

THE INDIAN WAY: A POLYVALENT RISING POWER

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on India's behavior as a rising power, drawing attention to its relative peaceful rise, to explain why has India charted an emerging course very different from its Eurasian counterparts, Russia and China?

India has adopted a foreign policy that differs from the general expectations of orthodox International Relations (IR) theories- those focusing on power transitions and international institutions- that assume India eventually would pursue the modification of the current global order- a revisionist behavior- or perhaps would slightly adjust the institutional order, maintaining the status quo. The three-level analysis of India's foreign policy from 2001 to 2018, shows that India is taking different pathways depending on the level and realm of geopolitical scope. I argue that India is a polyvalent rising power, demonstrating that India pursued a reactive behavior at the local (South Asia) level, at the regional (Indian Ocean Region) level it was characterized by its engagement, while at the global level its role was active.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of India's rise and its foreign policy, as well as to offer a different perspective to IR studies on rising powers by showing India's relevance for the construction of a broader literature.

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Introduction

The current global order is characterized by the rise of new powers, shaping a multipolar system where countries from different regions play more active roles in the various scenarios where power is projected. Chief among these emerging powers are the so-called “BRIC” countries: Brazil, Russia, China, and India. This dissertation focuses on the last of these, India, and seeks to shed light on its relative peaceful rise: why has India charted an emerging course very different from its Eurasian counterparts, Russia and China?

International Relations (IR) literature provides several different theories that generate competing expectations of emerging power behavior. Power transition theories and structural realism generally expect that rising powers will eventually turn “revisionist” and attempt to modify the existing system to match their interests, which are limited and molded by the existing structure of the system.¹ Other IR theories, especially those that focus on international institutions and globalization, expect emerging powers to instead uphold the status-quo, perhaps only making minor adjustments to the institutional order, to secure a status of more authority and leadership within it.² Common to all of them is the assumption that a power’s rise will strongly adhere to a “unidirectional”³ pathway—revisionist, status-quo, revanchist.

India, widely described as an emerging power, has charted a course different from orthodox IR expectations. India shows no signs of making a bid to restructure the global order, as some predict of China⁴—nor has India become “revanchist” or spoiler of the order, like

¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 591–613; Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

² G. John Ikenberry, “Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism after America,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 2011.; Arthur Stein; Robert O. Keohane; David A. Baldwin.

³ Borrowing from “unidimensional” in Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon, and Steven Ward, “Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power? An Alternative Typology of Revisionist and Status-Quo States,” *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 04 (October 2019): 689–708.

⁴ Vandana Bhatia, *The US–India Nuclear Agreement: Accommodating the Anomaly?* (Lexington Books, 2017); Subhash Kapila, *China- India: Military Confrontation 21st Century Perspectives* (Patridge India, 2016).

Russia.⁵ Despite local and regional disputes, India is not perceived as a revisionist by its peers nor generally by analysts. Furthermore, India's rise appears to lack a single pathway; as I document in this thesis, its foreign policy differs depending on the interests and actor with whom it interacts. Sometimes, as in its relationship with Pakistan, it exhibits militarist behavior—but at the same time India often deploys “soft power,”⁶ particularly in its attempts to project regional and global images of leadership.

This thesis examines India's emergence as a global power, with attention paid to discontinuities in its foreign policy. I argue that India's foreign relations are best described as *polyvalent*: they differ by level or realm of geopolitical scope. Briefly, India is locally reactive; regionally multilateral; and globally proactive, particularly in terms of issue-specific leadership. Consistent in each geopolitical level, when taken in toto these foreign policy vectors appear inconsistent. India's polyvalence thus explains why certain aspects of its foreign policy—its local reactivity and global proactivity—appear to impede or contradict one another. Polyvalence also explains why India does not neatly fit into the existing categories often deployed in emerging powers literature —revisionist, revanchist, status-quo. Indeed, India's global rise points out, and challenges, the view in the literature that rising powers have single “univalent” trajectories, such as revisionism.

To make my argument, I examine India's foreign policy from 2001 to 2018, the key phase of India's global rise. In 2001, India was included on the list of emerging countries under the “BRICS” acronym, which recognized the changes that were taking place in the traditional Indian foreign policy. During this period Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi served as Prime Ministers, which implied shifts in India's strategies and goals, but

⁵ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 2019).

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power The Means to Success in World Politics* (United States: Perseus Books Group, 2004).

doubtless the bigger change has been carried out by the current PM Modi, and his project “Make in India.”

In terms of method, I use historical foreign policy analysis and interviews, and draw on my adaptation of Takenori Horimoto’s “India’s Foreign Policy Matrix.”⁷ The Horimoto matrix includes present objectives, measures and future objectives at each level, whereas my adaptation explores a specific period and focuses more on main drivers of India’s foreign policy and its partners. In order to build a fairly comprehensive empirical picture, I have included interviews with academics and experts on Indian foreign policy, which were conducted online following a semi-structured format. The results of the interviews were mainly fueled by journal articles, specialized news, and reports. Qualitative and quantitative evidence are assessed to determine great power relations and their interactions.

I have chosen the matrix to organize my empirical because it allows me to isolate the regional, local, and global aspects of India’s foreign policy, demonstrates how each level is consistent but taken together amount to discontinuity.

My thesis primarily aims to contribute to the understanding of India’s rise and its foreign policy at the local, regional, and global levels. Second, it aims to contribute to the IR studies on rising powers by showing India’s relevance for the construction of a broader literature on this topic. The use foreign policy analysis to develop a nuanced picture of India’s foreign policy challenges IR orthodox literature on rising powers and raises some questions about the polyvalence vs. unidimensionality of rising powers, and the pertinence of a grand strategy or foreign policy coherence. If India is deeply polyvalent, perhaps China and Russia are as well—and thus simple descriptors like “revisionist” or “revanchist” (or “status-quo”) conceal more than they reveal. The goal of this work is not to predict changes in Indian Foreign Policy after

⁷ Takenori Horimoto, “Explaining India’s Foreign Policy: From Dream to Realization of Major Power,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 17, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 463–96.

2018, assuming that future power transitions may occur under different circumstances in a context of globalization and connectivity. However, the findings from the analysis of India's case at present are useful because they may provide a better understanding of the foreign policy of emerging powers, especially how they may interact with other states differently at different levels.

The thesis proceeds in three more sections. In the first, I examine competing theories of power transition, drawing primarily on structural realism and neoliberal institutionalism. I show the relevance of these theories in terms of typologies of rising powers, revisionist and status quo, and note how existing typologies have difficulty explaining seemingly inconsistent emerging power cases, such as India. The second chapter narrows down to the case of India and explores why its rise does not totally fit the theoretical predictions examined in chapter one. It deploys the tripartite geopolitical division mentioned above to structure an overview of India's foreign policy: in South Asia, the Indian Ocean Region, and then globally. I identify India's allies, challenges and main characteristics at each level. Each of these spheres has a significant impact on India's overall international status because they shape the ways in which other actors perceive it, determining their interactions. Importantly, India acts differently in each, contributing to an overall sense that its emergence is inconsistent or without coherent, grand strategic direction. In the last part, I conclude that India is a polyvalent rising power rather than as simply status quo, which pursues different objectives at each level showing its discontinuous foreign policy.

Chapter 1: theoretical framework

International Relations scholarship conventionally divides rising powers into two categories: revisionist and status-quo. Status-quo powers are those that enjoy growth in terms of economic and geopolitical power, perhaps taking advantage of changes in technology, yet do not seek to fundamentally change the existing set of rules, institutions, and distributions of power and ideas that make up an international system, because this configuration of the system serves their interests. Other powers have conversely sought to change the system to reflect their interests, often launching or being implicated in “hegemonic wars” that restructure international politics.⁸ Hence, some power transitions have led to the breakdown of the old order and the establishment of a new one, while others have resulted in limited adjustments.⁹ The established structure of the international system shapes the behavior of all actors, by rewarding or punishing them, whether or not their behavior coincides with the interest of the most powerful actor.¹⁰

This thesis argues that the existing IR literature on rising powers does not adequately describe India’s foreign policy. Below I will review the power transition literature to identify the main discrepancies.

1.1 Typology of rising powers

Although India at first glance appears to fit the “status-quo” label better than the “revisionist” one, the former category leaves exactly how India is rising “underdetermined”—i.e., it does not tell us how India is emerging under a general status-quo or non-revisionist stance. As I show below, both categories—revisionist and status-quo—assume “unidimensional”¹¹ accounts of emerging powers which do not fit the India case.

⁸ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1981).

⁹ G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008): 23–37; Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War”; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap*.

¹⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 9.

¹¹ Cooley, Nexon, and Ward, “Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power?”

Revisionist power

According to Ikenberry, a powerful state can create and enforce the rules and institutions of a stable global order to pursue its interests, but when changes appear in the distribution of power, new challengers arise—rising or emerging powers. Rising states generally want to translate their newly acquired power into greater authority in the global system so that its rules and institutions are in accordance with their own interests.¹² While some states do this only at the margins—status-quo powers (described below)—revisionist powers are those emerging states that seek to fundamentally change the distribution of goods (territory, status, markets, expansion of ideology, and the creation or change of international law and institutions).¹³ Staying in place is not the primary goal of revisionist states: they want to increase, not just preserve, their core values, and to improve their position in the system by gaining relative to others.¹⁴ As Steven Ward summarizes, “revisionism refers to an attitude of dissatisfaction with and corresponding desire to change the status quo.”¹⁵

Some accounts have sought to add nuance to this original definition. Goddard, for example, argues that the position of a state in the existing institutional order shapes its revisionist strategies: institutions do not merely restrain revisionists or force them to conform to the status quo, but can provide resources and opportunities to enable challenges to the international order, affecting how a revisionist will attempt to transform the existing institutional order.¹⁶ Revisionist states build the institutional order strategically, seeking power and influence through their ties with other states, but over time, states can find themselves in

¹² Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West,” 25.

¹³ Jason W. Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 14.

¹⁴ Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 87.

¹⁵ Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 11.

¹⁶ Stacie E. Goddard, “Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order,” *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018): 764, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000206>.

complex networks, altering the costs and benefits of their strategies, making certain forms of revisionism more attractive than others.¹⁷

Whereas Goddard examines revisionists' institutional contexts, Cooley, Nexon and Ward enlarge the revisionist state taxonomy, criticizing how previous attempts assessed revisionism according to "unidimensional" measures. They identifying four ideal typical orientations: status-quo actors are satisfied with both the greater order and the distribution of power; reformist powers express satisfaction with the current distribution of power but seek to change other elements of order; positionalist actors express satisfaction with international order but aim to shift the distribution of power; and revolutionary ones aim to revise both international order and the distribution of capabilities.¹⁸

Status-quo power

Ikenberry has theorized status-quo powers at length, explaining them in the context of postwar settlements created by great powers to restrain other powers and themselves, briefly noted above.¹⁹ In the post-Cold War context, Ikenberry argues that leading states—the United States and its allies—used institutions to extend and limit their power by 'locking in' other states into desired policy orientations.²⁰ Secondary states have incentives to accept this bargain because they are also looking for returns to power and, in future they might be able to modify the institutional bargain to reflect power changes.²¹ This creates an institutional logic under

¹⁷ Goddard, 764.

¹⁸ Cooley, Nexon, and Ward, "Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power?"

¹⁹ G. John Ikenberry, "Reflections on After Victory," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21 (2019): 5–19.

²⁰ Ikenberry, 8.

²¹ Therefore disparities of power seem to provide incentives on institutional bargains, and for a powerful state to offer restrictions on its power can be seen as a source of power because it reduces the anger and resentment caused by the use of coercive power. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2000); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Ikenberry, "Reflections on After Victory."

which most powers have strong incentives to support the status-quo, rather than seek to revise it, including China.²²

Other scholars expand this logic. For Davidson, status quo powers seek to maintain the distribution of goods such as territory, status, markets, expansion of ideology, and international law and institutions, in the international system.²³ However, according to Morgenthau, minor adjustments which leave intact the relative power positions of the nations concerned are fully compatible with a status-quo policy.²⁴ Schweller argues that status-quo states can signal their intentions by spending on defense regardless of whether the offense or defense is dominant.²⁵ Last, Cooley, Nexon and Ward argue that status-quo states are satisfied with the distribution of power and the broader international order. But because they are resistant to change, this makes them potentially more conflict-prone in the face of more reformist, positionalist, or revolutionary actors.²⁶

Despite the richness of the typology of powers given above, most accounts focus on slotting emerging powers into one category or another—status-quo, revisionist—and thereby ascribing a consistent grant strategic intention to the state in question (i.e., it seeks to revise the system, or is satisfied with it). It is important to consider that states have a variety of goals, and these can be at odds with one another or defy easy categorization. For instance, if an extreme revisionist state prefers to maintain its own borders, and therefore does not seek total revision of the status quo, then revisionist states often have revisionist goals directed at one part of the status quo, but seek to maintain the status quo in another part. Consequently, Davidson

²² Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West."

²³ Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States*, 14.

²⁴ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th ed. (McGraw-Hill Education, 2005).

²⁵ If defense dominates, a status-quo state needs only to invest in the dominant defensive weapons, and when offense dominance prevails a status-quo state could continue to focus on defensive weapons thus sending a clear and costly signal to their neighbors. Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 1996): 103.

²⁶ Cooley, Nexon, and Ward, "Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power?," 701.

categorizes states as revisionist if revisionist goals are the primary focus of their foreign policy.²⁷

This thesis finds that India's rise fits better with accounts that distinguish competing policy goals and issue areas, such as Davidson's treatment, and Cooley, Nexon, and Ward's typology. Davidson suggests that some values influence the way in which rising powers decide to be revisionist or status quo; if a state rejects a systemic ideology, then it is revisionist; if it seeks to maintain the distribution of ideology in the international system, then it is status-quo oriented with regard to ideology.²⁸ The U.S.-led order has been more liberal than imperial, with rules and institutions rooted in the evolving global forces of democracy and capitalism, where a wide range of participants and stakeholders participate.²⁹ In the last two decades, India has instrumentalized democracy promotion and capitalism as its common interest with western countries, reinforcing its image as an ally of the status-quo rather than a revisionist rising power.³⁰ Consequently, India seems to be status-quo oriented with regard to ideology at the global level, whereas at the local and regional levels it seeks to have an order more aligned to its own interests.

Importantly, India's foreign policy is marked by very different qualities in distinct geopolitical levels—its polyvalence—making it hard to classify as revisionist, status-quo, positionalist, reformist, and so on. Below, I review studies of India's foreign policy since its independence to better contextualize India's recent emergence, drawing attention to those changes that have impacted its interactions with the world and shaped its responses to international challenges.

²⁷ Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States*, 15.

²⁸ Davidson, 13.

²⁹ Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," 28.

³⁰ Deepshikha Shahi, "India in the Emerging World Order a Status Quo Power or a Revisionist Force?," Shifting Power Working Paper Series (Transnational Institute's TNI, 2014).

1.2 India's foreign policy

Overall, India's foreign policy is characterized as pragmatic. This section describes the main elements that had influenced the consolidation of India's rise, pointing out not only the domestic factors, but also India's response to the external conditions.

India's foreign policy history shows that certain values generally perceived as idealist have been an important characteristic of the Indian approach since the first decades after its independence in 1947. Ganguly and Pardesi argue that India's policymakers chose, quite deliberately, to ignore systemic constraints and pursue an explicitly ideational foreign policy, with (in their view) disastrous consequences.³¹ According to their account, after India's independence the United States had few cultural, strategic or economic links with the nascent nation, and the Soviet Union did not place any strategic significance on India. Therefore, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States demonstrated any great interest in India, which worked to India's advantage, giving it considerable room for maneuver. However, at a regional level, the distribution of power placed India at a disadvantage, because China posed a significant security threat.³²

According to Arndt, British rule impacted the development of India's foreign policy, which is evidenced by: the strength of the national movement for freedom that turned India to support independent movements internationally, the racial inequality led to India's emphasis on racial equality in its foreign policy, and India's decision to remain as a member of the Commonwealth. A fourth impact was that British rule, unintendedly, encouraged the memory of India's historical and civilizational achievements, which always appear in its foreign policy discourses as India's 'glorious' past. Finally, the fact of having been the losing party for almost two hundred years, with direct consequences for regional multilateralism and the limited scope

³¹ Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy," *India Review* 8, no. 1 (February 10, 2009): 4.

³² Ganguly and Pardesi, 5.

of India's commitment.³³ Thus, it is possible to see this impact in India's role in multilateral institutions and particularly in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and as a leader of the nonaligned movement it also made a significant contribution toward the process of decolonization.³⁴

With India's military defeat by China in 1962, the Indian government began a review of India's security policies and practices, adopting a program of military modernization and its foreign policy behavior increasingly assumed a more realist orientation.³⁵ Under Indira Gandhi, India's foreign policy sought to sustain two competing visions of world order: on the one hand, India still supported the cause of decolonization and continued to lead the charge on behalf of the weaker states in the international system. On the other hand, India accepted the importance of defense preparedness and increasingly overcame its reservations about the use of force in international politics.³⁶

After the Cold War, Delhi's intention to elevate its stature among developing countries declined as India lost its de facto status as a spokesman for their interests, becoming less active in international affairs, and focusing more on the domestic economy.³⁷ Lunev and Shavlay argue that Indian diplomacy has since become more spot-oriented, focusing on the development of relations primarily with specific countries and regions, rather than as an overall strategy.³⁸

In addition, until the 1990s, India's foreign policy was characterized by its establishment of mainly bilateral relations. Bilateralism in India is a consequence of the Panchsheel³⁹ and India's policy of nonalignment, implemented in order to safeguard India's sovereignty by

³³ Michael Arndt, "India's Cognitive Prior: Ideas, Norms, and the Evolution of India's Foreign Policy," in *India's Foreign Policy and Regional Multilateralism*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 31.

³⁴ Ganguly and Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy," 6.

³⁵ Ganguly and Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy."

³⁶ Ganguly and Pardesi, 9.

³⁷ Sergey Lunev and Ellina Shavlay, "Russia and India in the Indo-Pacific," *Asian Politics & Policy* 10, no. 4 (2018): 7.

³⁸ Lunev and Shavlay, "Russia and India in the Indo-Pacific."

³⁹ This term refers to the five principles of peaceful co-existence: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

allowing it to exclusively focus on its own priorities without third-party intervention or concessions.⁴⁰ This characteristic of India's foreign policy explains why India's decision makers claim regional structures should emerge from common interests, such as economy and security, and then decide whether a political dimension is needed or not in the dialogue.⁴¹ Therefore, the preference for the bilateralism or "minilateralism" over formal multilateralism has allowed India to have relations based on its interests, rather than through fixed or constraining institutionalized structures.

Indian foreign policy cannot be isolated from domestic politics. According to Horimoto, India's diplomatic elites have tended to resist the rise of their own country, leading to an underestimation of India's status and capabilities. This makes it difficult to draw comparisons with other rising powers, as the geopolitical conditions that drive Indian strategic thinking throughout the Cold War is *sui generis* in nature. While China adopted Deng Xiaoping's tenets and Japan the Yoshida Doctrine, India selectively sought help from both the United States and the Soviet Union at different times of the confrontation.⁴²

Under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (1991-1996), India reoriented toward the United States to avoid the nonproliferation issue, which overshadowed other interests. At the time, the United States had few interests of a global nature in India outside of nonproliferation, and at a regional level American investment in and trade with India was negligible.⁴³ In addition, the structure of the international system changed in the 1990s and to a large extent India's policymakers responded to those changes in the global order, enabling India to emerge as a potential great power despite challenges such as the country's economic growth rate, energy

⁴⁰ Arndt, "India's Cognitive Prior: Ideas, Norms, and the Evolution of India's Foreign Policy," 36.

⁴¹ Soraya Caro and Kelly Arévalo, "Transformaciones de La Política Exterior India y Su Incidencia En Las Relaciones Con América Latina," in *Nuevo Multilateralismo En América Latina: Concepciones y Actores En Pugna* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2016), 183.

⁴² Horimoto, "Explaining India's Foreign Policy," 472.

⁴³ Ganguly and Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy," 13.

security, and internal security problems within the framework of its democratic and secular institutions.⁴⁴

However, in the early 2010s, India's foreign policy seemed to be directionless. Some detected the causes for this lack of direction in the conduct of the Congress Party that had been in power since 2004, while others saw it as a function of politics, i.e., in the ideas and behavior of the foreign and security policy-making elite.⁴⁵ However, with Manmohan Singh in power, India adopted an engagement strategy with all major powers, emphasizing commercial cooperation, physical and political links with neighboring regions, and energy, security, and defense agreements.⁴⁶ For instance, Sino-Indian relations went into a phase of trust-building (despite intermittent setbacks on the disputed border); and India made movements on nonproliferation, signing the Civil Nuclear Agreement with the United States, finalized in 2008.⁴⁷

When Modi came to office in 2014, India reinforced its commitment to multialignment⁴⁸ through deeper security cooperation with the United States, as well as greater American investment in fixed and human capital in India, and a constructive and frank engagement with China.⁴⁹ Modi has shown greater interest in multilateral forums such as BRICS, G-20, EAS, and the United Nations. These interests do not so much depart from earlier versions of Indian foreign policy but build upon and show stronger commitment to a normative agenda, for example by leading on global issues such as climate change and democracy promotion.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ganguly and Pardesi, 18.

⁴⁵ Ian Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi," *The Round Table* 105, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 275.

⁴⁶ Hall, 276.

⁴⁷ Sarah Graham, "Manmohan Singh's Legacy (Part 2): Foreign Policy," May 19, 2014, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/manmohan-singhs-legacy-part-2-foreign-policy>.

⁴⁸ This term refers to the formation of several alliances, not necessarily military, to fulfil national interests ranging from the more tangible security and development related ones to the more intangible ideational ones. Arpita Anant, "What Is the Difference between Multilateralism and Multi-Alignment, and What India Needs to Follow in International Relations?," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (blog), February 28, 2020.

⁴⁹ Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi," 280.

⁵⁰ Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi."

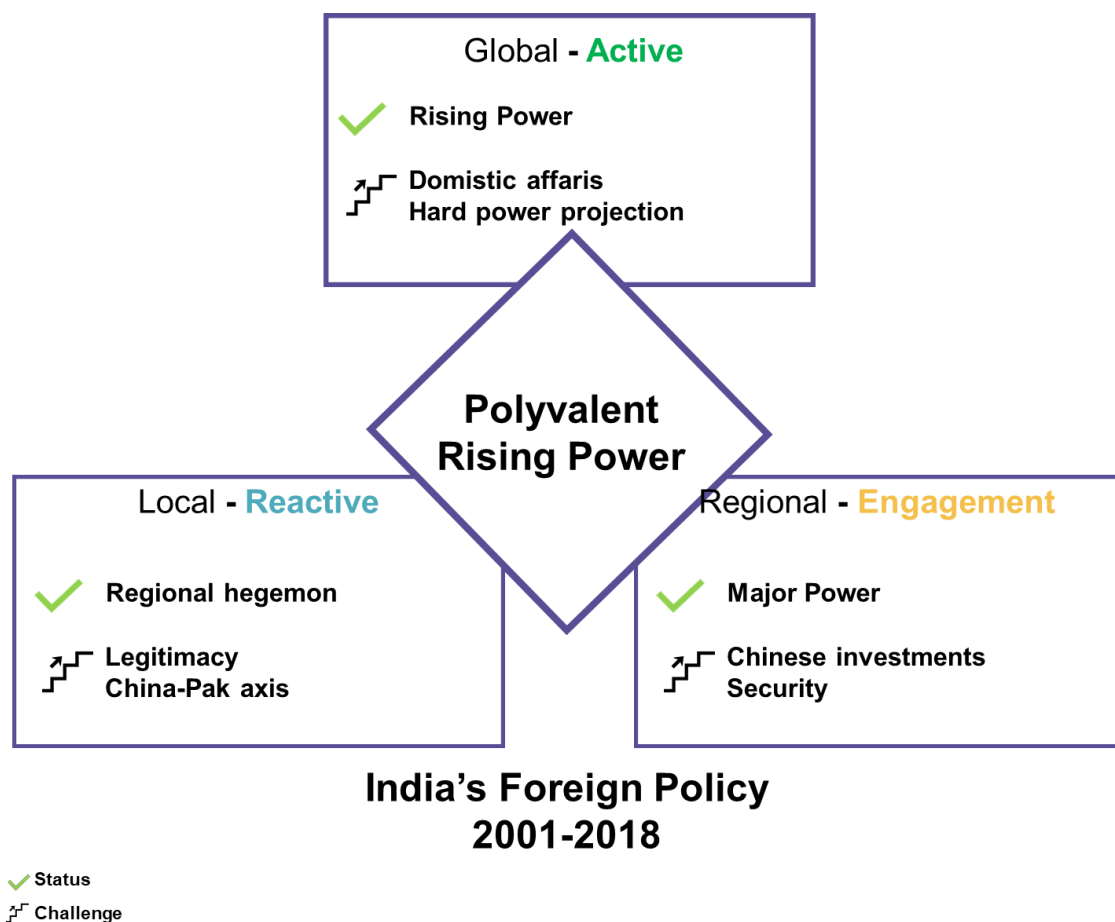
All in all, Indian foreign policy is not a single or uniform, and shows few signs of having an overall organizing principle or grand strategy.⁵¹ Scholars generally characterize Indian foreign policy as pragmatic. Indeed, it is difficult to grasp the substance of India's foreign policy because India differently implements its policies depending upon circumstances and timings at the local, regional, and global level, distinctions which I examine in the next chapter.

⁵¹ Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies*, August 28, 2017, 27–57.

Chapter 2: Indian foreign policy 2001-2018

In order to establish a clear view of India's foreign policy between 2001 to 2018, I have adapted Takenori Horimoto's "India's Foreign Policy Matrix".⁵² This matrix considers three different levels: the local (South Asia), the regional (Indian Ocean region), and the global. This structure will help us to understand the conditions that led India to rise despite being an actor that is not following a single path, by offering a more segregated analysis of the role played by India in each level, that poses different interactions and challenges.

The importance of this three-level analysis lies in the degree of details that can be analyzed from the end of the 1990s, when India began rediscovering its own traditional geopolitical thinking, leading India to advance its own interests and establish strategic partnerships.



⁵² Horimoto, "Explaining India's Foreign Policy."

2.1 Local level: reactive

I characterize India's foreign policy at the local level as reactive. This means India fails to propose initiatives when it has the resources and capabilities to do so and responds to external pressures without following an overall plan or pattern. Put simply, the actor reacts to the situation around it rather than pursuing a proactive agenda.

This level geographically refers to the South Asian subcontinent, India's immediate neighborhood: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. There, India is a natural regional leader due to its size, economic strength, military capacity and geographical location, sharing borders with all South Asian countries and with direct access to the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.

Even though South Asia is characterized by border tensions, lack of integration and instability, India holds a position of regional power. This status reflects not only India's geographical location, but also a shared history and the projection of Indian soft power, which, intended or not, is spread all over the subcontinent and into the broader region.⁵³ For example, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations has scholarships for students from SAARC countries, and there are special programs for Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. This is one of the key differences and advantages of the Indian influence in the region, whereas the presence of China in South Asia is something that has been built and cultivated, it is not a genuine relation.⁵⁴

Legitimacy and acceptance by its neighboring countries have been local challenges for India. The long history of wars, tensions, and mistrust between Pakistan and India, particularly regarding Kashmir, has prevented the entire region from developing truly positive relations.⁵⁵

⁵³ Patryk Kugiel, "India's Soft Power in South Asia," *International Studies* 49, no. 3–4 (July 1, 2012): 365.

⁵⁴ Zhang Yunling, "Return of China's Regional Concept and Construction of a New Order," in *Looking for A Road: China Debates Its and the World's Future* (Social Science Academic Press, 2017).

⁵⁵ Jean-Luc Racine, "Post-Post-Colonial India: From Regional Power to Global Player," *Politique Étrangère* 73 (2008): 67.

Most governments in South Asia do not fully accept the idea of India as a regional power, because of its uncompromising attitude.⁵⁶ For instance the water sharing with Bangladesh remains unresolved as much as it is trade and transit for Nepal and Bhutan; thus India's condescending attitude aims to punish more than to offer to help its neighbors.⁵⁷ Therefore, in South Asia there is an impression that India avoids commitment and does not lead when collective interests require it.

India's diversity is sometimes translated into vulnerability as the source of internal divisions in terms of religion, ethnicity and ideology, where common history and culture are not enough to connect different communities. According to Khan, this is a recurrent issue brought up by Indian neighbors when Indian local leadership is discussed, doubting about India's capacity to provide public goods such as regional security and peace, which impede the emergence of a cooperative order in South Asia.⁵⁸ As a consequence, Khan argues, before the 1990s South Asia failed to accomplish any sort of regional integration, positioning India as competitor rather than a mentor.

Based on the foregoing, it is possible to argue that India has legitimacy problems at the local level, and this has hindered integration and cooperation in South Asia. According to Neumann, being recognized as a power means that decision makers in other polities will take what they see as the power's interests into consideration, and other powers will recognize as rightful its interests.⁵⁹ In the first decades of India's independence, Indian foreign policy did not use India's power to build cooperation or the support of other South Asian countries, thus losing it the ability to influence and lead. In that period, India engaged in wars with Pakistan (1965-

⁵⁶ Badrul Khan, "India and the Making of a Hegemon," *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2008): 32.

⁵⁷ Khan, 33.

⁵⁸ Khan, 34.

⁵⁹ Iver B. Neumann, "Status Is Cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians Seek Great- Power Status," in *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88.

1971-1984-1999), and was involved in the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) and the Sri Lankan Civil War (1987), just to mention few examples.

One of the main characteristics of and changes in Indian foreign policy in the 2000s at this level, is that Indian policy-makers realized the importance of India's neighborhood in the process of consolidation as emerging power. In this way, India started to establish initiatives to solve some tensions with its neighbors, a process that has become more active after Modi's election in 2014. However, Jaiswal argues that India's foreign policy priority is the great powers and not its neighbors. Although India says its neighbors are important, it focuses more on the United States and other powers.⁶⁰ For instance, during Modi's first year as Prime Minister, he invited South Asian leaders to his oath-taking ceremony, which was unprecedented.⁶¹ But in successive months Modi acted quickly to address differences with the United States and he sought deeper economic ties with Beijing.⁶² In hindsight, the former, local activity appears much less significant—a matter of public relations or “cheap talk”—in light of the more substantive global initiatives.

In this way, India has reinforced its image as a reactive actor in the subcontinent. India's behavior reinforces the perspective of South Asian countries regarding India's decision to focusing again on its neighborhood, but primarily as a response to China's regional influence and the growing number of Chinese projects in South Asia, rather than a more cooperative or inclusive policy. China's close relations with Pakistan have exacerbated India–Pakistan tensions—for example, for India, China is becoming less inhibited about sensitive areas of strategic support to Pakistan, such as the development of infrastructure projects in Kashmir.⁶³

⁶⁰ Pranod Jaiswal, Interview, March 13, 2020.

⁶¹ “Can India's Modi Integrate South Asia?,” *BBC News*, May 29, 2014, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27572992>.

⁶² William J. Burns Mohan Milan Vaishnav, C. Raja, “Modi's First Year,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/05/26/modi-s-first-year-pub-60145>.

⁶³ Andrew Small, “The Sino-Pakistani Axis: Asia's ‘little Understood’ Relationship,” *DW.COM*, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-sino-pakistani-axis-asias-little-understood-relationship/a-18194448>.

As a consequence, India has intensified alliances with other nearby countries, such as Japan, as will be discussed further in regional level.

In addition, India and the United States have sought to contain China. Jaiswal argues that the United States is an opportunistic actor in South Asia because in the past it had strong relations with Pakistan, which has been the second recipient of aid from the US government in South Asia. With the growth of China, America's focus has shifted towards India.⁶⁴ However, Jaiswal argues engagement between United States and India is strategic but not necessarily long-lasting, because India also has good relations with Russia, which ends up creating more tensions with its first ally. Hence, both America and India's foreign policies in South Asia seems to be reactive, and from 2001 to 2018 one of the common drivers in both has been China. For Madan, each of these two countries employs a mixed approach to engagement with China, recognizing the importance of relations with China but also maintaining a strong Indo-US partnership, avoiding provoking Beijing or needing to choose between the other and China.⁶⁵

Another driver of the dynamics in South Asia is the imbalance of power between India and Pakistan, where the first holds a better position in terms of power capabilities. India's military expenditure increased from US\$30130 million in 2001 to US\$66578 million in 2018, while Pakistan's military expenditure was US\$5916 million in 2001 and reaches US\$12686 million in 2018,⁶⁶ which represents just 19% of India's expenditure. This condition makes Pakistan's balancing efforts more active than those of India. Thus, Pakistan has been pursuing a policy that would ensure its existence vis-a- vis India, historically inviting foreign powers to support its regional balancing strategies, leading in the 1970s and 1980s to a regional alignment in which Saudi Arabia, China and Pakistan with some support from the United States were on one side, while the Soviet Union/Russia, India, Arab countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Libya and

⁶⁴ Jaiswal, Interview.

⁶⁵ Tanvi Madan, "The U.S.-India Relationship and China," n.d., 14.

⁶⁶ "TRADING ECONOMICS | 20 Million INDICATORS FROM 196 COUNTRIES," accessed June 4, 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/>.

Syria were on the other.⁶⁷ Hence, I argue that in South Asia, India and Pakistan remain constrained, but Indian is in a better positions leading to a relationship that lacks trust.

This pattern of distrust is similarly repeated with the other countries surrounding India, especially with those whose borders still create tensions with New Delhi. India-Nepal relations are mainly determined by problems related to crime and illegal traffic across their open border; ironically, when India calls to seal the border, Nepal shows its disagreement and when Nepali leaders raise their voice to control the border, India terms Nepalese concerns as anti-Indian.⁶⁸

The creation of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC⁶⁹) in 1985 represented a diplomatic breakthrough in South Asia, being the first initiative aiming to boost regional cooperation. SAARC is guided by the assumption that cooperation in “low politics” areas (economic, social and technical) will leads to cooperation in political issues.⁷⁰ Thus, the perception of SAARC is divided: to some extent SAARC’s activity is mostly about speeches on key issues, such as peace and development in the region, whereas it also serves as the main regional forum where neighborhood problems can be solved and in which regional policymakers and experts meet regularly. The disappointing profile of SAARC is explained by these factors:⁷¹ first, SAARC lacks the capacity to hold consultations on bilateral political disputes, as established at its foundation. Second, despite de creation of the Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) and the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), intra-regional trade comprises only around 5% of South Asia’s total trade; and third, SAARC is home to around one-fifth of the world’s population and 40% of the world’s poor.

⁶⁷ SHS Soherwordi and Fazal Wahid, “Balance of Power in South Asia: The Politics of Nuclear Deterrence between Pakistan and India,” *JOURNAL OF SECURITY & STRATEGIC ANALYSES*, no. 2 (2016): 18.

⁶⁸ Deeptima Shukla, “INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 67, no. 2 (2006): 360.

⁶⁹ SAARC Member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Observer status countries: China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and United States

⁷⁰ SUJIT LAHIRY, “India’s Relationship With Its South Asian Neighbours: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS,” *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 17, no. 4 (2013): 73.

⁷¹ Muhammad Daim Fazil, “The Irrelevance of SAARC,” *South Asian Voices*, 2016, <https://southasianvoices.org/the-irrelevance-of-saarc/>.

India's dominance of SAARC is striking. India accounts for 75% of SAARC's population and nearly 80% of its collective GDP, and holds an overwhelming military power advantage over all other SAARC members, even combined. Nepal and Bhutan, landlocked countries, depend on India for transit to the outside world. Bangladesh has access to international seas but is surrounded by India on all sides.⁷² The asymmetry of power between India and its neighboring countries inhibit both the normalization of relations between them and the success of SAARC as a cooperation- and integration-strengthening mechanism in South Asia.

Security concerns and fear of dominance by India were present at the time of SAARC's establishment but were excluded from the SAARC framework in order to win agreement from India and Pakistan. The organization was thus incapable of addressing issues that were urgent and confined itself to trade and economic cooperation, which was not the immediate priority.⁷³ These structural characteristics and the distant relationships built by the member states have contributed to modest achievements over the years. According to the World Bank, South Asian intraregional trade is less than 5% of total trade, as noted above, having grown from approximately 3% in 1990, which makes it the least integrated region in the world.⁷⁴ The agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and several bilateral agreements have therefore not been enough to boost trade connectivity, remaining below what is necessary to unlock the region's potential for integration and prosperity.⁷⁵

All in all, SAARC is the only institution that groups all South Asian countries, and it seems to be their main tool to tackle common problems. Then, it is possible to argue that

⁷² Kishore C. Dash, "The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in South Asia" (Asian Development Bank, 2010), 15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2760724?origin=crossref>.

⁷³ Dash, "The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in South Asia."

⁷⁴ "The Potential of Intra-Regional Trade for South Asia," Text/HTML, World Bank, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/05/24/the-potential-of-intra-regional-trade-for-south-asia>.

⁷⁵ "Intra-Regional Trade in South Asia" (The Asia Foundation, n.d.).

the success of SAARC relies on India's approach to its neighbors and its willingness to define a proactive agenda to promote cooperation at the local level.

2.2 Regional level: engagement

The regional level in this analysis is equivalent to the Indian Ocean Region. It is bounded by East Africa, India, Indochina and Australia, and the Southern Ocean, including the straits of Malacca. The countries bordering this area are Australia, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Somalia, Tanzania, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Nevertheless, given the importance of the Indian Ocean Region for international trade, this is a zone where extra-regional actors have interests, for example Japan and United States.

Ambiguities and divergences between India's self-perception and others' perception arise at the same time with India's greater presence at the regional level, since a rising India will aspire to become the regional hegemon of South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and an extra-regional power in the Middle East, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.⁷⁶ Therefore, India's regional positioning is, for Delhi, part of the benefits of its geographical location, while for others it represents a potential threat. At the same time, China is increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean and western Pacific, which increases the need for regional actors to take a strong leadership role in the Indian Ocean Region.

In 1992 the Prime Minister Narasimha Rao announced the "Look East" policy, which sought to establish strategic relations with Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region, as part of India's process of economic liberalization. The "Look East" policy was initially motivated by economic interests, but it soon acquired strategic dimensions, too. India forged partnerships with several countries in the region that rested on three major pillars: elaborate

⁷⁶ David Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power," *India Review* 8, no. 2 (June 2009): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736480902901038>.

institutional mechanisms; economic interests including infrastructure development and connectivity; and common strategic interests.⁷⁷

Look East helped India not only to pursue economic modernization and integration, but also gain status as a regional power by building strong commercial, cultural, and military ties with countries in Southeast Asia. With the implementation of this policy, India's trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) rose from US\$2.4 billion in 1990 to US\$23 billion in 2005; trade with East Asia similarly increased from US\$8 billion in 1990 to US\$67.6 billion in 2005, which accounts for nearly 30% of India's external trade.⁷⁸ This policy was enacted from Rao in 1991 until Manmohan Singh in 2014.

The "Look East" policy boosted India's integration into its extended neighborhood, giving India a sectoral Dialogue Partner⁷⁹ status in ASEAN, which lately evolved to advisory status in ASEAN and member of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, and more recently member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and summit-level partner in ASEAN (as China and Japan). India has engaged with ASEAN by signing economic cooperation agreements with its different members:⁸⁰ in 2003 India and ASEAN signed an agreement to eliminate tariff barriers among all members and eventually establish a free trade area in goods, services and investment, followed by a final agreement on trade in goods signed in 2009 and another on services and investments in 2015. Bilateral agreements were also signed with Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, aiming at deepening economic integration with the region. In the context of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA), during pre-AIFTA, India's total

⁷⁷ K. V. Kesavan, "India's 'Act East' Policy and Regional Cooperation," ORF, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375/>.

⁷⁸ "India's Look East Policy," *The Economic Times*, 2007, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/view-point/indias-look-east-policy/articleshow/1593648.cms>.

⁷⁹ ASEAN has a system of relationships would range from regular cooperation consultations with a sectoral Dialogue Partner to full Dialogue Partner or strategic partner with a correspondingly greater scope of cooperation and level of engagement amongst government officials. The latter partnership is the most comprehensive and includes security cooperation. Hidetoshi Nishimura, "Snapshots of the ASEAN Story: ASEAN's Strategic Policy Needs and Dialogue Partners' Contributions" (ASEAN, n.d.).

⁸⁰ Preety Bhogal, "India-ASEAN Economic Relations: Examining Future Possibilities," ORF, 2005, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-asean-economic-relations-examining-future-possibilities/>.

merchandise trade with ASEAN economies has increased from USD\$8 billion in 2001 to US\$42 billion in 2009, during post-AIFTA, India's total merchandise trade with ASEAN economies has increased from USD\$53 billion in 2010 to USD\$93 billion in 2018.⁸¹

Under this scenario, India's geographical location makes the formulation of its maritime strategy a sensitive issue for its national security and its integration strategies. In recent years, India's maritime strategy has gained more attention from policymakers, which is explained by three factors:⁸² the first one is the international shift from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus and the repositioning of global economic and military power. The second is the change in India's definitions of security and threat, since India's maritime security environment has become more complex and unpredictable with the expansion of a variety of 'non-traditional' threats. The third is a national outlook towards the seas and the maritime domain, and a clearer recognition that maritime security is a vital element of national progress and international engagement.

India is at the natural junction of one of the busiest international shipping lanes of the world, Bab el-Mandab and the Strait of Hormuz, and India is also close to the Strait of Malacca. Another strategic maritime imperative is energy security (petroleum and petroleum-products) considering that almost 1,000 million tonnes of oil passes close to the Indian shores annually, not only for its own market, but also for oil-intensive economies such as United States, China and Japan.⁸³ Furthermore, the India's Exclusive Economic Zone⁸⁴ (EEZ) has abundant living

⁸¹ IANS, "India-Asean Bilateral Trade May Double by 2025 to \$300 Billion: Study," *Business Standard India*, November 12, 2019, https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-asean-bilateral-trade-may-double-by-2025-to-300-billion-study-119111200547_1.html.

⁸² Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 2015, http://indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf.

⁸³ "The Admiral Ak Chatterjee Memorial Lecture by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/1866/>.

⁸⁴ According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, this is the zone over which a state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources. It covers from the baseline out to 200 nautical miles from its coast.

and non-living resources, mainly under-sea mineral resources, where India has important activities of exploration and production.⁸⁵

According to Horimoto, at the regional level it is important for India to strengthen its alliance with Japan because the two governments have become mutually indispensable partners: for Japan, to cope with the rise of China, to say the least of utilizing economic opportunities; and for India to buy time as it becomes a major power.⁸⁶ The mutual interest between India and Japan explains why during the 21st Century, relations between New Delhi and Tokyo have gained momentum through an agenda focused mainly on connectivity and security. Indeed, India-Japan security cooperation is defined by the growing operational depth and geographical latitude of bilateral and even trilateral exercises with the United States; also, their maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific lays the foundation for future strategic information sharing.⁸⁷

According to Basu, a central issue in the alliance between Japan and India is their common interest in securing sea lines of communication, seen as a regional public good. Japan supports India's naval capabilities in relation to China, given Japan's interest in avoiding any potential Chinese interference in the sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean; the Japanese economy is heavily dependent on oil imports from the Middle East.⁸⁸

Consequently, for India are important the strong ties with United States and Japan, to reach India's purpose to become a regional power in this zone and reinforce a dominant position. Japan and United States can support India's regional aspirations while dealing with China's influence, a factor that seems unlikely to disappear in the Indo-Pacific region in the coming years, especially with the growing number of infrastructure investments related the BRI

⁸⁵ "The Admiral Ak Chatterjee Memorial Lecture by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee."

⁸⁶ Horimoto, "Explaining India's Foreign Policy," 482.

⁸⁷ Titli Basu, "Where India Fits in Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy," *The Japan Times*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/01/21/commentary/japan-commentary/india-fits-japans-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

⁸⁸ Basu.

project. For instance, the strengthening of Indian maritime capability will result in a greater presence in the Indian Ocean and a provider of regional security, which would allow its two partners to focus their resources in countering Chinese influence in the South and East China Seas. However, in 2018 India spent only 15% of its total military expenditure on its navy, lower than the United States, which spends nearly 30% of its total military expenditures on its navy, while Australia and Japan spend 25% and 23% respectively, and China spends nearly three times as much as India on its military overall.⁸⁹ In 2018, India hosted the biennial exercise 'Milan' organized at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, attended by 16 countries to foster cooperation through naval exercises and professional interactions, and to nurture stronger ties in dealing with security challenges.⁹⁰

According to Scott, one manifestation of the growing Indian naval role in the Indian Ocean has been the participation of India's powerful naval units in exercises with the navies of other countries in the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Cape of Good Hope. These exercises, begun in the 1990s, connected India with extra regional states such as France, Russia, Britain, Brazil and South Africa, and above all the United States. A growing number of advanced warships are deployed on naval diplomacy around the Indian Ocean, which is supported by Australia, Japan and Vietnam as a way to strength their ties.⁹¹

In terms of security India has been able to hold an important position in the Indian Ocean Region, and the United States has evolved into a cooperative and supportive presence rather than an antagonistic presence, ready to step aside to some extent as it concentrates more on the Pacific and the Gulf. The United States has developed a partnership with India given the latter's geostrategic position, partially to contain China. The United States is the main sponsor of

⁸⁹ Aman Thakker, "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy," *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy* 16 (2018), <https://www.csis.org/npfp/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy>.

⁹⁰ "India to Host Mega Naval Exercise amid China's Manoeuvring in High Seas," *The Economic Times*, February 25, 2018.

⁹¹ Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept."

protection on the high seas in the Indian Ocean, because of its economic concerns related to oil, decisive supplies and raw materials.⁹²

However, at this level, contrary to dynamics at the global one, for India the United States acts more as a balancing ally than a partner, which is expected considering that India seems to be unwilling to cede its dominant role to an outside actor, hence India's strategy to expand commercial ties with all countries.

In 2014, PM Modi announced the "Act East" policy, as an extension of the "Look East policy", with a wider reach engaging actively the Asia-Pacific region. This policy aims to create partnerships and rapidly accelerate economic, diplomatic, and strategic interactions with East Asia, increasing India's options for external investment, and signaling displeasure with China.

As mentioned above, initially the "Look East" policy was conceived as an economic strategy to increase India's relations Southeast Asia, in the context of India's economic liberalization. Over the years, it expanded its geographical reach to Japan, South Korea and Australia, and also it covered significant strategic issues gaining even a political dimension, such as maritime security and defense cooperation.

However, the main benefit of this policy until 2018 has been its strengthening of "multidimensional" ties between India and ASEAN, which is important for the consolidation of India's power. For instance, in 2015 Modi's government allocated \$1 billion to enhance institutional and physical connectivity, recognizing that the success of the "Act East" Policy will be measured by its contribution to the security and economic development of India's North East. The ties between India and ASEAN is described as "multidimensional" because of it includes the security, political, and counter-terrorism realms, e.g. through defense

⁹² Huma Amin, "United States Presence in Indian Ocean: Counter Strategy For China," *Modern Diplomacy* (blog), January 14, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/01/14/united-states-presence-in-indian-ocean-counter-strategy-for-china/>.

collaboration.⁹³ It is important to mention that at the same time India has also worked on its high-level diplomacy with China; this has included high-level visits to both countries.

At this level, India has deployed soft power elements. Recurrently India's government talks about historical and cultural links as a backup for its political and economic diplomacy, as well as its multi-cultural and multi-faith background. According Hall, India's new public diplomacy stems partly from a realization that its reputation in its 'near abroad' region 'is not as good as it might be'.⁹⁴ The new soft power approach consists of a benign foreign policy, promotion of economic interdependence, strong cultural cooperation and foreign assistance.⁹⁵ In this regard, Buddhism has been a bridge between the two regions with chairs of Indian studies in universities in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia; Indian cultural centers in Jakarta, Bali, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Suva, Lautoka; and joint restoration of monuments in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos⁹⁶.

In brief, at the regional level India is characterized by its engagement in different initiatives that are emerging by different regional and extra-regional actors, and also because of its proactive agenda. The Indian Ocean Region poses challenges for Indian security, but despite its foreign policy at the local level, India has been able to act in a consistent manner.

2.3 Global level: active

Some of the key drivers of Indian foreign policy at the global level are connected to the image it projects internationally, in particular because the era studied here features two events that impacted other actors' perceptions of India: its inclusion in the BRICS group in 2001 and the culmination of Narendra Modi's first government in 2018.

⁹³ Ashok Sajjanhar, "India's Act East Policy so Far and beyond," *Gateway House* (blog), May 12, 2016, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/indias-act-east-policy-far-beyond/>.

⁹⁴ Ian Hall, "India's New Public Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 6 (December 2012): 1089–1110, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2012.52.6.1089>.

⁹⁵ Kugiel, "India's Soft Power in South Asia," 365.

⁹⁶ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "India Gains from Soft Power in South East Asia," *The Economic Times*, October 12, 2017.

At the global level India is most often portrayed in positive terms as an active actor, especially because of its multilateralism. For instance, according to Narlikar, India was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945, was one of the 23 original signatories to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and India participated in the negotiations of the aborted International Trade Organization. India's active role is described as a mechanism through which it seeks greater legitimacy and recognition through which it can influence the agenda of global international organizations.⁹⁷

Even though India was included in the BRICS group in 2001 in recognition of its rising power status, Indian foreign started this process in the 90's with economic liberalization and the "Looks East" policy. That change in India's foreign policy also included a shift in the attitudes of the Indian elite away from their conception of India as primarily an anti-imperialist power.⁹⁸ For instance, former Prime Minister Singh pointed out the change in India towards democracy promotion in a speech in 2005 "If there is an 'idea of India' that the world should remember us by and regard us for, it is the idea of an inclusive and open society, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society. . . . Liberal democracy is the natural order of social and political organization in today's world. All alternate systems, authoritarian and majoritarian in varying degrees, are an aberration".⁹⁹

In terms of India's international image projection, Indian culture has been important, in particular since 2014, when the Prime Minister Modi, under the framework of the United Nations, advocated for the adoption of the International Yoga Day, which now is celebrated on the 21st of June where Modi offers a speech and leads large congregations in yoga practice.

⁹⁷ Amrita Narlikar, "India's Role in Global Governance: A Modification?," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 95.

⁹⁸ Parag Khana and Raja Mohan, "Getting India Right," Text, Hoover Institution, accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.hoover.org/research/getting-india-right>.

⁹⁹ Manmohan Singh, "Speech by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at India Today Conclave, New Delhi," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/2464/>.

However, this strategy of building and positioning India's image has faced episodes in which this effort has not been totally fruitful because of the country's hardline politics at home.

However, during the period since 2014, India has faced some challenges at the global level. Though India lags behind China in economic and military strength, its diplomatic status potentially balances out this disparity. Despite its stalled efforts to be part of the UN Security Council, the United States has welcomed India in other spaces of the UN and scenarios such as the G-20, where India has been actively cooperating on themes as terrorism, economy and new technologies.¹⁰⁰ In 2015 the UN General Assembly (UNGA) declared plans to expand the UNSC, but until 2018 India's campaign did not prompt the UNGA to move towards the resolution, even though India insisted on bilateral meetings with the U.K., United States, Russia and France, all states that have expressed bilateral support without actively collaborating with India in the UN for expanding the council.¹⁰¹

According to Khana and Mohan, India and the United States act as allies to advocate issues related to democracy promotion, pluralism, and rule of law.¹⁰² For example, India is a founding member of the Community of Democracies, an intergovernmental organization aiming to strengthen democracy worldwide by providing support to emerging democracies and civil societies.¹⁰³ This does not imply a paradigm shift in India's aspirations, but rather represents India seeking instead to be an active part in the global security order beyond the UN structure.

Another challenge is related to the BJP government's hard-right agenda, which has clouded India's international image since the party took power in 2014. The 2018 Report on

¹⁰⁰ Khana and Mohan, "Getting India Right."

¹⁰¹ Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India's Campaign for Permanent Seat at UNSC Slowing down," *The Hindu*, August 20, 2019, sec. National, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-campaign-for-permanent-seat-at-unscl-slowing-down/article29161642.ece>.

¹⁰² Khana and Mohan, "Getting India Right."

¹⁰³ Christian Wagner, "Promotion of Democracy and Foreign Policy in India," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, 2009, 10.

International Religious Freedom states that the BJP's proposals were designed to erase Muslim contributions to Indian history and had led to increasing communal tensions, which motivated mobilizations against PM Modi by the Indian diaspora in the United States, just months after a Modi's historic speech in front of near 190.000 people in Madison Square.¹⁰⁴ Years before that welcome of Modi to the United States, his visa was denied because of his alleged negligence in preventing a 2002 massacre in which more than 1,000 people died, many of them Muslim.¹⁰⁵ This situation represents a challenge for India's foreign policy because the image New Delhi tries to promote does not correspond well with Hindu nationalism and the domestic persecution of Muslims and other minorities, encouraged by Modi.

The disconnect between India's soft power outreach and domestic policies has had a negative impact on India's image projection abroad. Then, according to Goel and Biwas, if India wants international respect, it must earn it by showing greater democratic commitment and accountability.¹⁰⁶ As stated by the former President of India Pranab Mukherjee in a 2007 speech, "The biggest challenge for our foreign policy, however, lies in changing our own mindsets. The Indian strategic community must come to terms with our increasing weight in the international system. Today's India is not a bystander to the actions of other powers".¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Vivian Yee, "At Madison Square Garden, Chants, Cheers and Roars for Modi," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2014, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/29/nyregion/at-madison-square-garden-chants-cheers-and-roars-for-modi.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Swati Sharma, "India's Modi Was Once Denied U.S. Entry. Sunday, He Was the Star at Madison Square Garden.," *Washington Post*, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/28/indias-modi-was-once-denied-u-s-entry-sunday-he-was-the-star-at-madison-square-garden/>.

¹⁰⁶ Anish Goel and Bidisha Biwas, "Narendra Modi's Soft-Power Diplomatic Efforts Abroad Are Being Undone by Hardline Politics at Home," *Text, Scroll.in* (<https://scroll.in>), accessed May 14, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/961333/narendra-modis-soft-power-diplomatic-efforts-abroad-are-being-undone-by-hardline-politics-at-home>.

¹⁰⁷ Pranab Mukherjee, "Address by External Affairs Minister on the Occasion of National Launch of Global India Foundation - 'India and the Global Balance of Power,'" accessed May 19, 2020, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/1810/Address_by_External_Affairs_Minister_on_the_occasion_of_National_launch_of_Global_India_Foundation__India_and_the_Global_Balance_of_Power.

From 2014, Modi's government has focused more on "geoeconomics," the "use of economic instruments to accomplish geopolitical objectives,"¹⁰⁸ than the traditional tools of geopolitics and statecraft. This change is related to the way in which Modi conceives India's role in the international system, distancing it from Nehru and adopting a more realistic and pragmatic basis for action. Nevertheless, while some Indian analysts argue that PM Modi there has made India's public diplomacy notorious rather than attractive, the main the core of India's foreign policy structure remains intact. In this regard, Caro argues that before Modi the Ministry of External Affairs prevailed over other ministries in forming India's foreign policy. Now, however, the focus is mainly on the Niti Aayog¹⁰⁹ and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which implies a modernization of the policy-making process.¹¹⁰ Caro recognizes that this modernization presents challenges because it breaks with previous practice, but Indian foreign policy needed to be modernized and the economy should take precedence over diplomatic and foreign policy.¹¹¹

According to Islamoğlu, only from 2014 has India been fully open to the global market economy.¹¹² Until the 1990s, India had a state economy influenced by socialist movements and communist parties that held coalitions with the National Congress Party, the dominant party and because of its independence legacy. Therefore, since Modi came to power, India's foreign policy has been built around the idea of using economic strength to consolidate and help its rise as a global power, articulated mainly with the industrial policy "Make in India," which aims to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub.¹¹³ After its first three years of implementation, "Make in India" has helped to reduce some deficits, but the contribution of the

¹⁰⁸ Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, "The Lost Art of Economic Statecraft," *Foreign Affairs*, 95, 2 (April 2016): 99.

¹⁰⁹ Former "Indian Planning Commission". It emerged in 2014 as a policy think tank with the aim to achieve sustainable development.

¹¹⁰ Soraya Caro, Interview, March 9, 2020.

¹¹¹ Caro.

¹¹² Huricihan Islamoğlu, Interview, March 17, 2020.

¹¹³ "Make In India," accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.makeinindia.com/about>.

manufacturing sector to GDP is barely 16%. Progress in improving the country's inadequate roads, rail lines and ports was slow, and the job creation rate had fallen.¹¹⁴

Modi's focus on geoeconomics and the "Make in India" program has resulted in some interdependence with China, however. For example, Islamoğlu argues that while India does not participate physically in China's Belt and Road Initiative, it does so virtually; Chinese capital is being invested in India's IT sector, dominating its mobile market and digital payment systems.¹¹⁵ In recent years Chinese companies have invested in two-thirds of Indian startups, an investment valued at over USD\$1 billion, with significant stakes being bought by companies like Alibaba and Tencent.¹¹⁶

In general, India has been able to build stable relationships with other relevant international actors—in contrast to Russia¹¹⁷ and China,¹¹⁸ whose relations with other powers and regional neighbors have become more fraught over time. According to HHS Viswanathan, peace and development have been the fundamental pillars of India's foreign policy. Far from being an obstructionist, history shows that India has been appreciated for playing a balancing role and being a consensus builder.¹¹⁹ For Caro, on the other hand, India's foreign policy is closely related to its internal development and its geoeconomic interests. Furthermore, Caro continues, today all countries are moving toward a scenario of uncertainty about who their real friends are, and who their strategic partners are, based on geopolitical and geoeconomic interests—and India has to play there too.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Suparna Dutt D'Cunha, "PM Modi Calls The World To 'Make In India,' But The Initiative Fails To Take Off," *Forbes*, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/suparnadutt/2017/07/24/missing-the-mark-pm-modi-courts-the-world-to-make-in-india-but-the-initiative-fails-to-take-off/>.

¹¹⁵ Islamoğlu, Interview.

¹¹⁶ Niranjana Sahoo and Steven Raj Padakandla, "India's China FDI Gamble," May 1, 2020, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/05/indias-china-fdi-gamble/>.

¹¹⁷ Elias Götz and Camille-Renaud Merlen, "Russia and the Question of World Order," *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (March 15, 2019): 133–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1545181>.

¹¹⁸ Evelyn Goh, "Contesting Hegemonic Order: China in East Asia," *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 614–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1604989>.

¹¹⁹ HHS Viswanathan, Interview, March 11, 2020.

¹²⁰ Caro, Interview.

Conclusion

International Relations theories provide different expectations of rising power behavior. On the one hand, rising powers can be “revisionist” and attempt to create, through conflict and possibly war, a new distribution of goods in the international system. On the other hand, the configuration of power can serve a rising powers’ interests, and it can adopt “status quo” behavior. Hence, rising powers are expected to fit into one of these categories.

A three-level analysis—local, regional, and global—of India’s foreign policy from 2001 to 2018 shows that India does not easily fit into either of these categories. Instead, it is a polyvalent rising power which pursues different objectives at each level. Although, taken as a whole, India’s emergence better fits status quo than revisionist, describing India as a “polyvalent,” rather than as simply status quo, power more accurately captures its discontinuous foreign policy.

As I have argued, at the local level (South Asia) India has pursued a reactive foreign policy. Despite its position as South Asia’s hegemon, India still needs to develop a more consistent agenda to foster integration, as well as assumes a leadership position when crises arise. In its extended neighborhood, the Indian Ocean Region, India’s foreign policy is based on engagement, cooperation and strong relations with strategic actors that share its concerns in terms of security. At the global level, India behaves more actively, working vis-à-vis other powers, although its domestic policies, particularly under Modi, do not always align with its international image. Hence India’s active emergence at the global level sits in marked contrast with its local reactivity and regional multilateralism.

Moreover, at the local level India is part of SAARC, which is not only the main institution to promote integration in South Asia, but also an important venue where India can increase its local leadership and legitimacy. However, SAARC is also vulnerable to bilateral tensions and non-balance, its more than three decades of activity has not given the expected

results. India's "Look East" policy and its recent version "Act East", as well as Indian engagement with ASEAN, are increasing not only the trade flow from India to the Indian Ocean Region and Southeast Asian countries, but also consolidating India as a major regional power. Even though at the global level India still seeks UNSC permanent membership, this has not limited its ability to project power in other UN bodies, nor in multilateral organizations, where now India does not speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement as it did in the Cold War period, but instead represents the developing world and emerging powers.

Throughout this analysis, two actors emerge at all the three levels: The United States and China. Despite the characterization of India's behavior- revisionist or status quo- the relationship with these countries helps to shape India's responses, underlining New Delhi's lack of foreign policy continuity. Therefore, at the local and regional levels Chinese influence plays a large role in determining India's foreign policy responses. At the global level, this relation generates less constraint. In the case of the United States, India has maintained a stable alliance, but in some levels its intensity changes.

Even so, India is still lagging in the transition from a follower to a leader. Certainly, the efforts made from the 2000s are still giving its fruits, but this is a reminder of the consequences of India's inward-looking foreign policy in its first years as an independent state.

All in all, the Indian foreign policy from 2001 to 2018 reflects the behavior of a polyvalent rising power that does not well fit a specific category from orthodox IR accounts of rising powers. This underlines the peculiarities of the Indian pathway as a rising power. Notably, India is missing from many recent accounts of rising powers.¹²¹ The present thesis gives a different perspective of how the analysis of emerging power and international order can

¹²¹ India has no index entry or substantive discussion in new works on rising powers, including Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*; Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs)* (Cornell University Press, 2018); Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Cornell University Press, 2018).; and only a brief discussion in Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

assess the new trends given by the experiences of the new powers. It shows that an emerging power does not need to be simply revisionist or status quo but it may have an overall contradictory foreign policy.

Whether Narendra Modi and future Indian leaders will be able to develop a uniform foreign policy across different levels remains to be seen. Developing this foreign policy will require a process of domestic negotiations and strengthening of current international status. According to Tripathi, India faces a big challenge with the consolidation of a policy direction, due to policymakers confusion in terms of what needs to be done, who are the partners, what sort of relation India is going to have with other powers, and so on. India's vision needs to be clear.¹²²

Here it may be helpful to look at India's own past as a source of strategic thought, which emphasizes polyvalence and continuity. The Arthashastra¹²³, has long influenced Indian strategic thought. It presents the Raja Mandala theory, which locates the ruler at the center of an anarchical system, and to survive the ruler must know his position in the mandala system of states. This is a model of the international system with a circle in the center, and a state of constant (real or potential) opposition is the norm. The ruler's immediate neighbor is an enemy, the state next to the immediate neighbor is the enemy of this neighbor and likely to be the ruler's friend. Behind the friendly state is located another unfriendly state, and so on.¹²⁴ Consequently, this system is characterized first by states surrounded by a ring of allies and enemies; and second, the particularities of the relationships among the states are not fixed. In this way, India is at the nucleus of the system with a foreign policy that allows multidirectional alignment with major powers and seeking a wider sphere of influence. To penetrate surrounding circles, India can instrumentalize commercial cooperation, and create strong political linkages with

¹²² Dhananjay Tripathi, Interview, March 7, 2020.

¹²³ This book, written by Kautilya, is a collection of rules and a description of how a state should work to gain or to maintain power.

¹²⁴ Arndt, "India's Cognitive Prior: Ideas, Norms, and the Evolution of India's Foreign Policy," 25.

neighboring regions and multistate defense agreements. Then, in the contemporary scenario, India's foreign policy would thus mirror the Arthashastra's emphasis on a realistic, pragmatic, and intelligent use of power, informed by knowledge, while focusing on enhancing hard power and the use of other forms of soft power.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Rajiv Bhatia, "The Arthashastra in Modi's India," *Gateway House* (blog), 2016, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/the-arthashastra-in-modis-india/>.

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