



# RISING POWERS in GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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## OPINION

### Is American Power in Decline? Rising Powers in the Era of Trump

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**Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme Jr., James Parisot**  
27.1.2018

Global IR

The twenty first century has brought thus far a perceived and perhaps unprecedented sense of uncertainty in regard to the future of US dominance in global governance. Notably, various events — the 9/11 attacks, the war on terror, the remarkable economic growth in many countries outside the West, the global financial crisis and economic stagnation in Europe, and the apparent democratic regress in the US due to the Trump presidency— signal that American power is under siege both from within and outside its territorial borders. Notably, the Trump administration’s lack of political resolve in upholding multilateral approaches to global governance —as concretely represented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, United Nations, among many others— marks a clear departure from the way post-World War 2 American power has expanded its economic, military, and geopolitical influence worldwide.

Amidst this perception of decline, possibilities abound. While Donald Trump’s public statements uphold a unilateral and anti-globalization policy stance, thereby undermining long-standing American foreign policy agenda, China’s Xi Jinping during the 2017 World Economic Forum proudly upheld the significance of an open economy and a multilateral approach to addressing global problems. Such a commitment from China for open trade comes in stark contrast to the US, where President Donald Trump expressed disinterest in the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, an attempt for the US and the other 11

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Pacific nations to eventually foster more intensive trade and economic cooperation. Amidst Brexit and the emergence of crude nationalist discourses as well as the election of racist political parties across Europe, the future of the European Union grounded in self-proclaimed aspirations towards stronger democracy, human rights, and rule of law appears to be in danger.



Such a prognosis about Europe becomes even more interesting with Vladimir Putin, who appears to be committed in consolidating his rule over Russia and in expanding Moscow's influence. In an era of perceived American decline, Russia has intensified its effort in shaping the domestic politics of key individual states within Europe and its immediate region, while China has started building artificial islands in the highly disputed maritime region in which the Philippines and Vietnam remain as key claimants.

In other world regions, Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa, and Turkey, to name a few, have begun marking their political footprint in the world stage in quite unprecedented ways. At the start of the new millennium, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and eventually South Africa formed a new international organization called BRICS, which presents itself as being committed to a more democratic, equitable, representative system of global governance. Most notably, China's 21st century maritime silk road plans—a 900\$ billion worth of double trade corridor scheme connecting China with the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia—clearly suggest Beijing's determination to extend its geopolitical and economic influence way beyond its immediate regional neighborhood.

Over-all, defying the optimism that emerged right after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, contemporary world politics appears to be entering a dramatically different era. The election to the US presidency of blatantly sexist, and racist Donald Trump gravely undermined the perception of US legitimacy in global governance — if only such a legitimacy emanates from the long-standing American rhetoric on multilateralism, electoral democracy, and civil and political human rights backed by the use of force in the way of American expansionist policies. Yet, Trump is not an exception; Trump-like discourses reverberated in other parts of the world through far-right, racist, discriminatory, sexist, and crude nationalist politicians who have gained so much traction more recently — with Rodrigo Duterte,

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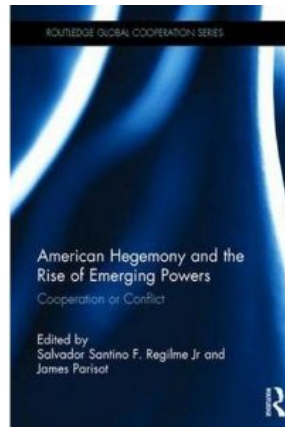


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Vladimir Putin, Geert Wilders, Marine LePen, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Viktor Orban, to name a few of them.

What do such aforementioned events and changes tell us about the future of American hegemony? Is American power in a pathway of irreversible decline, or isn't it? What kind of fundamental challenges do reemerging powers such as China and Russia pose to long-standing dominance of the US?

To answer those questions, we assembled a diverse and multidisciplinary group of established and promising scholars—historians, area studies specialists, economists, sociologists, political scientists—in order to address those difficult but important questions. In our edited volume *American Hegemony and the Rise of Emerging Powers: Cooperation or Conflict*



(Routledge 2017), our analytical strategy departs from many influential and recent works on this topic through several ways.

First, our various chapter contributors approach the main puzzle by imbibing a holistic approach, particularly by acknowledging the importance of social processes in various economic, political, and cultural realms across transnational and local scales. Second, while mainstream scholarship evaluates the current status and prospects of American decline by extrapolating findings from just one world region, our volume does the opposite by upholding the geographical contingency of US hegemony. Particularly, American hegemony has varying effects depending on its interactions with transnational, regional, and national structures of power and elite constellations in a particular world-region. Third, representing intellectual, gender, and geographical diversity, our contributors present a wide variety of theoretical perspectives in order to examine the puzzle of American hegemonic decline. We have chapters written with a realist outlook, which highlight the importance of national interest and power as key motivations in world politics. Others highlight the intersubjective and ideational underpinnings of how power and hegemony are constructed, thereby casting doubt over the supposedly iron-clad objectivist view of power. Some of our chapter contributors, however, emphasize the importance of economic strength and financial prowess as key indicators of American hegemony. Others, meanwhile, highlight military strength, while others emphasize knowledge production in regard to rising powers and US hegemony.

Essentially, those three aforementioned points highlight some of the many substantive arguments that we offer in our edited volume. We do not uphold a definitive answer to this debate on whether American hegemony is in a path of irreversible decline. What we do offer, instead, is a more holistic and open-ended approach to American

hegemony — an approach that acknowledges patterns of continuity as well as contingency in world politics.

In terms of continuity, at least in the short- to medium-term, we are likely to see the increasing material inequality within and across nations worldwide. Such a possibility, among many plausible scenarios, could pose a fundamental threat not only to the stability of national political systems worldwide but also to the durability of contemporary global political economy. We are likely to see that Trump and his racist and sexist allies within and beyond the White House would continue to undermine the moral appeal of international human rights norms, multilateral cooperation, and liberal democracy. We are likely to see emerging authoritarian leaders worldwide attempting to consolidate their power by repressing political dissidence, distributing rents amongst allies, and undermining democratic institutions and systems of checks and balances by instituting personalistic control. As Trump's presidency continues to wreak havoc upon national democratic institutions, American influence and leadership in global governance are becoming more tenuous. Perhaps the Trump presidency and its detrimental effects to American politics pose a more effective threat to American hegemony than the rising and reemerging powers outside the West.

About the Author:

✉ [s.s.regilme@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:s.s.regilme@hum.leidenuniv.nl) [bit.ly/2DKqPF5](https://bit.ly/2DKqPF5) [@santinoregilme](https://twitter.com/santinoregilme)

## Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme Jr.

**Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme Jr.** is a University Lecturer of International Relations at the Institute for History of the Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands. He holds a joint PhD in Political Science and North American Studies (2015) from the Freie Universität Berlin, and he previously studied at Yale, Osnabrück, and Göttingen. He has published articles in journals including, among others, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Human Rights Review*, and the *Perspectives on Political Science*.

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27.1.2018

About the Author:

✉ [jpariso1@binghamton.edu](mailto:jpariso1@binghamton.edu)

## James Parisot

**James Parisot** received his PhD in Sociology from Binghamton University, USA, and is part-time faculty member in the Department of Sociology at Temple University, USA. He has published articles in journals including, among others, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Critical Thought* and the *Journal of Historical Sociology*.

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