The Meaning of a Rising India: (Re)Examining India as Regional Power in South Asia

David Mitchell

Paper Presented FLASCO-ISA, Joint International Conference, Buenos Aires
July 23rd - 25th

David Mitchell
Dept. of Political Science and Dept. International Relations
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, PA 17837
dmmitche@bucknell.edu
India has been described in a variety of ways ranging from emerging power, global power, great power, would-be great power, major power, and regional power. What unites many of these perspectives is that they are acknowledging that India’s economic standing and the size and ongoing modernization of the military is changing India’s position and status in the international community. More popular accounts of India’s rise in power leave it unspoken as to what exactly is being discussed when discussing India’s economic, political or military power. Many of these analyses then infer from the changes in India’s capabilities preferences and behaviors related to a variety of issues. The problem is that India, or any state’s power, is not simply a function of material capability. The problem with lack of precision is that it opens up debates that result in some identifying India as a great power with other asserting only that it is a major power or not a power at all. If a discussion of India’s place in the world is going to rest on sound foundations there needs to be more precision in our explanations of what it means that India is one type of power or another.

This is equally true of analyses of India and its power status in South Asia. India is considered to be a regional, if not ‘the’ regional power in South Asia. Judging India’s status as a regional power in the region in one sense is easier than the global level, given the ease with which one can identify indicators that provide evidence of how India’s capability outstrips those of other states in the region. Yet, the same problem persists in that a focus strictly on capability provides us with an incomplete understanding of India as a power and consequently limits a full understanding of what India means for the region. This study provides an improved understanding of India as a regional power, by advancing a typology designed to enhance our ability to identify regional powers. It does so by develop a typology that goes beyond focusing on material capability and draws on the insights of critical political economy found in the “new
regionalism” literature¹. More specifically, it builds upon a typology developed by Miriam Prys, however this new typology provides a more developed role for a neo-Grancscian conception of hegemony and the role of actors at various scales.

In the following section, the literature that addresses definitions of regional powers is reviewed, with the intent of teasing out the strengths and weaknesses existing in the literature. This review is followed by the development of a regional power typology that is based on a typology developed by Miriam Prys. The new typology is used to evaluate the status of India post-1991 economic reforms. A reformulated typology will ensure an improved understanding of India’s status as a power, which can be used to better address a range of issues, as well as be of benefit to policy makers inside and outside of the region.

Identifying/Defining Regional Powers

Perhaps given less attention than other topics in the study of regions, is the subject of how we identify or define a regional power, which can be attributed to the difficulty in defining regional power (Hurrell 2010). Power matters in the development of regions, although there are different beliefs regarding how important, which is complicated by the challenge of identifying regional powers (Fawn 2009). Goertz and Powers (2011) who argue that regions come to be defined as states form economic institutions, stress that regions are not defined exogenously, but are the conscious choice made by states to address a functional problem. So, there is a critical link

---

between regionalism – where regions are seen as the policy or project by – and regionalization – which is a process of regional formation (Fawcett 2005). Schulz, Söderbaum, and Öjendal (2001) assert that regionalization is both a top-down state driven process and a bottom-up market and society process comprising a variety of actors, such as social network, NGOs, transnational corporations, social movements, etc… From their perspective this is what defines the “new regionalism approach”. The task then is to understand how all these actors and processes converge in the development of the region. Moreover, it places a value on understanding regional powers as they are a critical component in region formation, but this requires an ability to accurately identify or define these actors.

More focus is required to better specifying what we mean by regional powers and how they function, given that we know the ability of states to cooperate or integrate requires the role of a powerful leader (Mattli 1999). As Nolte notes, there has been a general “general lack of analytical instruments to identify and compare regional powers and to differentiate regional powers from great and middle powers” (Nolte 2010, 882). This has been very much complicated by the very complexity of regions, which have been heavily shaped or influenced by the restructuring brought on by globalization. Regions are developed by multiple actors at multiple levels of aggregation that does not privilege the state (Hurrell 2005; Wunderlich 2007). This deficiency should not be confused with an entire absence as a number of scholars have sought to address this fundamental issue identifying regional powers. Our understanding of how we define a regional power has in fact evolved despite the minimal focus given by scholars, thus the task is to build and refine our interpretations. The argument being advanced here is that existing typologies and frameworks have moved the study of regional powers in the right direction, but
what is required is greater precision and to integrate the insights being provided by the ‘new regionalism’ with that of more traditional regional literature.

Traditional International Relations theorizing has rooted power in material capabilities, typically drawing on some combination of military and economic capability with some other variables like population size (Organski 1980, Mearsheimer 2003; Lemke 2010). Interpreting power in terms of capability is obviously a necessary aspect of a state establishing itself as a power, but it is not sufficient for identifying powers at the regional level or even systemic levels. Yet, scholars working on regions have continued to overly rely on power as a form of material capability, by doing so they have in effect applied the theorizing at the system level and transposed it onto states in the context of the region. Lemke (2010) draws on the Correlates of War definition of hard power to explain regional propensity to conflict. Within the literature on Regional Security Complexes, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll (2010; 2012) argue that in order for a state to be a regional power it must account for a “significant share of the regions power capabilities in order to qualify as a regional power” (2012). They acknowledge their understanding of regional power is influenced by Waltz and agree with Waltz that this significant power translates into influence relative to other states in the region. Buzan and Waever (2003), although, acknowledging the limitations of the Neo-Realism in regional analysis argue that regional powers define the polarity of any regional security complex. It is these states’ capabilities that allow them to exercise influence over the states in the regional complex, yet at the same time limits their ability at the systemic level vis-à-vis global powers. Buzan and Waever accept that the power of the state is more than material capabilities, but by relying on a conceptualization of regional security complexes that are wedded to power distribution; their analysis is still overly dependent on material capability. Theorizing on regional powers that
works within the confines of traditional theorizing, like neo-realism, is potentially trapped by its state-centric-rationalism.

However, not all the literature on regions and regional power has been limited by traditional theorizing’s over-reliance on power understood in terms of material capability. Material capability matters, but power can come in different forms and other factors within and beyond the state contribute to a state’s status as a power. Before delving deeper into the conceptualization of regional power extant in the literature, it is important to address the relationship between power and leadership. A state can distinguish itself from others purely based on its material capability, however, this does not necessitate that this can translate into the ability to influence and structure regional arrangements. Brute force can be marshalled to compel other actors to conform to a preferred behavior, yet this is not the extent of power implicit in most accounts of power. The assumption is that raw power capability can be utilized to build cooperation or win the support of others. In this instance, power is not capability, but power is the ability to influence and lead. Leadership requires that others accept the legitimacy of one’s lead and a willingness to support a putative leader’s actions; in short, leadership is the product of a social interaction that is only partially reflective of one actor’s superior material strength (Jesse, Lobell, Press-Barnathan and Williams 2012). If the interest in studying regional powers is ultimately to explain and understand their effect on the interactions, order, structure, and institutionalization of regions, then an interpretation of power that is connected to an ability to engage in effective leadership is essential. This means in defining a power we must account for capability and how a regional power leads.

A starting point to account for the leadership dimension of power is to require that other actors recognize a state as power (Buzan and Waever 2003; Destradi 2010; Nolte 2010; Schirm
2002). Recognition of one state’s power capability, however, can mean any variety of things to other states ranging from indifference to balancing, but accepting the state’s leadership or developing the will to follow is not automatic. Power then requires that there is an influence over the preferences and beliefs or an intellectual leadership (Nabers 2010). Lake (2009), similar to Pedersen (2002), argues that hierarchies form within regions based on a social exchange whereby a dominant state provides some value for the region and in exchange subordinate states return “compliance” and “legitimacy” and because of this cooperative relationship, peace comes to characterize the region. These arguments while having some validity omit the exercise and power that compels compliance by subordinate states. Neo-Gramscian analyses of global relations have drawn on a conception of power or hegemony that assumes both usage of coercion by actors, but also consent that is a product of intellectual and moral leadership. From this perspective, “power can be exercised indirectly by presenting a particular view as compatible with communal aims” (Nabers 2010, 61). The leader-follower relationship is not a simple optimizing exchange, rather leadership uses socialization by way of a dominant discourse that sets norms and becomes institutionalized. Stephen Gill, although not addressing regional power, argues “leaders must not only seek to define what is unique and specific about a current conjuncture in their communications with those they lead and organize, but they must also find ways to justify a course of action and mobilize resources to act effectively on it” (Gill 2012).

Accounting for hegemony has been integrated into analyses of regional power by other authors, in fact; this is an element of the ‘new regionalism’ literature. Both Nolte and Prys in their studies of regional power account for the perceptions of member states in the region and their perceptions of the putative regional power. Nolte provides an extensive list of criteria for, as he describes it, the identification and comparison of regional powers. This set of criteria draws
on previous research and is quite comprehensive, perhaps too comprehensive. Nonetheless, Notle (2010; 2011) accounts for some critical variables, notably, perception held by other actors inside and outside the region; leadership in regional institutions, the influence the regional power exercises over the region; material capability; and the possession of ideological resources. It is the last dimension that speaks to the idea of hegemony discussed by critical political economy, as an ideological dominance exhibited by the regional power. Notle points us in the right direction, however, he only provides a broad framework and he does not provide us with the basis to judge relative weight of these dimensions of regional power – which he explicitly acknowledges – nor any understanding of how these characteristics might manifest themselves differently across states. Are these characteristics the same for a newly established power versus a more mature power? What does it mean if some of these characteristic apply to a state while others do not. This is left for further research.

Miriam Prys (2010; 2013) has taken us the furthest in specifying a typology of regional powers that is more parsimonious than Notle’s criteria and it has the added benefit of explaining how variations in the different dimensions produce different types of regional powers. This provides us with a more precise base for identifying regional powers, but also for conducting further research because the typology gives indications of how these regional powers will behave. Prys identifies four dimensions of regional power: the self-perception of the regional role, the perception by other states in the region that the regional power has a special role, the provision of public goods, and the influence of preferences and values of other states in the region. Collectively these variables yield three types of regional powers: the detached power, the regional hegemon, and the regional dominator. Prys further adds a conditional variable, the openness of the region to extra-regional influence, because external influences, while not
defining the regional power, have the ability to place constraints or limit the behavior available to regional powers.

While I agree with the fundamental elements of Prys’ typology, I argue that it has some limitations and there are additional elements of the region and the global level-of-analysis that need be accounted for, but also a more prominent role for the hegemon. First, Prys’ dimension, exercise of power, expresses itself in three ways across her regional types. Detached Powers have no impact on the region, while ‘regional hegemons’ influence preferences and values, and Regional dominators impact through violence and force. The distinction made between the regional hegemons and regional dominators is a false dichotomy, because as previously addressed; hegemony as neo-Gramscians define it, involves both coercion and consent. States will use a combination of force and less “hard” forms of influence in order to impose themselves on other states. One could argue that states that had begun the process of establishing their influence over a region would need to use force to deal with rivals or states that undermine its agenda. There is no reason to identify the use of force with one type of power. Yet, Prys’ identification of a variation is not entirely unwarranted as states might rely on varying mixes of force and other forms of influence.

An additional problem is also found with the description of the types of goods that the regional power provides to the region. Here Prys asserts that regional hegemons provide regional public goods while regional dominators provide private goods. Once again, the distinction created might in fact prove to be false, as hegemons at the global or regional level will provide and seek various goods simultaneously. The provision of public goods, although benefiting actors other than the regional power, does not negate that the final goal of the regional power is to advance its own interests or exploit some actors in the region. Destradi (2010) has critiqued
authors like Nolte – she does include Prys in this group – who conceive of regional powers as “pursuing benevolent, leading, integrating strategies”. While Prys has not exactly done this, the construction of her typology creates the perception that regional hegemons are interested in providing public goods as an end, acting as if they were being beneficent, while regional dominators do not.

Part of the appeal of Prys’ approach is that it makes an effort to incorporate an understanding of hegemony that moves beyond traditional rationalist explanations and incorporates a critical/neo-Gramscian definition. However, in doing so, Prys seems to stress the persuasion and the influence on preferences, but does not incorporate the role of transnational forces within or beyond the region in constituting state power, which is a central concept in neo-Gramscian thought. There has to be an accounting for the role that the historical forces extant in a region and how these coalesce to constitute the state’s power. These forces may exist within the state, but may also be found in transnational forces without. Moreover, hegemony is never complete and the forces of opposition are always present, thus forces of counter-hegemony must also be involved in the development of the typology of regional power (Gill 2012). This could potentially fall within the parameters of Pryst’s argument where she identifies openness of the regional as a conditional variable. This, however, is not sufficient since counter-hegemonic forces may emanate from within and beyond the region. The presence or strength of counter-hegemonic forces, as well as any extra-regional forces will contribute to the constitution of the regional power. This means that what Prys treats as a conditional variable needs to be an essential dimension in the definition of regional power. This contradicts to some extent individuals like Amitav Acharya (2007) who argues that regions are constructed more from
within than without because of regional powers. While not false, this assertion maybe incomplete.

**Varieties of Regional Powers**

Using Pys’ typology as a starting point, I develop a new typology that accounts for hegemony, including the role of transnational actors, and the role of extra-regional actors that help define the regional power (see Table 1). Like most of the research on regional powers, it is assumed that these states have a preponderance of material capability. Unlike the treatment by neo-realists or analyses influenced by them, material power is necessary but far from sufficient and as will be described below material power is not just possessed by the state alone. Four dimensions contribute to a state being a regional power (self-perception, centrality in foreign policy, level of hegemony, role of competing actors) and variation in each of these dimensions results in five types of powers (defacto regional power, detached regional power, “nascent” regional power, regional hegemon, regional dominator). Although treated as ideal-types, states find themselves exhibiting the characteristics that fall in between types, which means we can think of regional powers existing on a continuum. However, it is not assumed that the different categories should be treated as stages in the development regional power, even though some states could progress from one type of regional power to another. In the following sections, each dimension that defines a regional power will be discussed as well as how they are operationalized. This will be followed by an illustration of the typology using the case of India.

**Self-perception.** This dimension drawn is from Pryc and is rooted in role theory. Role theory suggests that state leadership develop policies or behave in light of a particular national
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Perception</th>
<th>De Facto Regional Powers</th>
<th>Regional Detached Powers</th>
<th>“Nascent” Regional Power</th>
<th>Regional Hegemon</th>
<th>Regional Dominator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priority is advancing the interests of the state in the region. Regional dominance is not priority.</td>
<td>Domestic or Global Priorities</td>
<td>Aspires to Regional role – positive contribution</td>
<td>Exceptionalism – State believes that it is best positioned to advance interests of region.</td>
<td>Exceptionalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality of Regional power in foreign policy of states</td>
<td>Many states view power as important, yet not vital to economic/political interests. Low levels of dependence. Low centrality to major non-state actors outside of state</td>
<td>Many states view power as important, yet not vital to economic/political interests. Low levels of dependence. Low centrality to major non-state actors outside of state</td>
<td>Regional states interested in deepening ties, Enhancing integration.</td>
<td>Centrality of the state for regional actors. Political and economic relations dependent on regional powers policies. Collaborate with regional power to advance interests.</td>
<td>Centrality of state. Political and economic relations heavily determined by regional power. Regional states ideologically align with regional power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological influence is non-existent. State works with other states to identify mutual interests.</td>
<td>Hegemony is non-existent. Use of bilateral and some multilateral mechanisms to shape relations based on material interests. Occasional resort to coercion to defend vital state interests.</td>
<td>Initial efforts to extend hegemony. Has limited effect, but there is some development of institutions and agreements to extend influence. Hegemony is contested.</td>
<td>Propagates ideology based on national articulated values sustained by non-state actors. Driving force behind the creation of various institutions.</td>
<td>Ideological domination supported by regional “constitutional” arrangements. Regional control relies less on direct coercion. Consolidation of a transnational bloc that supporting state hegemony.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of competing Actors</td>
<td>Domestic actors have a variety of interests that do not necessarily align with the interests of the state.</td>
<td>Domestic – Domestic actors have a variety of interests that do not necessarily align with the interests of the state.</td>
<td>Domestic – Alignment between interests of economic elite and the state. Some divisions exist from political competition.</td>
<td>Domestic – Alignment of public and private interests in regional power. Domestic stability enhances power of the state.</td>
<td>Domestic – Alignment of public and private interests in regional power. Domestic stability enhances power of the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic &amp; Int’l</td>
<td>International – extra-regional/hegemonic forces influence regional politics</td>
<td>International – extra-regional/hegemonic forces influence regional politics</td>
<td>International – Extra-regional forces are still present, but cannot ignore interests of regional power. Often must negotiate.</td>
<td>International – state has the ability to limit or negate influence of extra-regional forces, particularly states. Non-state actors accommodate the interests of the state.</td>
<td>International – extra-regional forces play minimal role without support or acquiescence of regional power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
role, which has two dimensions, role conception and role prescription. Individuals or collectivities exhibit roles that are a product of role conception, which are subjective beliefs about what the appropriate behavior the state ought to take in the international community. Role prescriptions are the norms and expectations that emanate from the environment, they are ‘cues’ or ‘demands’ placed on an actor that occupies a particular social position or possess a certain status (Holsit 1970). Overall, the state’s role serves to provide a stable identity, which functions to shape policy and the behavior of the state. Emphasis has been placed on role conception, compared to role prescriptions, in the literature on foreign policy because it is self-defined and thus will be of greater consideration for the decision maker due to the connection to national interests, however role prescription is not unimportant. Role prescription becomes more salient in highly structured environments, such as formal organizations or in the context of treaty obligations, where explicit rights, duties, and obligations have been accepted and are expected by the state and others. National roles do not just act as a set of guidelines or norms for the leadership when enacting policy, but it also serves to “galvanize national support and cohesion at home and serve as a power resource in its own right” (Hurrell 2006).

States may perceive that they can play a variety of different roles within the region or not. A de facto regional power is a state that has a preponderance of material capability making it at a rudimentary level a “regional power”, but this state while highly engaged with the region does not seek a role where it exercises power or leadership over that region. Other actors may see the state having this role, but the state itself – or its leadership – does not hold this belief. The conditions that exist around the de facto regional power define its status as a power. This is the type of state that would be considered a secondary power or regionally in the presence of a more powerful state. Detached regional powers on the other hand do see themselves playing a
leadership role but it is beyond the region or its priorities are on domestic issues, thus effort is not focused on the region. Nascent regional powers have role conception that is aspirational in nature. The state “believes” that it should play a role in the region, but that it may not have the full capability to do so, as such, it must be restrained in its approach and play a positive role advancing assumed regional interests. The distinction from the de facto power is the perceived role of projecting power. For the regional hegemon and dominator, I also adopt Prys’ two versions of exceptionalism. The regional hegemon and regional dominator both perceive that they are exceptional states and that they have a special role to play in exercising leadership or domination over a group of states or geographic area.

Centrality of the Regional Power. Instead of considering the perceived acceptance by other regional actors of the regional power, which is Prys’ approach, I reframe this as the centrality of the regional power in the foreign policy of other states in the region. Prys’ usage of acceptance is not meant to imply approval of a regional powers status or position; instead it suggests that states recognize the “special role” for the regional power. Important to this conceptualization is the understanding that it does not matter if states believe that the status of regional power is right or correct. Rather than place the focus of this dimension of regional power on the perception of “acceptance”, I reframe this variable as the centrality of the regional power in the foreign policy of other states in the region. In other words, how big of a role or what level of dependence does the regional power play in political or economic policies enacted by other states. The advantage of this reframing is that it fundamentally still addresses the same issue, but it is less reliant on perception. A leader’s perceptions or beliefs may not always align with the reality of the relationships that they maintain. A stronger sign of a state’s status as a regional power would be the extent to which other states by necessity orient their foreign policy
toward the regional power. This could vary from practically non-existent to having a foreign policy that is fully integrated with the regional powers. Prys cites Lake who argues that failure to diversify an economy away from a dominant state is an indicator of acceptance. I would argue that this is an indicator of the centrality of the regional power, which transcends mere perception. A state that consulted with the regional power before signing an international agreement or taking military action would also indicate that the regional power was a priority in a state’s foreign policy.

For de facto regional powers, there is a low degree of centrality for the state or sub-state actors, as the regional power is not vital to any economic or political interests. In the case of detached regional powers, regional states and their sub-state actors have low levels of dependence on the regional power and economic and political ties are not vital. Nascent regional powers find their ties with regional states as deepening with a number of states economically or politically tied to the regional power. In other words, states in the region find a desire to benefit from the power of the “nascent” power. Regional hegemons and regional dominators are central to the political and economic foreign policy of the states in the region. States in relation to a regional hegemon are dependent on regional powers policies and they prioritize collaboration with the regional power to advance their interests. For states in regions with regional dominators, their foreign policy is heavily determined by regional power and states not only build foreign policy around their relationship with the regional power, but there may be an ideological alignment.

Level of Hegemony. Hegemony addresses the non-material aspects of power, but it also introduces the multi-level aspect of the construction of power. The establishment of hegemony is not solely a state-centric project, as transnational capital and political leadership collaborate to
propagate a dominant ideology and will use coercion, but also institutions, formal and informal as a means to establish and maintain its dominance. The state is one of many mechanisms with which a hegemonic ideology can be spread. However, transnational actors, specifically capital, are not entirely placeless and the state performs a valuable function in protecting the interests of domestically located capital. While transnational capital has global interests, they are advantaged by powerful state apparatuses and will attempt to use these mechanisms to their benefit. Business interests influence state foreign policy in order to achieve economies of scale with other firms within the region (Reed 2014). In de facto regional powers ideological influence is non-existent and the regional power works with other states to identify mutual interests. Regional detached powers are also regional powers were ideological hegemony originating in the regional power is non-existent. However, these states will use bilateral and multi-lateral mechanisms to shape relations based on material interests. Hegemonic discourses at the global level will be resorted to in order to build cooperation. There will be the occasional resort to the use of force to defend vital interests.

Nascent regional powers, regional hegemons and regional dominators possess varying degrees of ideological hegemony. Nascent powers extend to limited effect an ideology, which will be manifested by the creation of some institutions at the regional level used to regulate and discipline the region. Transnational actors are active in the region and begin to work to consolidate interests under a common ideological perspective. The ideology may not be unique to the nascent power, but will draw on existing dominant ideological currents. For regional hegemons, a hegemonic ideology is articulated and a discourse of national value is propagated by state and non-state actors within the region. The state is highly active in collaborating with institutions to advance hegemony. The region dominator differs because there is the
consolidation of a transnational bloc within the region that supports the hegemony that originated in the regional dominator. This is supported by an extensive network of “constitutional” arrangements of formal institutions that are political and economic. Coercion is used at times to preserve the hegemony, but dominance is primarily sustained by indirect influence.

Role of Competing Actors. The level of hegemony identifies the role of non-state actors in the power status of states and, as discussed above, the role of these non-state actors contribute to the power of the state. In terms of the centrality of the regional power to other states, we also see that the position of a regional power is also, in part, defined by actors and processes beyond the state (Fawn 2009). But it is important to also account for extra-regional actors, particularly great powers, but also the influence of domestic political actors and their level of opposition to the state. Domestically, the state maybe characterized by a high level of instability as various groups challenge the authority of the state or impedes its ability to extract and harness the resources of the state, which undermines the states material capability (Jesse, Lobell, Press-Barnthan, Williams 2012). This is also often the basis from which counter-hegemonic forces emerge. It is assumed that the more powerful a regional state, the less domestic instability should exist, enhancing state power. This means that for a de facto regional power, experiencing low levels of domestic stability; this may hamper the effectiveness of the state and create inefficiencies, but does not undermine the fact that this state has more power than others. The same would hold true for detached regional powers, domestic challenges weaken the state, but they have minimal impact on the functioning of political and economic life. Nascent regional powers on the other hand might experience intense competition within the confines of the established political system, but this does not threaten political life and economic interests are not jeopardized to the point of threatening the domestic system. Both regional hegemons and
regional dominators see an absence of meaningful political and economic instability from opposition groups that could amount to instability.

Equally, the more powerful the state the lower level of extra-regional forces influence should be. Note that influence on state power need not come solely from extra-regional powers projecting power directly into the region, but it could also come for hegemonic forces that are not strictly state based. The de facto and detached powers are confronted with a variety of extra-regional forces that place the region beyond the control of the regional powers. Nascent powers experience the presence of extra-regional forces, but these forces are in engagement with the regional power negotiating their role in the region. In contrast, regional hegemons have the ability to negate the influence of extra-regional forces, particularly states. International actors often accommodate interests of regional powers. For regional dominators, extra-regional forces play a minimal role and require the support of acquiescence of the regional power.

Once again, the inclusion of domestic and international actors is necessary because the presence or absences and the activities of these actors places limits on the power of regional states. In this respect these actors help constitute the power status of the state and are not separate or conditional. To demonstrate the utility of the regional power typology, the next section will examine the case of India as an illustration of how the typology can be used to identify regional powers.

**India’s Status as Regional Power**

India has gained much attention because of the rapid growth of its economy in the wake of the 1991 economic reforms. In the public and popular media, India’s status as an emerging economy
has inevitably and, perhaps mistakenly, translated in to discussion of India as an emerging power (Cohen 2001; Buzan 2002; Ganguly 2003; Kapur 2006; Nadkarni 2011; Nayar and Paul 2003). What this focus obscures is a deeper analysis of what it means to say that India is an emerging or even a great power. In addition these commentaries have focused on capability as equating with power and over looked the ability to influence (Mistry 2009). Perhaps more lost in this discussion, is whether or not India is a regional power and what does that exactly mean. Scholarly discussions of Indian foreign policy point out limitations on Indian power, despite its disproportionate capability relative to its neighbors, which include internal conflicts, instability in neighbors, and the on-going rivalry with Pakistan (Mitra and Schöttli 2007). The implication of these analyses is that India remains a regional power, despite these challenges. Given, the preceding discussion on regional power, this section will seek to identify what type of regional power India is employing the developed typology. The analysis focuses on Indian after the reforms of 1991, when discussions of Indian and its power have been most relevant.

Self-Perception. The origins of Indian foreign policy have their roots in the strategic thoughts and beliefs espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru, who served as India’s first prime minister and foreign minister (Hardgrave Jr. 1988). In the broadest terms, Nehru’s views have been described, in one form or another, as a combination of realism and idealism. His beliefs were realist in the sense that he viewed the world as one of threats and weak states were particularly vulnerable to powerful states. Consequently, states must be guided by their national interest. This belief in part contributed to the development of India’s policy of non-alignment where India pursued a foreign policy that would be independent of both US and Soviet blocs during the Cold War.
The idealist aspect of Nehru’s beliefs had different dimensions. In one respect, Nehru’s idealism was expressed as liberal internationalism with a profound belief in the need and ability for states to cooperate with one another in a multilateral fashion. This took on a formal expression in the development of Panchsheel or five principles of coexistence. It also saw India heavily involved in the early Cold War efforts at nuclear disarmament, UN peacekeeping operations, and the mediation of international conflicts. Nehru’s ‘idealism’ can also be understood, however, as a set of beliefs influenced by Fabian socialist thought and India’s colonial experience. Anti-colonialism and anti-racialism, both figured prominently in Nehru’s ideas about how the state, particularly states in the developed world, ought to approach international politics. As a consequence of these views, Nehru was skeptical of the motivations and intentions of the western powers. The moral idealism found undergirding the policies of nuclear disarmament, de-colonization, and the promotion of Third World solidarity coexisted with a realist approach to international affairs, particularly in the near abroad (Vanaik and Islamia). Within the South Asian region, Nehru desired to keep out foreign powers as South Asia was considered to be India’s sphere of influence (Malone 2011). This belief was also driven by the desire to resist any neo-colonial efforts on the part of colonial (former) or great powers (Mohan 2004). Hilali (2001) in an analysis of India’s intervention in Sri Lanka comments, “Indian officials strongly opposed the foreign powers’ presences and their intervention in the domestic affairs of South Asian Nations”. India’s actions at the time were also meant to convey to neighbors that “in the case of intra-regional conflicts India’s neighbors should seek the assistance of India” (2001, 744).

2 Panchsheel or the Five Principles of Coexistence were developed from a 1954 agreement between India and China. The five principles include: mutual respect for territorial integration and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.
The perception of playing a leading role in the protection and development of the region manifested itself more formally in the 1996 with the enunciation of the Gujral Doctrine, which was less concerned with external threats, but with a desire to foster stability in the region. The doctrine stipulates a “hands-off” policy whereby no nation will interfere in the affairs of others, disputes will be settled peacefully with respect for each state’s sovereignty, and most importantly the basis for India’s relations was one where India did not require reciprocity. The latter point is important because it stems from the belief that if India is going to be an effective regional leader that it needed to generate goodwill by not making demands on its neighbors. As Mohan notes, this policy, although articulated by the government of I.K. Gujral, reflected a change in beliefs across the political elite (Mohan 2004, 242). Importantly, it was believed that India could not play a meaningful role internationally, without first reconciling regional conflicts. In addition, with the global emergence of trading blocs, India perceived that in order to compete it too need to stand at the leader of a regional economic bloc (Mohan 2004). So, historically and contemporarily, India has perceived itself as a playing the role of a regional leader both from unwanted foreign influence and internal conflict and instability.

Centrality of India in Foreign Policy. The centrality of India in its neighbor’s foreign policy is mixed. If one has to characterize the post-1991 period, it is one where India’s centrality is limited both politically and economically. Economically, India is important, but not as central to the economic foreign policy of its neighbors. India is the major regional trading partner for the states of South Asia, however the level of intra-regional trade is extremely small (more than 50% of total trade are with industrial powers in Europe, North American and East Asia) when compared with the trade of many states in relation to the rest of the world (Sahu and Patra 2012). The low levels in the post-WWII history are as a result of import substitution policies and, in the
period of liberalization, lingering protectionism. The exception to this is the high levels of bilateral trade with Nepal and Bhutan and India is among the top twenty trading partners for Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh (Batra 2007). The other state considered a power in the region, Pakistan, has negligible levels of trade with India (Malone 2011). So even though India has increased its economic engagement in the region, for example one billion in credit to Bangladesh and increasing trade with Myanmar, the states in the region as a whole are not economically dependent on India and their foreign policies and are tied in important ways to actors in neighboring regions or further afield.

Politically, India’s centrality to members of the region also varies. Obviously, India is highly central to Pakistan’s foreign policy, however this centrality is not one that is a positive that contributes to India power. Despite this fact, the rivalry is an indication of India’s power status because, as T.V. Paul argues, the on-going rivalry is the product of a “truncated” asymmetry in power (Paul 2005). India’s superiority is truncated, because even though India has greater power, it has been increasingly limited by a variety of developments, notable Pakistan’s development of nuclear weapons. The power dynamic between the two is one where power differential fuels the Pakistani perceptions of India as threat, which is one factor that sustains the rivalry.

The relations with the other states have been more complex in terms of centrality. India’s “smaller” neighbors have historically been wary of India, because of its material capability (Mukherji 2010; Nadkarni 2012). This is what in part inspired the creation of the Gujral doctrine, so at this basic level all states in the region have given special attention to India. However, once one moves beyond this general orientation, important differences emerge in the extent to which India is a central priority to their foreign policy. Bangladesh’s relationship with India is
emblematic of the tensions that exist between India and its neighbors, yet because of a variety of factors including sharing borders, cross-border migration, terrorism, and control of the Ganges, India is a central preoccupation for Bangladesh. Malone (2011, 113) cites a former foreign minister who asserts that “Indo-centrism” is a key element in policy as a result of its power and that Bangladesh has needed to develop external ties to compensate. Nepal is another country where there are deep political ties yet wariness of India. There have been close ties between the two countries militaries and India was understood to be the guarantor of law and order (Malone 2011). Nepal, like Bhutan, is landlocked with India bordering on three sides and due to the boundary created by the Himalayas India has been Nepal’s main transit route. In addition to its weak economy, geography has contributed to Nepal’s dependency on India (Rajagopolan 2005). The relationship can be tense as Nepal has been aggrieved by what has been perceived as Indian interference in Nepalese politics and treaties and agreements dating back to the 1950s that have benefited India at Nepal’s expense (Chaturvedy and Malone 2012). Bhutan’s geographic location, as already noted, has helped foster its dependency on India, aside from economic asymmetry. But India’s centrality goes further, as the Indian military has troops stationed in the northern part of the country. More importantly, Bhutan has been deferential to India on foreign and defense policy in relation to China (Malone 2011).

Sri Lanka’s political engagement with India has been primarily by way of the connections with the Tamil community in southern India, this culminated in a brief military intervention in Sri Lanka by India to end the civil war and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s assassinations by the LTTE. Subsequently India played less of a central role in the conflict until 2004 when Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse requested Indian assistance in resolving the conflict and later India would provide military assistance to the government
(Rajagopolan 2005). Yet, it was Norway which became most central in attempting to broker a settlement to the conflict and in recent years China has become a primary trading partner and has moved to base Chinese naval assets in Sri Lanka. In the Maldives’ foreign policy, Sri Lanka has been most central politically and economically (Rajagopalan 2011). India has become a more important actor as it has contributed increasing levels of development assistance. Myanmar (which some do not necessarily include in South Asia) has shared a similar relationship with India. China has become central to Myanmar’s foreign policy as the Chinese offer economic incentives and has provided support for the government. Myanmar’s view is that India lacks a clear policy or long term strategy for building deeper ties (Zhao 2014). Trade with India is less than half that of China and much of Myanmar’s trade is routed first through third party states.

There is significant variation among the state’s in India’s region as to how central India is to their foreign policy. India matters to them all, but the extent varied significantly and there is little evidence that they are dependent on relations with India. A number of the states have established important relations with China, which gives these states options in terms of the development of economic and foreign policy. Aside from Pakistan that is hostile to India – but where India still remains central – the state’s in the region are wary of India’s influence and are often apprehensive about a rising India.

Level of Hegemony. Hegemony as it is being employed in this study is the resort to coercion and ideological conformity implemented by a historical bloc that incorporates a transnational capitalist class and state elites that employ various forms of institutions to ensure conformity to historical bloc’s interests. In 1991 with the reform of the economy, India formally embraced neo-liberalism as an economic model, although it did not abandon government intervention in the market. Bava (2010) asserts that India in the 1990s adopted a western
orientation on both domestic and foreign policy. Actually beginning with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the government began to divest from some public enterprises and privatized; enacted a floating exchange rate; and; liberalized trade in services and goods. This has continued under both the center-left Congress party and the center-right BJP. So by making these changes, India moved away from decades of economic policy that emphasized development and moved to deeply integrate itself into the neo-liberal global economy. India embraced the neo-liberal hegemonic discourse and practice that was restructuring the global economy. The impetus for which was the stagnating import substitution polices and financial crisis, but also a domestic “technocratic conviction” driving for liberalization (Mukherji 2010). The latter point is important in that the change in India’s economy and the norms underlying that change were influenced by the Indian business community that saw a comparative advantage for India in industries, such as high-tech services (Khanna and Mohan 2006). This was in turn supported by liberal reformers in government, such as then finance minister and later Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It is true that India at times has represented itself as a developing country challenging neo-liberal rules, for example in WTO negotiations, this is not a rejection of neo-liberalism though, but a desire to re-work its terms.

What was occurring during this period was the emergence of an Indian transnational class that was pulling India the larger global economy. At the regional level, organizations in the private sector formed to facilitate greater economic cooperation. The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) was formed in 1992 by private sector chambers of commerce from the region as a means to promote trade and Investment (Kelegama 2007). It has been argued that neo-liberalization has led to states in India co-governing with the national government on economic policy as state chief ministers are engaging economic diplomacy
courting other governments and firms to grow the local economies (Sridharan 2003). This is tied to businesses, particularly the technology sector, have placed pressure on chief ministers to support their efforts to attract foreign business and investment. However, the states have not slipped their leashes, because the national government has played a facilitating role in this kind of activity in terms of the regulatory policy that enables states to pursue investment and trade (Jenkins 2003). Either way, both arguments represent the formation of the transnational class guided by neo-liberal ethos and incentives.

Liberalization of the region has manifested itself in what Gill refers to “new constitutionalism”, which is the creation of agreements that are designed to manage and regulate the global economy. The main regional organization, created in 1985, is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation that was idea that did not originate with India and did not initially have an economic focus. By the 1990s, economics took on a central focus and in line with the neo-liberal agenda, the SAARC Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) was created that put in place trade preferences for intra-regional trade. This was later complemented by the South Asian Free Trade Association (SAFTA) that specified the phased elimination of tariffs.

The elements to impose hegemony on South Asia are in place for India. There is the emergence of a transnational capitalist class that has formed a bloc with the government actors and they have led to state and regional policies that are designed to sustain and institutionalize neo-liberalism. However, for a number of reasons India has not been able to effectively impose hegemony on South Asia. First, India has benefited from neo-liberalism, but the liberalization of India and South Asia has opened up the region to global economic forces. Thus, the ideology that India has adopted facilitates a political economy that does not necessarily enhance India’s ability to impose itself and discipline the region. States continue to rely on bilateral agreements,
including India, and they are also ensconced in other multi-lateral agreements connected to
different regions (Kelegama 2007). Neo-liberalism opens the door to a global transnational
community and extra-regional actors. This on its own would not preclude India from establishing
a high level of hegemony, but a second problem has emerged that India’s economy has not been
directed toward the region in terms of trade and investment. The dominance of a state’s currency
is emblematic of their economic dominance of the region and, in the case of the rupee; it is of
low significance because of lower levels of investment and trade (Kappel 2011). This is
problematic, because regional powers need to establish the type of vertical integration among
firms that would allow them to have oligopolistic domination of value chains (Kappel 2011).

The institutions and agreements that have been created have not been effective; in part
because India’s economic thrust has been elsewhere, but also because of resistance from its
neighbors. Acharya (2011) argues, because of its history India suffers from a lack of regional
legitimacy, while Malone (2011) asserts that most of India’s neighbors have not accepted its
“economic logic”. What is possibly occurring is the development of “norm subsidiarity” or the
emergence of counter-hegemony at the regional level. Third, progress and development of
SAARC and other regional arrangements are continually hampered by regional political
problems, particularly the conflicts that exist between the member states, most notably India and
Pakistan. As it stands now Indian industry has not yet seen the value in the region relative to
other regions, because of continuing tariff barriers limiting economies of scale (Gavin and
Lombaerde 2005).

---

33 Acharya (2011) defines norm subsidiarity as “a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve
their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors.” This was being
used in a argument that regional orders among developing countries are shaped by norm subsidiarity in relation
great powers.
It cannot be said that India maintains hegemony over South Asia. The elements to do so exist, but they have not yet been developed and they are undermined by the conditions in the region. Before moving on, there are two additional elements to discuss in regard to hegemony in India. The first element is the promotion of democracy, which has been presented as the political parallel to economic neo-liberalism. Foreign Secretary Natwar Singh (2005) articulates India’s approach to democracy by stating “As a flourishing democracy, India would certainly welcome more democracy in our neighborhood, but that too is something that we may encourage and promote; it is not something we can impose on others”. India has engaged a number of its neighbors with the intent of promoting democratization, but this has been balanced by a pragmatic view that India’s interests require that it engage with non-democracies (Mehta 2011). This means that India has not sought to establish a political hegemony over the region that would contribute to its power.

Hegemony is not ideology alone. Because hegemony is never complete and may be challenged in times of crisis, coercion may be required to preserve the established order. India has rarely resorted to the use of coercion in its relationship with its neighbors. The use of force has been most often used in a reactive manner and primarily in relationship to Pakistan. The exception to this are India’s deployment of peacekeeping forces in 1987, which was driven by the ethnic ties to the south of India and the pressure of refugees, and the 1961 intervention in Goa ending Portuguese colonial rule. In fact intervention has been at odds with India’s historical beliefs about its role in the region and this is reinforced by policy, such as the Gujral doctrine that explicitly asserted non-intervention.

**India the “Nascent Power”**
There is no doubt that India is the most powerful state materially in South Asia relative to all of its neighbors and that alone should permits to consider India a regional power. However, the material capability of any state is weak, or imprecise, measure of a state’s ability within a region. It tells us very little about the nature of the state’s status as a power other than it is greater or lesser in relation to other states. Going a step further, it is even weaker when discussing the issue of whether or not a state has come to dominate its region. Discussions that treat powerful states as “hegemons” based on their material capability alone are assuming that this capability then translates in to some kind of influence over the region, which is not necessarily the case. Knowing more about the nature a state’s position as a regional power provides greater insight into what kind of power they are capable of exercising and what that might mean for the region as a whole.

The typology presented above has established a way to do just this as it moves beyond account of material capability. It addresses how the state perceives its role in the region. A state may have a material power, but may not see itself as playing any kind influential role over their region, which means they will not act on their capability. A second dimension of the typology is the regional power’s centrality in the foreign policy of other states. It is here where there is a convergence between the idea of power as influence and capability, because the variable of centrality is identifying that the regional power has an impact on other states that forces them to place a priority on the regional power. A state that has power will have a gravitational pull on its partners in the region as they must concentrate on the regional power’s political or economic actions. The third dimension of regional power is hegemony or the level of hegemony that the state exercises over the region. This hegemony is ideological dominance that ensures conformity and disciplines the behavior of the region. To ensure this hegemony, the state may resort to
coercion, but will rely on various forms of “constitutionalism” as a means to regulate behavior. The scope of the state’s hegemony requires that transnational actors cooperate to propagate and sustain it in the region. The last dimension focuses on the role of competing actors in the region. The assumption underlying this variable is that a state’s power is limited and defined by other actors in the state’s environment. A greater level of domestic opposition to the state absorbs state resources and undermines the state’s ability to focus on the region. The greater the ability of extra-regional actors to play a role in the region, the more constraints placed on the power of an ostensible regional power.

What this typology means for our view of India is that India should be conceived as a “nascent” regional power. India does not fit this particular type perfectly, but it does mostly conform to specified dimensions. India continues to desire to play a positive leading role in the region. However, India’s centrality in the foreign policy of other states in the region is mixed. None of the states in the region can ignore India and this is driven by apprehension about India’s power. Some states like Nepal and Bhutan have politically and economically prioritized relations with India; however, Sri Lanka has not. Pakistan has India as a priority, but this is entirely driven by the perception of threat. India has sought to extend hegemony in the region and, with the assistance of transnational actors, sought to spread neo-liberalism and democracy promotion. But India’s promotion has not resulted in truly enhancing India’s power. To regulate the region, India has been an advocate for the development of regional institutions, primarily by way of SAARC. However, the ideology being advanced is one that is not specific to India and serves the interests of a global bloc of actors that benefit from the liberalization of economies. This will benefit particular classes and industries in India and will in turn contribute to India’s power, but it also undermines India as the region is opened to outside actors and the demands of the global
interests are empowered. In fact, India has been confronted by competing actors that are domestic and extra-regional. Domestically, the government confronts a range of domestic challenges. There are a variety of separatist movements and domestic terrorist threats that have hindered development. Economically, the Indian left has continued to challenge the reformist turn the state has taken and act to slow down liberalization. China has an influence with Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Pakistan. Moreover, some of the states have adopted policies with other regions and states as a means to avoid dependence on India.

This analysis of India was based on a typology that was rooted in the work of Miriam Prys. In Prys’ analysis, India is a detached regional power – as she defines it – which means that we arrive at different conclusions and the main reason has to do with the view of India’s focus on the region. In defining, India as detached, Prys is arguing that India is playing a global role and seeking to exercise power internationally, which is true. India has, since its founding, sought to be a global power; however, India has also sought to establish itself as a regional power as well. The problem is not that India is disengaged; rather India is a weak or less developed regional power. As discussed above, India has seen itself as a regional leader and it has sought to exercise hegemony over the region, but it does not have the power to do so effectively. But based on this new typology, Prys’ judgment is not unwarranted as India does have characteristics that it shares with a detached power. Both studies have reject simple formulations that overly rely on material capability and take for granted the complexity of power and the way in which power is ideological and power is the product of variables at different levels-of-analysis, which results in various forms of regional power.

The next step for this research is to continue to test the typology in application to other regions, which would then allow for cross-national comparisons of regional powers. This would
be particularly informative in explaining the variations we see in regional powers. It would permit us an ability to engage in comparisons in the rise and decline of regional powers. For example, even though a state may begin to decline in military and economic capability, it remains a regional hegemon. This might be accounted for by the fact that the regional hegemon’s ideological domination remains in place and has not yet been challenged by counter-hegemonic forces, even though other elements of its power has weakened. We can address how do regional powers contribute to the strength and stability of regional institutions? How do different regional powers contribute to the propensity for conflict in a region? With a better understanding of regional powers, we can chart their behavior over time and not only know what defines them, but also identify likely behaviors on a range of issues. The study of regions is necessary as the restructuring of global relations elicited by globalization fosters regional groups or as security threats emanate from particular regions in the world. But the study of regions needs to avoid assuming regional powers or providing simplified definitions that do not provide sufficient insight into complexity and variation.
References


