

Bringing the region back in? Deciphering India's engagement with South Asia

By **Jayashree Vivekanandan**
and **Jason Miklian**

■ Executive summary

How does India envision South Asia? What do Indian policymakers envisage the country's regional role to be? The issues and actors that dominate India's regional foreign policy give a glimpse of the country's priorities in the region. The much-touted "shift" in Indian diplomacy under Narendra Modi offers us a window into the priorities of the new government and the extent to which continuity from the past shapes its regional policy today. This report explores how India works both above and below the regional level in an effort to secure its regional diplomatic and economic priorities. It examines the following five issue areas that have influenced India's relations with its neighbours: the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, India as a humanitarian actor, supraregionalism and subregionalism, border politics, and democratisation. The report closes with reflections on what implications these engagements might have for Indian foreign policy in the future, arguing that a more inclusive and engaged leadership by India could help to resolve some of South Asia's most vexing and intractable challenges.

Introduction¹

How does India envision South Asia? What do India's policymakers envisage the country's regional role to be? These questions have renewed relevance as the international community increasingly views India as South Asia's pre-eminent power. Nonetheless, puzzles abound. Firstly, discussions of India and "the region" tend to centre around varied understandings of what exactly constitutes South Asia. The political act of interpreting geography has meant that the perimeters of regions have fluctuated with the criteria used to define them. South Asia has been no exception to this norm. Some historical perspectives draw on old power corridors that stretched "from Suez to Shanghai"; one definition includes Iran as part of the region; while others exclude Myanmar and Afghanistan in favour of a more subcontinental perspective (UNDP, 2014: 224).

These inclusions and exclusions carry significant weight in any consideration of India as the region's most powerful actor. They also shape the country's foreign policy orientations at the bilateral and regional levels as India looks to

expand its sphere of influence, both in absolute terms and as a counterweight to perceived rivalries with actors such as China. India's priorities in the region are evident in the issues and actors that dominate the country's foreign policy. The much-touted "shift" in Indian diplomacy under the Narendra Modi government offers a window to analyse whether the country's regional priorities have indeed changed and if these priorities are indicative of the improved synchronisation of policies at different levels of government.

This report first explores how India is increasingly attempting to avoid the historical trappings of the region by working both beyond and beneath it. It examines the following five issue areas that have influenced India's relations with its neighbours: the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India as a humanitarian actor, supraregionalism and subregionalism, border politics, and democratisation. The report closes with reflections on what implications these engagements may have for Indian foreign policy in the future.

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Background

South Asia is touted as the fastest growing region in the world, and the countries conventionally considered as constituting the region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) are projected to register a regional growth rate of 7% in 2015. In a year (2014-15) the region has turned the highest inflation rate among the world's developing regions into what is currently the lowest (World Bank, 2015). But South Asia continues to fare poorly by most development indicators, with the lowest regional Human Development Index value after sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2014: 33). The region's poor development profile will undoubtedly impinge on India's regional and global aspirations, especially if it regards its future as being that of "a human resources power" (Jaishankar, 2015).

South Asia remains among the least politically integrated regions in the world and its states continue to view multi-lateralism and regionalism through the lens of national interest. Connectivity is among the first casualties of the statist logic as states leverage access through their territory for political gains (Saran, 2011). This explains why Pakistan denies India access to Afghanistan across its territory, just as India blocks direct connectivity between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Even though India's geographical location makes it the best positioned to permit the use of its infrastructural capacity by way of rail, road and port networks to facilitate intra-regional connectivity, the notable lack of connectivity is emblematic of regional relations today.

Typically, regional hegemony seeks to combine national interest and the common good of the region. A start in that direction was made during Prime Minister Modi's 2014 visit to Bangladesh, when the two countries agreed to establish coastal shipping connections to avoid third-country ports and decongest overloaded road transport networks (Mohan, 2015). However, India seemed to send out contradictory signals through the Dhaka visit. On the one hand, the historic bilateral agreement on exchanging enclaves indicated the willingness of both sides to accept the reality of settled communities on their respective territories. On the other hand, the exclusion of the chief ministers of India's north-eastern states from the entourage that accompanied Modi to Dhaka was a reminder of the continued peripheral status of substate actors and issues.

Modi is well aware that his foreign policy agenda to spur economic growth and foreign direct investment could be undermined by an unstable neighbourhood. He has argued that "India desires a peaceful and stable environment for its development. A nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood. That is why my government has placed highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with its neighbours" (Modi, 2014). At first glance the Modi government's regional policy is reflective of intensive engagement with India's neighbours, particularly when measured by the sheer number of state visits and bilateral agreements that

have marked the prime minister's first year in office. The fact that it was 17 years since an Indian prime minister visited Nepal and 28 years since one visited Sri Lanka added significance to Modi's visits to these countries.

Yet Modi's policy approach has remained largely conventional, particularly when negotiating troubled relations with neighbours such as Pakistan. As most Indian prime ministers have done on assuming office, Modi demonstrated a willingness to engage with Pakistan. But bilateral relations have followed a predictable trajectory after the initial bonhomie wore off, turning into an all-too-familiar stalemate. The current suspension of official-level talks is suggestive of the extremities that have more often than not informed the two countries' relationship. Much rides on Modi's scheduled visit to Pakistan next year for the SAARC summit, especially since parallels are being drawn with former Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee's Islamabad tour in 2004 that marked a shift in bilateral ties (Roy-Chaudhury, 2015).

Indeed, the Indian government is willing to adopt a more aggressive stance if Pakistan is unwilling to discuss what India unwaveringly considers to be the core issue – terrorism. The Modi government's muscularity was evident in India's recent and unprecedented decision to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1965 war against Pakistan with a month-long "commemorative carnival". The commemoration was tellingly launched on August 28th 2015, 50 years to the date when India took control of the Haji Pir Pass in what is now Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, and marks the first time that India has commemorated a war that it has been involved in (Subramanian & Singh, 2015). In other words, India chose to celebrate a victory that has been sharply contested by the Pakistani establishment. Modi came across as more discreet in instances where he was keen to project India's soft power, such as during his Sri Lankan visit in March 2015. His emphasis on drawing on historical ties connecting the two states was understated, as was his cautious support for a "united" Sri Lanka, despite his visit to Jaffna being the first by an Indian prime minister. But India's involvement in most post-civil war development projects such as the Sampur power plant and the Kankesanthurai port has been much slower than anticipated (*The Hindu*, 2015a).

Modi's orientation and performance have been extensively compared with those of his predecessor, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Modi has repeatedly signalled that his form of governance marks a definitive break from the past. Indeed, the transition has been hailed as dramatic to the point of being described as signalling "the birth of India's second republic" (Baru, 2014). Modi's election victory in 2014 was at least in part due to his reputation for economic prowess, and this focus has carried over into regional policy, with a particular emphasis on large infrastructure projects. For example, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport and Transit Project that aims to build port and road connectivity between Northeast India and Myanmar offers

an alternate route between Northeast India and Kolkata. The USD 50 million project is to be funded entirely by India's Ministry of External Affairs and was a core focus of the Singh government's "Look East" policy, now re-envisioned under Modi as "Act East". The Indian government presented it as a development gift to Myanmar, and in India as an economic and strategic move directly linking South-east Asian markets with Northeast India.

The public visibility of Modi's regional visits obscures the fact that his foreign policy in South Asia has been marked more by continuities with that of the Singh government rather than departures from it. Expectations of a series of breakthroughs in regional relations have slowly given way to an emphasis on incremental successes, and at least some of the foundations of Modi's achievements are the result of significant work by his predecessors. Arguably, Modi's greatest success – the historic boundary settlement with Bangladesh – has been a product of five years of negotiations begun by the Singh government in 2010 and still contested by many within Bangladesh itself (Miklian and Hoelscher 2013). Incidentally, Modi's political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, had resisted the agreement with Bangladesh when it was in opposition.

Working in and around the region

To analyse the extent to which the politics of regionalism inform India's South Asia policies, this section explores how the following issue areas have influenced India's relations with its neighbours: SAARC, humanitarian support, supraregionalism and subregionalism, border politics, and democracy promotion.

SAARC

Analyses of South Asian regional relations often revolve around the successes and failures of SAARC. This association is an intriguing example of a mechanism of cooperative regional security that remains avowedly apolitical. While it aims to facilitate cooperation among its members, it seeks to do so by sidestepping the very issues that hinder such cooperation in the first place. Perhaps ironically for an apolitical association, however, member states have used SAARC for political ends with surprising frequency. States have managed to hold summits to ransom chiefly because they have not surrendered any of their sovereign prerogatives to the organisation (Obino, 2009).

This has meant a stark contrast between SAARC institutions and member states in their respective mandates and styles of functioning. The association's bodies are largely advisory and consultative, intended to monitor and coordinate activities among members, such as is the case with the SAARC Secretariat. The association was clearly not

given the power to be a platform for states to discuss or settle contentious bilateral issues. This, coupled with the fact that members are institutionally unfettered by their SAARC membership in resorting to other means of settling differences, has meant that states have often unilaterally postponed SAARC summits when they were in a position to do so.²

However, SAARC has served as a de facto diplomatic avenue to defuse regional tensions. States have routinely discussed issues of mutual concern when they have congregated for SAARC summits, and India has been particularly proactive in this regard. From discussing river water sharing with Bangladesh at the very first summit in 1985 to the resumption of official dialogue with Pakistan at the Colombo summit in 1998, India has sought to informally leverage the annual meetings on multiple occasions. This perhaps speaks to one reason for India's continued interest in the SAARC – even though most observers see little concrete cooperation or diplomatic progress resulting from official SAARC platforms, negotiations and decrees.

Perhaps the most visible lesson for SAARC is that there is little to highlight in terms of true pan-South Asian cooperation. It has struggled to shake off the general impression, both in South Asia and beyond, of being a weak regional organisation. SAARC's poor record of executing intent is a case in point. For example, it has been over a decade since the Regional Convention on Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution was adopted in 2002, but it is yet to come into force. During its 2011 meeting the Council of Ministers itself admitted that the convention "has been weak in dealing with the prevention and suppression of trafficking in women and children in South Asia" (SAARC, 2011).

At the institutional level, efforts to both strengthen and modernise SAARC are under way. The organisation's decision to invite observer states to join in 2007 indicates both a new phase in its expansion and the growing interest of extra-regional powers in South Asia.³ Japan, which has been the single largest donor state to South Asian states in the last 20 years, was the first to express its interest in being part of the SAARC (Muni & Jetly, 2008). Myanmar and China are both keen to join the organisation and engage India in subregional forums, including the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation (BCIM) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Intra-regional politics have played out over which states should be invited to become observers – and whether they should be invited at all. India has usually been suspicious of giving outside powers leeway to influence the region's affairs – more so when it came to giving observer status to China.

² For example, in 1989 Sri Lanka made the holding of the fifth SAARC summit contingent on the withdrawal of the Indian Peacekeeping Force; the Babri Masjid demolition in India led to the postponement of the seventh summit in 1992 and 1993; and the Indian-Pakistani standoff following their Kargil conflict meant that the 11th summit was postponed for three years.

³ From the initial seven their number has increased to nine. SAARC observers now include Australia, China, the EU, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and the U.S.

India's neighbours, on the other hand, see observers as a counter-veiling force to India's dominance and hence have been more supportive of their admission to SAARC (Muni & Jetly, 2008: 23).

India as a humanitarian actor

India's engagement in the global humanitarian space has a long history, from initiatives in the Group of 77 and Non-Aligned Movement during the cold war to its extensive contemporary contribution to UN peacekeeping forces. In addition, India now also has the capacity and resources to act independently as a humanitarian actor where it wishes, either as a significant bilateral donor in South Asia or as a human rights campaigner in international forums for states such as Afghanistan. India uses its region as the primary point of humanitarian departure, and the country's ability to project itself to regional and international audiences as a humanitarian actor and its interest in doing so are visible in South Asia in its responses to recent humanitarian tragedies in Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and even Pakistan over the last five years (Miklian 2014).

However, India's growing involvement with global and regional humanitarianism does not necessarily constitute a new humanitarian template pursued in conjunction with its foreign policy aims. For instance, the country does not see any contradiction in its espousal of the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states and its support for universalism on issues such as human rights. Although India was one of the 48 member states that adopted the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it has firmly held that human rights violations should be not be the basis for intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. India's own inconsistencies in observing its chosen position, evident in military interventions in Sri Lanka and what was then East Pakistan during the cold war, did not deter it from insisting that all powers external to the Kashmir dispute should observe the principle of total non-intervention. India's foreign policy behaviour is characteristic of a risk-averse state that tends to pursue goals that are more limited and incremental in nature than those of risk-accepting powers such as Russia.

There has also been little substantive change in India's humanitarian foreign policy platform since Modi took office. Powers the world over have leveraged their much-needed help to other states for political gain; indeed, it is even expected of regional hegemons. But underlying political tensions often mean that goodwill gestures have not translated into the intended political dividends. India's response to the Nepalese earthquake offers an interesting glimpse into its role as a regional hegemon. Given previous tensions in bilateral relations, India's prompt help, though expected and appreciated, was warily received by the Nepalese state and its people. India is often perceived as being too close for comfort, chiefly because it has not channelled its influence through the regional forum. The

SAARC has a host of agreements and institutions in place to address both regional challenges and national calamities. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre was established in 2006, within which was housed the SAARC Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism (NDRRM). However, it was not until 2011 that an inter-governmental meeting in Malé finalised the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters (SAARC, 2011). This is despite the fact that South Asia has the highest incidence of recorded natural disasters of all the regions in the world. In the last four decades the region has experienced 1,333 disasters that killed nearly a million people (*The Hindu*, 2011).

But a regional response was elusive in the case of the Nepal earthquake, because India responded directly rather than routing its relief work through the NDRRM. Its pledge of USD 1 billion in assistance was made at an international donors' conference organised by the Nepalese government (*Indian Express*, 2015). But the challenge to devise a collective strategy also stems from the very design of the mechanism. Despite the NDRRM's stated objective "to adopt a coordinated and planned approach to meet ... emergencies", its operative principles are steeped in the idiom of sovereignty. Prefaced by the assertion that "The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of the Member Countries shall be respected", the discretion and primacy of the affected country is reiterated throughout the NDRRM's framework (SAARC, 2011). While all aid carries political undertones, the format and delivery mechanisms of Indian humanitarian aid are at least as much about projecting the country's capabilities to the world as they are about goodwill to regional partners.

Supraregionalism and subregionalism

The politics of regionalism has played an essential role in South Asian state interactions, especially after the end of the cold war renewed the importance of multipolarity and encouraged the redrawing of regional power blocs.⁴ While India's foreign policy approaches have historically been concerned with external perceptions of the country's regional role in the world, Indian policymakers are electing to take greater ownership of narratives on the country's role in the region.

Perhaps India's most visible foray into supraregionalism lies in its attempts to expand existing conceptualisations of "South Asia" and what constitutes India's "neighborhood". Modi's invitation to Mauritius to attend his swearing-in ceremony along with the SAARC states' heads of government is an indication of how he envisages India's sphere of influence to be in keeping with the country's stated policy of its "extended" neighbourhood. Modi's visits to Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka this year reiterated the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean region, particularly with reference to China's growing interest there (Roy-Chaudhury, 2015). The political emphasis on developing an "integrated Indian Ocean strategy" is a clear articulation of

4 See in particular Acharya and Buzan (2007); Hurrell (2007); Hurrell and Fawcett (1995); Kelley (2007); Mansfield and Milner (1997).

how India seeks to secure its maritime interests and explains why its interest in regional associations extends beyond the SAARC (Jaishankar, 2015). Its desire to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations indicates how India is attempting to redefine its regional space. It hopes to leverage obvious strategic gains from SCO membership (it has had observer status since 2005). An energy-hungry economy like that of India will be keen to tap the rich natural resources that SCO members command. For example, India is eager to operationalise the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline even though Iran is not part of the SCO.

A second important corollary of India's diplomacy in South Asia has been its subregional focus. Subregionalism, which entails facilitating cooperation between geographically contiguous regions of neighbouring countries, has caught the policy imagination of several Asian states. Subregionalism in Asia has found institutional expression in platforms such as the Greater Mekong Subregion, Southern China Growth Triangle, BIMSTEC and BCIM. Although primarily state driven, these groupings take the dynamics of regional integration to the borders of member states, which allows for an array of local and substate actors to come to the fore by dint of their locational identity (Hocking, 1993; Blatter et al., 2008). For example, India, as a member of BIMSTEC and the BCIM, has been making concerted efforts to integrate with its extended neighbourhood through its border regions, particularly its Northeast. This process has a sectoral orientation, with India seeking to collaborate with Bangladesh and Myanmar in developing subregional institutional frameworks in the fields of energy, trade, transport, and health in the interests of revitalising trade and increasing economic connectivity (Kurian, 2014). Also, in June 2015 Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal signed Motor Vehicles Agreement, which aims to ensure seamless connectivity among the four states. Likewise, the 70 border *haats* (local markets) that India recently opened along its international border with Bangladesh have been crucial in revitalising trade among local communities living on either side of the border. These examples point to the emergence of subregional stakeholders that are lobbying for greater integration and are instrumental to the success of such initiatives (Kurian, 2014).

With such a dizzying array of acronym-laden ventures, it is important to recognise why there is such a need to forge multilevel institutional linkages in India's regional policy. The enhanced prominence of actors outside the formal hierarchy of state structures and their increasing interconnectedness point to the emergence of multilevel governance mechanisms. States find themselves having to share policymaking with a host of non-governmental actors whose increased participation in policy processes has redefined the role of the state from one of policy control to that of policy coordination (Vivekanandan, 2009). Subnational actors function simultaneously in both the national and supranational realms, creating transnational networks in the process. Chandhoke (2003) argues that this repre-

sents the rise of "network governance" in terms of which a host of non-state actors, both above and below the state level, are sharing policymaking and implementation functions with the state. However, creating institutional mechanisms that coordinate policymaking across borders and organisational levels has historically been a daunting challenge in South Asia.

Border politics

Indian policymakers have traditionally considered South Asia as a heavily securitised space, and the Modi government is no exception. Cross-border terrorism and India's international land border management policies have underpinned much of the country's security relations with its neighbours. The Modi government saw the Peshawar school attack by the Pakistani Taliban as a grim warning that Pakistan should continue to be perceived as a hub of terrorism. Modi (2014) made a pointed reference to the attack during his speech at the UN, maintaining that Pakistan needs to make significant efforts to curb terrorism before "serious bilateral dialogue" can be resumed. However, Modi has been circumspect about Islamic associations with terrorism, arguing during his July visit to Kazakhstan that the countries' shared Islamic heritage has always rejected extremist forces (*The Hindu*, 2015b). Tackling militarism in the region would also be an enduring challenge for the Modi government, given how entrenched such militarism is in states like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. In practice this has led to military ventures that blur the lines of legality, notably India's high-profile military strikes into Myanmar territory and its covert operations in the region. Although the Indian establishment in the 1990s is seen to have reduced the covert regional capabilities of India's main foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (although this supposed reduction remains debatable), the Indian army's cross-border operations have expanded, including its actions in Myanmar in 2006 and 2015 and Bhutan in 2009 (Swami, 2015). The recent strikes indicate the domestic need for continued political validation of the role of the Indian intelligence services throughout South Asia.

India's neighbours tend to believe that successive Indian governments have perpetuated and even exacerbated disconnects through their border policies. For example, Bangladeshis find it ironic that their border with India must be increasingly walled off for "security reasons" that range from preventing militants' cross-border movements to checking money laundering, when India's border with Nepal remains completely open despite numerous instances of these very security lapses (Miklian 2009; Miklian and Hoelscher 2013). While resolving long-standing territorial disputes such as that between India and Bangladesh may be cause for short-term celebration, if the end result is simply for India to have a better idea of where to build its walls, the political gains from such bilateral agreements will likely be quite short lived.

Democratisation

In principle the trend towards democratisation in South Asian societies augurs well for India's efforts to position itself as the centre of the regional integration project (Muni & Jetly, 2008). India largely sees the opening of democratic space as offering greater avenues for contact outside the formal political sphere and potentially checking violence as a means of dispute settlement. This liberal line of reasoning makes a case for stabilising conditions for multilateral cooperation. Framed within the discourse of a regional collective, the benefits of states turning democratic are seen as being collectively reaped. However, India's neighbours are wary of the consequences that this logic implies, especially when they see it as underpinning India's growing desire to support the promotion of democracy in the region (Mehta, 2011).⁵

All South Asian states struggle to balance their weak democratic capacity with their capacity to honour human security demands in an increasingly regionalised and internationalised political environment. The so-called "hybrid democracies" in South Asia – Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – have at times all straddled the line between authoritarianism and democracy over the previous two decades.⁶ Each has also sought to quell localised rebellions through attempts to sell, justify and legitimise democracy to recalcitrant pockets of the country, while conducting undemocratic military actions against these very populations, often simultaneously (Pearce et al., 2011).

Supporting democracy also carries significant strategic value, but India's own record continues to be mixed. Many in the international community and in Nepal and Myanmar have highlighted India's public and back-channel efforts to support democratic transitions in these two countries as positives in this regard. But because India itself is no stranger to democratic challenges (Miklian, forthcoming; Miklian & Kolås, forthcoming), its overtures towards South Asian democracy promotion are sometimes viewed with scepticism. Monarchical and military regimes in South Asia have historically been suspicious of more open societies for fear of the dissent they generate and prefer to redirect protest towards an external threat. Serious flaws of trust deficit and radicalisation that have hobbled the democratic experiment in countries like Pakistan have worked to stoke anti-India sentiments in the region and breed resistance to opening borders to regional flows (Muni & Jetly, 2008). These sentiments are multiplied when India elects to support undemocratic regimes in the region in an effort to

insulate and protect the power of its bilateral relationships, with recent developments regarding Islamic authoritarianism in the Maldives being the best example.

Conclusion

In the highlighted issue areas and others India under Modi has elected to continue the path of attempting to lead in the region of South Asia through two parallel ventures: engaging bilaterally with other South Asian states at the expense of South Asia's multilateral frameworks and trying to transcend the region by attempting to expand India's sphere of influence. In support, India is likely to pursue bilateral or issue-based networks at international forums because of their manoeuvrability, despite the Indian foreign secretary's assurance that "shared power" will be at the heart of South Asia's emerging security architecture (Jaishankar, 2015). What is worth exploring here is the extent to which Modi's economic engagement with the neighbourhood is aligned with his other foreign policy goals. For example, an important plank of the prime minister's economic diplomacy has been to support a "Make in India" platform. The major powers have welcomed the initiative, and China – considered to be a competing power in the manufacturing sector – has even offered to align its "Made in China" with the "Make in India" strategy (NDTV 2015). However, Modi is yet to articulate what the strategy would imply for regional trade and industry. Should India anchor it within the institutional processes of SAARC, the initiative could potentially revitalise the laggard pace of intra-regional trade.

Clearly, without Indian initiative or interest in prioritising a more inclusive South Asian multilateralism we are unlikely to see South Asia cohere as a region over common concerns. Further, it is unlikely that SAARC will be able to emerge as a counter-veiling force to international pressures. The extent to which this will impinge on India's strategic ambitions remains uncertain. What is clearer is that by employing bilateralism to satisfy national interest calculations, the Modi government continues along a foreign policy path in the region that is often more counter-productive than constructive. While it is simplistic to say that India assumes its mantle of South Asian hegemon by expecting deference from its neighbours, it is possible that a more engaged, multilateral approach might serve to make the country's neighbours feel more respected as equals. Crucially, it would also provide new opportunities for India to offer inclusive leadership to help resolve some of South Asia's most vexing and intractable challenges.

⁵ Of course, this position is also strongly supported by those business and political actors that stand to significantly gain from a more economically open South Asia. The recent experience of Indian pressure from both state-owned and private firms for increased business development in Myanmar – and Modi's enthusiastic support for such initiatives – is indicative of positions of this kind in policy practice.

⁶ Democratic governments are presumed to act as self-restrictive mechanisms that prevent or at the very least greatly reduce the likelihood of their leaderships' committing atrocities. But in many developing-country democracies the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate violence are blurred, and arguments for state violence to bolster security in the name of legitimacy are common. In this way, Pearce et al. (2011) argue that the Global South has perfected the art of creating perpetually violent democracies.

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■ THE AUTHORS

Jason Miklian (PhD, Norwegian University of Life Sciences) is a senior researcher on South Asian conflict resolution and regional security at the Peace Research Institute Oslo, and has published on the media and foreign policy, the Maoist insurgency in India and Nepal, and the political ecologies of war and conflict minerals in South Asia. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in South Asia since 2005 and has written for or been cited in an expert capacity by *The New York Times*, the BBC, *The Economist*, Agence France-Presse, *Foreign Policy*, NRK and *The Hindu*, among various media outlets.

Jayashree Vivekanandan is an assistant professor in the Department of International Relations at South Asian University, New Delhi. Her research interests include critical approaches to international relations theory, India's strategic history, memory politics and transboundary resource governance in South Asia. She is the author of *Interrogating International Relations: India's Strategic Practice and the Return of History* (Routledge, 2011).

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