

OPINION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India's Foreign Policy evolution and changes

The international system recognizes and divides nation states in terms of their respective “powers”. Some are called great powers; some are identified as middle powers; some as emerging powers; and others, rising powers. Each of these terminologies has a specific meaning attached with them because different kinds of powers have different attributes, roles and functions in international relations.

For instance, a great power is defined as a state that plays a major role in international politics with respect to security-related issues. The great powers can be differentiated from other states on the basis of their military power, their interests, their behaviour in general, their interactions with other powers and other powers’ perception of them. This definition of great powers was given by Jack S. Levy in his book, *War In The Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975*.

All the superpowers therefore are great powers but the reverse is not true. This is precisely because one has to be a great power first in order to become a superpower. For instance, both the US and the Soviet Union were great powers even before World War II, but they were not recognized as superpowers then. It was only after the end of World War II that the world recognized them as superpowers because of their military strength, their destructive potential (especially with the advent of nuclear bombs) and their capabilities to affect international politics at a much wider and deeper scale than before.

Then, there are rising powers, which are primarily those powers whose rise in terms of their socio-economic indicators as well as their military strength is recognized by other nation states in the international system. Sometimes, their rise is so sharp and fast that it starts throwing a challenge to existing superpowers. For instance, many scholars argue that China is a classic case of a rising power which is at the cusp of becoming a superpower and take the place of Soviet Union whose collapse in 1991 left a vacuum in the international politics as it was balancing the US for nearly half a century.

While China is recognized as a rising power, India has often been termed as an emerging power since the last decade, especially after the LPG or liberalisation, privatisation and globalization reforms after 1991 that accelerated its economic growth and it became a nuclear power in 1998. It secured India’s national interests to a considerable extent. The term emerging power denotes that a nation state has just started to emerge as a power which is recognized as such by other existing powers in the international system.

The “self-image” of an emerging power changes rapidly, as it starts to broaden both its intentions as well as capabilities to make a broader mark outside the region in which it is regionally situated. For instance, India has always been a regional powerhouse of South Asia, so much so that the very idea of South Asia can’t be imagined without India in the picture. However, India was not considered as a major global power till the turn of the last millennium, after which India’s interests, especially economic interests, were broadened.

Today, the situation is very different. Not only has India’s overall power increased manifold, the country is seen as one of the major powers in the world whose influence is not just confined to its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia. Ironically, over the last few years, India’s relations with most of its immediate neighbours have deteriorated but outside the region, India is enjoying amicable and strong trade, economic and security relations with most of the major powers.

Many scholars of international relations call India a middle power as well. The term itself suggests that a middle power is often a sovereign nation-state that comes in the middle of the power spectrum of all nation-states. These states are relatively less powerful compared with great powers but possess the capability to shape international events. During the Cold War, states like Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden played the role of middle powers. Today, scholars and academics put India and Australia, along with Brazil and South Africa, in that position.

That brings the question of what kind of power India actually is. Is it an emerging power, is it a middle power, is it at the cusp of becoming a rising power? The answer to this question is debatable but the most agreeable answer is that India is one of the major economic powers with nuclear power capability today.

However, one should also examine why these terminologies are important in themselves. The most likely reason seems to be that these terminologies are coined to assess the power of nation-states by the international community so that they calculate their strategy of behaving with a particular state in a particular way. Second, these terminologies often act as catalysts to boost the “self-image” of a nation-state.

However, many diplomats and scholars of international relations caution that leaders and ruling dispensations in respective nation-states shouldn't take these terms neither too seriously nor too lightly. The concept of power of nation-states has changed with time. To sum up, power manifests itself in many ways and therefore to be recognized as a major power, nation-states aspire to possess both the hard and soft power to influence the international system at large.

Martand Jha, is a junior research fellow at School of International Studies, JNU

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crack