BOOK REVIEW

Globalization and global governance

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1. Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order, by Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, Oxford University Press, 2020, 256 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

Donald Trump’s presidency gave rise to another round of debate about the end of U.S. global leadership. In Exit from Hegemony, Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon argue that the international system is undergoing some major transformations, that the challenges facing American hegemony preceded Trump’s election, and that those challenges show no sign of abating. According to the authors, in addition to Trump’s “America First” diplomacy, the demise of the U.S. hegemony is accelerating due to three major drivers: challenges by other great powers; “bottom-up” pressures from smaller countries; and transnational counter-order movements. Washington can do little to reverse these dynamics, making it very difficult for the U.S. to maintain its global hegemony.

Cooley and Nexon begin their book by recalling anxieties about American decline in the late 1980s, which ended with a period of “unipolar exuberance.” However, they assert, things are different this time, and the collapse of Washington’s global hegemony is now inevitable. In chapters 2 and 3, Cooley and Nexon clarify key concepts, like “hegemony” and “international liberal order” and construct their analytical framework. They conceptualize international orders as specific ecosystems that are made up of architectures (rules, norms, and values) and infrastructures (relationships and interactions). They further categorize variation among international orders along two dimensions: “the relative density of ordering infrastructure and the degree that related architecture is conflictual or congruent” (39). In chapter 3, they outline two modes of contestation through which international orders in general, and hegemonic orders in particular, evolve: one is contesting from within existing architectures and infrastructures (or “order contestation”); the other is constructing alternative architectures and infrastructures (or “alternative-order building”).

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The following three chapters describe the three dynamics undermining the US-led liberal order (57), namely “great-power challenges” (or “exit from above”), challenges from below (or “exit from below”), and the rise of right-wing transnationalism (or “exit from within”). Chapter 4 focuses on the rise of Russia and China as “revisionist powers” and their efforts to create alternative institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), promoting competitive norms and revising international rules. As Cooley and Nexon argue, despite the different tactics and growing power asymmetry between them, Moscow and Beijing have been making deliberate efforts to coordinate their actions in challenging the American hegemony. In Chapter 5, the two authors investigate “bottom-up” dynamics, focusing on how and why various small states in different regions have chosen to exit American-led institutions and shift to alternative patrons. For rulers of those weaker states, their paramount concern—regime security—was once guaranteed through aid and protection associated with their compliance with U.S. leadership, and the lack of alternative patrons after the end of the Cold War made Washington an indispensable source of international goods. However, these relationships have been threatened by an increasing number of American intrusions into the domestic affairs of these weaker states, and these regimes are now shifting to new, emerging providers, such as China, for economic and political benefits. Chapter 6 focuses on how a series of transnational networks with multiple and conflicting groups have openly disrupted liberal culture in the West through promoting aggressive right-wing values and norms. The authors also tried to reveal Moscow as a broker in this process.

Chapter 7 highlights how Trump’s diplomacy intersected with the above three dynamics to facilitate the decline of the U.S.-led liberal international order. In Chapter 8, Cooley and Nexon summarize the book’s main propositions and seek to anticipate the future of the international order following Trump’s departure from office. They suggest that Washington should adopt a more pragmatic strategy and must accommodate other powers to a much greater extent than it has in the past.

In sum, the book investigates the recent transformation of the international order, examining various dynamics that are undermining U.S. global hegemony. It suggests that, regardless of who occupies the Oval Office, efforts to build alternative orders are unlikely to ease. The Biden administration will make some attempts to undo the damage brought on by Trump, but the evolution of world politics is “too far down multiple pathways to allow for a return” (17) to American hegemony.

2. Protecting China’s Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy, by Andrea Ghiselli, Oxford University Press, 2021, 304 pages, £75.00 (Hardcover)

Over the past several decades, the rapidly expanding presence of Chinese nationals and business operations in unstable regions such as the Middle East has brought the protection of overseas interests into the Chinese national security agenda, making policy adjustments necessary. Andrea Ghiselli’s new book, Protecting China’s Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy, analyzes
this major adjustment in China’s foreign policy through the framework of securitization theory. Drawing on abundant Chinese primary sources, Ghiselli examines how main actors in the Chinese foreign policy-making process understand this emerging challenge and how these actors coordinate with each other in promoting capacity-building and making institutional adjustments.

The first three chapters examine the backdrop against which Beijing has had to make policy changes. It explains the steady expansion of China’s interests overseas, particularly in regions like North Africa and the Middle East, while highlighting the difficulties that Chinese companies and citizens encountered when the Arab Spring started. It also traces the evolution of the Chinese state’s policies before the 2012 Libyan incident and examines Beijing’s policy infrastructure on regulating its firms’ overseas business exploration in those earlier years, including the evolution of the role and mission of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Ghiselli then investigates key actors in the securitization process and examines their interactions with one another. Chapter 4 examines the role of the Chinese foreign policy experts both inside and outside the government system, showing difficulties they encountered in “transmitting and producing precious information” (115) to top leaders. An interesting finding of Ghiselli here is that those more professional Chinese area studies specialists lacked the necessary influence to warn the government about risks. It seems that generalists in the Chinese international relations studies community, like Professor Wang Yizhou of Peking University, played a bigger role in promoting policy changes, but only after those crises had already become apparent. This observation deserves further exploration. Chapter 5 examines the role of public opinion as an important force in the securitization process, showing how the government dealt with the general public’s growing attention to these new challenges. One of the most interesting sections of this chapter (and the book as a whole) is the author’s discussion on Chinese movies like the Wolf Warrior 2 and Operation Red Sea as case studies of changing public opinion (Ghiselli’s methodological discussion in the appendix also deserves close attention). His key finding here is that it was those incidents abroad, rather than deliberate central planning, that were the decisive catalysts of the securitization process of Chinese overseas interests.

Chapter 6 focuses on the regulatory and institutional tools developed by the Chinese party-state to improve interagency coordination and to provide legal and technical foundations for the use of its military overseas. Ghiselli highlights broad changes in the institutions and laws that regulate and coordinate actions of various central government agencies, state-owned enterprises, and the Chinese military forces, namely, the PLA and the People’s Armed Police, to carry out necessary operations. This chapter also examines how orders and laws introduced by the Chinese government pushed companies to invest more in security, including through means of hiring private security companies.

Chapter 7 exams developments in China’s military capability and presence for the purpose of protecting overseas interests, showing how the overseas operations of the Chinese armed forces have evolved since the 1990s (However, nearly all of these operations are UN peacekeeping operations, and the author did not suf-
Ghiselli finds that China has managed to create more space for its diplomatic maneuvering and has striven to upgrade its armed forces for overseas deployment when necessary. He also shows that various factors, including lack of experience and information and competitions for bureaucratic interests, have undermined the emergence of a coherent Chinese strategy on this issue. These limitations on the securitization process, as well as the internal and external constraints on expanding the role of Chinese military forces, are issues that deserve deeper examination in future research. The last chapter summarizes the book’s main findings and concludes by discussing their implications for the study of Chinese foreign policy in the future.

In sum, the book investigates the process through which China has worked to secure its overseas interests and Beijing’s corresponding policy adjustments. It reveals the expanding frontier of Chinese national interests and the changing role of the PLA in defending them. As the world again enters a grim era of great power competition, it is crucial to understand China’s efforts to defend its expanding overseas interests and, in that context, adjust the functions and practices of its military forces. Ghiselli’s work provides valuable insights on this issue and is a significant contribution to the literature on China’s foreign policy.

3. *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics*, by Mark Raymond, Oxford University Press, 2019, 280 pages, $74.00 (Hardcover)

The constructivist literature on global governance has identified several mechanisms by which actors promote the diffusion and expansion of international norms and orders. However, this research agenda has yet to adequately specify processes and means by which states can create and change international rules.

In his new book, *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics*, Mark Raymond reveals the dynamics of international rule creation and amendments, with a focus on the role of what he calls “procedural rules”. Deriving insights from H.L.A. Hart’s idea of “secondary rules”, Raymond argues that, like all social practices, the practice of making and changing rules in international affairs is governed by a set of procedural rules, which as “secondary rules” provide background knowledge about who can engage in rule-making and rule-interpreting. Procedural rules also offer an “instruction manual” on how to make and interpret rules and how to expand the application of existing rules on novel cases (1). As social actors tend to evaluate different proposals according to relevant procedural rules, other things being equal, proposals that are advanced in accordance with existing procedural rules are more likely to be accepted by other actors, while deviations from accepted practices would only encounter denial and criticism (2–3). Besides, disagreements over procedural rules also play a key role in people’s failure to reach consensus.

The first chapter of the book lays out the conceptual and theoretical arguments summarized above, and the following four chapters test those hypotheses through case studies. Chapter 2 examines the construction of the European Concert system in the aftermath of the Napoleonic War, which was significantly different from the previous balance-of-power practices in the eighteenth century. It shows how
Austria’s Metternich, as a diplomat from a weaker state, leveraged contemporary rules associated with multilateral great power diplomacy and positive international law to establish new practices of active, collaborative conflict management that accorded special rights to great powers. It also explains how Metternich and Castlereagh invoked norms of sovereignty to defeat undesirable proposals made by other actors, in particular Tsar Alexander’s idea of Holy Alliance as a robust collective security system. It also shows how controversies around the institutionalization of those new rules of great power cooperation led to the eventual split between Britain and the continental powers.

Chapter 3 examines the making of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which delegitimized war as a means of conflict resolution. Raymond shows that, when they were negotiating the pact, both the French and American diplomats had tactically manipulated and employed important procedural rules at that time, including “a thoroughgoing commitment to legal positivism and an emerging norm of multilateralism” (92), to advance their positions.

Chapter 4 examines al-Qaeda’s effort to revise the international system following the 9/11 attacks via a mixed strategy of terror attacks and public messages, and the U.S. government’s unilateralist approach in response. This case highlights how agents maintain their own internalized notion of legitimate practices, even when they fundamentally disagree with each other and seek to challenge and revise existing rules. As each side relied almost exclusively on its own culturally prescribed secondary rules, whereas al-Qaeda relied on the procedures of Islamic jurisprudence and Washington relied on its own interpretation of the Law of Armed Conflict, these divides rendered meaningful engagement extremely difficult.

Chapter 5 investigates heated debates at the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on establishing rules for state conduct in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). Representatives from various states deliberately adopted existing diplomatic rules and international laws, such as sovereignty, to advance their positions and shape governing rules of this new issue area. Specifically, Raymond reveals how the United States rebuffed Russia’s proposal of a multilateral treaty governing state use of ICTs for military purposes by extending the applicability of the Law on Armed Conflict and the law of state responsibility to this new issue.

The book concludes by summarizing its main arguments and contributions to IR theory. Highlighting the importance of procedural rules, Raymond’s work enriches our understanding of the international norms-making process that provides structure global governance.

**Declarations**

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that there are no competing interests.