social space is quantitatively confirmed. There is confirmation of the existence of a space-time point of inevitability of war that is escalating across international fields, shifting the concept of Thucydides trap related to the military security dilemma to the broad concept of “tie power trap” across international fields triggering the fractal security dilemma.

There is a successful establishment of a quantitative relationship between Bourdieu's social distance across international fields between international actors and the emergent behavioral trend from international society. From the perspective of the “Power-traps Framework”, as long as neither of the two countries establishes a monopoly of international symbolic capital over time and across all competitive international fields, the fractal security dilemma and fractal warfare will continue to spread endlessly from one field to another.

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