

Part I

Title:

The Prelude to the Battle of Systems: Restructuring the Global Order Behind America's Tariff War

Abstract:

Since 2018, the United States has frequently initiated tariff policies against major economies. On the surface, this appears to be an economic dispute, but in essence, it is the prelude to a deeper battle over institutional dominance. This paper argues that the so-called "tariff war" is not an isolated event, but a strategic effort by the U.S. to reclaim leadership in the global trade order. We will analyze the structural logic behind this American initiative and explore its profound implications for the future of the global economy.

Classification:

International Relations | Global Economy | Institutional Evolution | Strategic Studies | Comparative Politics

Keywords:

U.S.-China Trade War, Institutional Competition, Global Governance, Tariff Policy, Structural Mapping, Systemic Asymmetry, Order Reconstruction

Main Text:

1. Tariff War on the Surface: A Tactical Move, Not the Strategic Core

In recent years, the United States has raised tariffs on China, the EU, Mexico, Japan, and other major economies, triggering global trade tensions. Conventional interpretations often reduce this to a resurgence of "isolationism" or "protectionism." However, such explanations miss a deeper truth: **this tariff war is the opening act of a systemic confrontation.**

During the era of global trade liberalization, the U.S. discovered that its institutional advantages—particularly in virtual economy, innovation-driven industries, and capital market rules—had ironically become loopholes exploited by other countries. Take China, for instance: through non-market practices and low-cost advantages, it exported massive volumes of goods via open Western systems, resulting in de-industrialization and capital flight in the U.S. Thus, the U.S. is not merely "opposing free trade" but is conducting a global **"re-alignment of institutional fairness."** Tariffs are merely the tool—a form of pressure. The goal is to realign the global system under rules that restore institutional parity.

2. Strategic Rationale: Why the U.S. Must Rewrite the Rules

The U.S. launched this systemic battle for several deep-rooted reasons:

1. Declining Institutional Magnetism:

Western systems once drew global capital and talent due to rule of law, transparency, and innovation-friendliness. But as countries mimic institutional forms while manipulating operational mechanisms (e.g., state subsidies, capital controls, data firewalls), the U.S. institutional appeal has been eroded.

2. Distortion of Global Governance Structures:

Institutions like the WTO and IMF were designed under U.S. leadership, but their multilateral operations have been co-opted by structural arbitrage and reversed discourse power. The U.S. finds itself constrained by the inertia of rules it once created.

3. A New Cold War Framework Emerging:

The competition is no longer limited to trade or economics—it's ideological and institutional. The trade war is merely a **"frontline proxy battle"** for value-based system leadership across domains including tech, military, and data governance.

3. The Trade War Is a Strategic Language, Not an Economic Accident

Many believe that the U.S. will back down from the trade war due to domestic economic pressure. In truth, **America's strength lies in its ability to convert internal pressure into institutional innovation.** Economic losses in the short term are viewed as "structural abrasions" traded for long-term strategic dominance.

The real aims of the U.S. are to:

- Break dependence on legacy global production chains
- Reconstruct a U.S.-centric system of value and regulatory dominance
- Use tariffs to **compel foreign institutional reform and market reciprocity**

From this view, the trade war is not irrational populism, but a **rational, long-term systemic strategy**.

4. Conclusion: This Is a Battle of Systems, Not Just Tariffs

If the 20th century's competition was defined by land, resources, and military power, then the 21st century's competition is dominated by **institutions, data, and cognitive control**.

This tariff war is America's necessary step to **preserve institutional vitality and reassert global rule-making authority**. The true outcome of this conflict won't be found in trade deficit tables, but in the redrawing of global economic and political architecture over the next 50 years.