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The Hegemonic Defense Strategy of the Hegemon

-- US Containment Strategy from the Perspective of Geopolitics

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Abstract: Hegemony preservation is the main strategic goal of hegemonic countries in the hegemonic cycle. After the end of World War II, in order to confront the Soviet Union and its Allies behind it, the national security strategy of the United States in the early postwar period centered on "containment". The goal of the "containment" strategy of the United States is to control the "heart zone" of the Eurasian continent. By examining the way of maintaining the hegemony of the United States, it can be seen that it is an important feature of the strategy of the United States to identify its opponents and formulate corresponding strategies. Geopolitics has had a profound impact on the foreign strategy of the United States to varying degrees, especially on the "containment" strategy of the United States after the war. It can be said that geopolitics has, in a sense, served as an important tool for America's global expansion.

Keywords: Hegemony preservation; Containment strategy; Geopolitics

As a country with strength and willingness to control the international order, a hegemon will not passively wait for the power checks and balances of other countries, but will actively use the power checks and balances to maintain the hegemonic status. Mackinder's "heartland" theory, Mahan's "Sea power" theory and Spykman's "marginal zone" theory have a profound impact on the foreign strategy of the United States, especially on the "containment" strategy of the United States after the war. Through the practical application of geopolitical theory, the strategic interests of the United States can be maintained. Identifying the adversary and developing a corresponding strategy are also important features of American strategy. This paper aims to cut through the geopolitical perspective of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, focus on the geopolitical thinking mode of the "containment" strategy of the United States against the Soviet Union after World War II, and talk about the importance of the "containment" strategy of the United States in the strategy of maintaining hegemony.

1. Hegemony preservation and geopolitics

Traditional hegemony theory holds that hegemony must go through vicissitudes. Paul Kennedy argued that hegemons decline because of "overreach"; Robert Gilpin pointed out that hegemonic countries promote the rise of other countries and the transfer of hegemony by assuming international responsibilities and providing international public goods. These theories hold that the hegemonic power's efforts to maintain hegemony are doomed to be ineffective and even accelerate the decline of hegemony. Therefore, the rational choice of the hegemonic power is to accept the fact of the decline of hegemony and actively use the "unipolar moment" to prepare for the protection of future interests.

However, after World War II, the United States, with its strong strength, established a global military alliance system and economic development order, thus forming an international hegemonic system with the United States as the hegemonic power. In the 31 years since the end of the Cold War, there has been no force to check the hegemony of the United States, and Japan, Germany, the European Union and other actors once regarded as potential challengers have become closer to the United States.

The so-called hegemony protection refers to "maintaining the power distance between a hegemon and other countries, and maintaining this power distance as a constant that a hegemon considers to be safe". In the view of the hegemonic powers, any country, especially a great power, is a threat to it as long as the power gap between it is narrowing and exceeds its own defined threshold.

Hegemonic countries have unrivalled strength, as well as the intention and ability to pursue power and status and dominate the international system, but hegemony is not equal to power, and hegemony cannot be maintained solely by force. In the reality of international relations, hegemonic transfer is not necessarily accompanied by hegemonic wars. The study found that "power transfer is extremely rare, rarely caused by different economic growth rates, and generally occurs in a peaceful way". Robert Gilpin believes that a hegemon will have two choices when the cost exceeds the benefit. One is to reduce its commitment and start to shrink; the other is to continue to maintain the existing policy and eventually break out the war for hegemony. However, both hegemonic and rising countries are well aware of the risks of great

power war, and there is no sufficient reason to launch hegemonic wars without endangering their core interests.

The theory of geopolitical strategy is the theoretical basis for the formulation of American foreign policy and global strategy. In 1943, Nicholas Speakman critically inherited and developed Mackinder's theory and based it on the "Borderland" theory. In Speakman's vision, the "inner crescent, formed around the heart of the continent by the countries on both sides of the land and the water," was the "periphery." This "fringe zone" consists of three components: the "European coastal region, the Arabian Middle Eastern desert region, and the Asian monsoon region," which is completely cut off from the continental heart. This isolation is a barrier to the vast desert and mountain belt stretching from the Himalayas and Tibet to Xinjiang and Mongolia. It can be seen that these two theories have a certain historical inheritance

However, with the development of communication and transportation technologies in the industrial age, geography gained increasing attention, focusing on the distribution of population and resources, the strategic geographical location of countries, and the ability of countries to invest. Therefore, hegemony preservation is not only limited to the level of force, but also needs to supplement the study of hegemony preservation from the perspective of geopolitics.

In view of the existence of nuclear deterrence, it is impossible to carry out large-scale war, and the US containment strategy is also a topic that people often discuss. Therefore, it is necessary to study it in order to interpret the hegemonic preservation from the perspective of geopolitics.

2. Geopolitical factors in America's "containment" strategy

Starting from the Truman administration, every American government has formulated and implemented the "containment" strategy against the Soviet Union. During this period, the United States established a comprehensive encirclement of the Eastern camp around the Eurasian continent, including politics, economy, diplomacy, ideology and military aspects. Throughout the decision-making and implementation process of the "containment" strategy of the United States, from the determination of the "containment" strategic objectives, to the selection of main "containment" means, and to the geographical allocation of "containment" forces, it shows strong geopolitical colors.

2.1 Geopolitics and American expansion abroad

Before the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 and World War II, the continental expansion of the United States turned to overseas expansion, and the United States began its initial overseas expansion under the guidance of Mahan's "sea power theory". By the end of World War I, the United States had become one of the most powerful maritime powers in the world and was recognized by the European powers through the Washington system, achieving an equal status with the former naval power Great Britain. By the end of World War II, the United States had almost complete control of the Pacific, and "the United States of America had left its old anchorage and sailed out to sea as a world power."^[25]

Relying on the Americas, it tried to bring the entire American continent and East Asia and the Pacific region into its sphere of influence. The idea of sea power is that sea lines of communication and their choke points (straits, canals, islands) can control the world economy and energy transportation, thereby controlling the economic and security lifeblood, and thus taking over the world. In the Spanish-American War, the United States gained Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Annexation of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1898; He occupied Wake Island in 1899. In the 1903 US-Malaysia Treaty, the Panama Canal was opened to traffic in 1914, forming the control of the Pacific Sea line of communication; In December 1921, the United States, Britain, Japan and France "Treaty concerning the Island Possessions and Territories in the Pacific Region", which controlled the sea lines of communication in the Pacific Theater of World War II.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, American presidents have put forward different foreign strategies, but their essence is "containment" strategy. The United States not only blockaded the Soviet Union on land, but also actively consolidated existing military bases on the periphery of Eurasia and constantly sought new military bases.

In the outer Eurasia, the United States mainly established military bases in Western Europe, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and infiltrated these regions through the military assistance of the United States, and launched a covert struggle with the Soviet Union. The United States will use aircraft carriers and forward military bases to control the sea lanes, and then blockade the Eurasian continent. These are not only the two signs of America's outstanding performance in post-war international politics, but also the two pillars of Mahan's sea power thought.

In order to establish post-war world hegemony and "contain" the land power of the Soviet Union, the United States continued to vigorously develop its maritime power, established extensive naval and air military bases overseas, and occupied maritime strategic points. Whether it was military alliances in Europe and Asia and North Africa, or the presence of American troops in these regions, the United States was carried out under the banner of "containing communist expansion." The military bases in Europe are mainly three base groups in Central Europe, Southern Europe and Western Europe, and the Central Europe base group is mainly in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands; The southern

Europe base group is mainly in Italy; The Western European base group is mainly in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Spain and Portugal. After the outbreak of the Cold War, the United States rapidly increased the number of troops in Europe. Because the focus of the US containment strategy is mainly in Europe, the number of US troops stationed in Europe is the largest. According to statistics, in 1950, the number of American troops in Europe was 80,000, by 1953, the number of its troops in Europe reached 427,000.^[11]

Since the initial overseas expansion of the United States, the United States has been implementing a strategy of maritime hegemony, actively developing maritime military forces, establishing military bases overseas, controlling important maritime chokepoints in the world, and taking the Eurasian continent as the main strategic goal, all of which show the influence of Mahan's sea power thought. From the specific implementation of the containment strategy of the United States, the powerful maritime military force is the most powerful means for the United States to "contain" the Soviet Union, and has always been throughout the foreign strategy.

2.2 Geopolitics and the Truman Doctrine

The international environment of Eurasia at the end of World War II was that, with the exception of the Soviet Union in the middle zone, which had vast territory and superior power, the other peripheral countries were on the verge of collapse due to being the battlefields of World War II. In the view of the United States, these peripheral countries were in danger of being swallowed up by the Soviet Union. This not only conflicts with the strategic goal of US hegemony expansion, but also directly threatens the domestic security of the United States, because the Soviet Union, which has unified the Eurasian continent, has enough resources to contain the United States mainland from both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Even if the Soviet Union, which monopolized Eurasia, had no desire to attack the United States at home, its control of Eurasia's rich resources would have suffocated the United States at home. Therefore, the United States considered it a primary goal of the United States to prevent Eurasia from falling completely into the hands of the Soviet Union. According to Speakman's theory of geopolitics, a maritime power can deal with a continental power only by allying itself with a country on the edge of Eurasia. Thus, the United States decided to aid and support the peripheral countries of Eurasia to contain the Soviet Union.

The United States helped Western Europe and Japan recover their national strength through economic aid, military guarantees, and the establishment of multilateral or bilateral mechanisms, while at the same time bringing these countries under its own power and achieving control over both ends of Europe and Asia. Clearly, in the view of the United States, the Soviet Union, which controlled the "heart" of the Eurasian continent, not only had a tradition of territorial expansion, but also had a geographical advantage of expansion. After the war, the Soviet Union's power had expanded to Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans, reinforcing the United States' determination to "contain" the Soviet Union.

In short, in the early postwar American foreign policy, the Soviet Union was established as the main target of "containment", and geopolitics was an important consideration. The importance of the Eurasian "heartland" is mainly determined by its geographical location, ease of transportation and means of transportation, and potential power. As a result, "American Cold War experts used geopolitics as the basis for national policy against the Soviet Union and international communism." Drawing on earlier geopolitical theories derived from geography and static interpretations of global and regional spatial patterns, they introduced political and strategic concepts such as containment, domino theory, the big picture view of the balance of power, and key states into the vocabulary of Cold War geopolitics. In this context, Mackinder's heartland theory plays an instrumental role."

2.3 Geopolitics and the Eisenhower Doctrine

With the escalation of the "Cold War" confrontation, the United States and other Western countries finally strengthened their military "containment" means. The foreign policy of Eisenhower period basically continued the "containment" strategy of Truman period, and it was strengthened in degree.

The Eisenhower Doctrine was introduced in response to the threat of a possible global war arising from the possible Soviet intervention in Egypt after the Suez Crisis. At the same time, British and French influence in the region was diminished by American protests over their actions during the Suez War, which led to a power vacuum. Eisenhower believed that a firm position was necessary to improve the situation, but this position was further complicated by the position taken by Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. Nasser was rapidly building a power base and using it to pit the Soviet Union against the United States, adopting an attitude of "positive neutrality" and accepting Soviet aid

At the regional level, the doctrine was intended to offer independent Arab regimes an option to avoid Nasser's political control, while strengthening them and isolating communist influence by isolating Nasser. However, this strategy largely failed, and by 1959 Nasser's power had grown so rapidly that he could influence the leadership of neighboring Arab states (such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia); At the same time, his deteriorating relations with Soviet leaders enabled the United States to shift to a policy of compromise

The Eisenhower administration also saw the Middle East as a region critical to the future foreign policy of the United States and its Al-

lies. The region holds most of the world's oil reserves, a necessity for Allies. Eisenhower's opposition to longtime Allies Britain and France during the Suez crisis, which led to the collapse of Anglo-French influence in the Middle East and raised fears of Soviet dominance, was all the more credible because Nasser was increasingly leaning toward the Soviet Union. The Eisenhower Doctrine was a reversal of previous policy; The United States now bears the burden of military action in the Middle East.

Overall, Eisenhower doctrine contained the expansion of Soviet communism. This policy approach has had a profound impact on later American foreign policy and national defense strategy.

3. The impact of geopolitics on the preservation of American hegemony

"The Cold War was not about democratic ideals, it was about geopolitical realities. The United States opposed the Soviet Union because it threatened its strategic interests, not because the Soviet system denied its citizens the pursuit of freedom and democracy. The balance of power, not ideological views, guided American foreign policy during the Cold War. The ideology in the "Cold War" has been greatly weakened, the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union has been compressed, and the pursuit of global hegemony is the real purpose of the United States to launch the "Cold War" against the Soviet Union.

The close combination of American hegemony preservation and geopolitics after the war is not accidental, but because the geopolitical theory is in line with the maintenance of American hegemony. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the collapse of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "Cold War" was declared over. However, the "Cold War" mentality in the US foreign strategy has not been completely eliminated, and the most important alliance system continues to exist and be strengthened. In Europe, the United States still actively promotes the eastward expansion of NATO after the end of the Cold War. Through the military integration of NATO, the United States has brought its military forces close to the "heart zone" of Eurasia, that is, Russia's doorstep. Therefore, the Russia-Ukraine conflict can also be regarded as a war initiated by Russia because of its fear of its own geopolitical security. In the East, it is the internal integration of the "convergence" alliance system with the United States as the core. Even in some regions, such as Northeast Asia, the shadow of the "Cold War" still remains strong. The United States also forms a strong forward deterrence in Northeast Asia through its military presence in Japan and South Korea, preventing continental Asian countries from developing maritime strategies.

"At present, the United States from outside Eurasia occupies the primacy of the world, and the power of the United States is directly deployed in the three peripheral regions of Eurasia, and from there exerts a strong influence on the countries located in the interior of Eurasia." In Zbigniew Brzezinski's remarks, we can see that even after the end of the Cold War, the main goal of the United States' global geostrategy is still Eurasia, whether it is the eastward expansion of NATO or the Indo-Pacific strategy, the basic situation of the United States "encircling" the Eurasia continent has not changed.

Therefore, the "Cold War" is over, the "containment" posture of the United States in East Asia is still maintained. In the context of the implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy by the United States, this "containment" posture has been strengthened. Today's tensions between China and the United States are not just the result of ideological differences, but of competition between the existing hegemonic power and the major rising power. The use of the "Indo-Pacific" strategy is a new "containment" strategy made by the United States in response to the new changes in the geopolitical environment such as the rapid rise of China. In the current world structure, the United States is still in the dominant position, and China's rising power affects the world pattern, including the power structure, the interaction mode among great powers, and the international mechanism and norms, etc., and the power position of the United States is getting closer and falling into the Thucydides trap.

Given that the United States has always used two means of "engagement" and "containment" toward China, geopolitics is a consistent factor in China-US relations. Therefore, from the perspective of geopolitics, examining the containment strategy, the means by which the United States maintains its hegemony, not only enables us to understand the geopolitical characteristics of the United States' foreign strategy more deeply in theory, but also helps us to better understand the essence of the United States' current strategic shift to the east, that is, to contain China's development in order to achieve the fundamental national interest of maintaining its own hegemonic position.

4. Peroration

To sum up, the end of the "Cold War" has not made the United States change its containment strategy toward the Eurasia continent, and the geostrategic goal of the United States is still centered on the Eurasia continent to prevent the emergence of challengers to American hegemony on this continent. Under the role of the US hegemony in geopolitics, the US takes safeguarding national interests and security as the first priority, enabling the US to assume an important role in the region and the world, and make its own contributions to regional security, world security and international shipping security, while ensuring its own security. However, while pursuing its absolute national interests, the US has led to instability in some regions. Thus, it is not conducive to maintaining the internal security of the country, that is to say, the geopolitical theory plays a double-edged role in the strategy of maintaining American hegemony.

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