

Threatening Engagement: Regional Hegemons and Terrorist Groups

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MOSTAFA ELSHARKAWY, OCT 8 2022

The role of terrorist groups in the international system has puzzled scholars of contemporary international relations for many years. Situating non-state actors like terrorist groups is especially difficult given their often decentralized and sporadic nature.[1] And while most of the attention dedicated to terrorism takes on an international perspective, much of political terrorism is regional.[2] This is partly the reason why regional orders are often created to solve security problems, including terrorism.[3] Like any hegemonic power, regional hegemonic states are preoccupied with the maintenance of their regional order. Given that terrorist groups are non-state actors, there is no inherent incentive to be engaged with them, especially as they seek to disrupt the hegemonic order. Hegemonic states run the risk of legitimizing a terrorist group undeservingly.[4] Nonetheless, states continue to dedicate resources, manpower, and research to their counterterrorism policy.[5] So why is it that regional hegemons engage with terrorist groups? More specifically, what affects a regional hegemon's propensity to engage with an organized terrorist group? This is the question this paper considers. It would be unreasonable to argue that any state will not engage with a terrorist group that may present some future threat to it. This is especially true for regional hegemons, where we assume some level of threat almost all the time. Thus, this research does not, and cannot, observe *whether* a regional hegemon engages with a terrorist but *why* a regional hegemon does so.

A common understanding of this relationship is that states and terrorist groups engage with each other in a retaliatory fashion. In Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare (1994), they argue that states assume a "natural" rate of retaliation and terrorists have rational expectations about the retaliation they will receive.[6] This framework, though simple to absorb, fails to account for the different state behaviors of hegemons. It reduces counterterrorism efforts to a security issue, when, in reality, it often involves other economic and geopolitical issues. I argue that regional hegemons utilize a criterion for engagement that identifies hegemonic status as the main motivator behind a propensity to engage with a terrorist group. I posit that three central considerations undergird such threats to a regional hegemon's status — threats to economic capabilities, threats to the hegemon's allies, and threats to geopolitical interests. Commanding significant economic power is a central tenet of hegemonic strength, particularly so for economically interdependent regional orders. Furthermore, regional hegemonic states often depend on secondary states to achieve their hegemonic status, leading to an obligation on the part of the regional hegemon. And finally, regional hegemons must also consider the relative strength of their rival, as this is ultimately what could lead to the loss of hegemonic status itself. With these in mind, we can expect regional hegemons to counter any threats that harm its economic capabilities, allies, or support its rivals.

A cross-case and overtime analysis of India and Nigeria yields some evidence to support this theory. I process-trace the propensity of these regional hegemons to engage with two local terrorist groups, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Boko Haram. The threat that JeM posed to India's military-industrial assets in the Northwest and to its strategic position in Jammu and Kashmir motivated its decision to engage with JeM. It dispels the notion that India engages with the group simply for retaliatory reasons as this analysis will show. The analysis provides preliminary support for two of three mechanisms, with threats to the hegemon's allies not appearing to be a consideration for India. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that future case study analysis can also support this mechanism. The Nigerian case study, serving as the control group, demonstrates that with little threat to economic capabilities, allies, or geopolitical interests, the propensity to engage with Boko Haram is not high. The counterterrorism strategy used

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by Nigeria since 2010 confirms this claim.

Sitting at the nexus of counterterrorism policy and the study of hegemonic power, the implication of this study is useful to both policymakers and academics. To policymakers, it categorizes the central considerations that states have in dealing with terrorist threats. Given the preliminary support for it, the study can lead to a more effective allocation of counterterrorism resources, especially in relation to economic assets, geopolitical interests, and bilateral relations. To scholars of hegemony and regionalism, this study underscores the agency of regional hegemons to dictate policy in their regions as Lake and Morgan (1997)[7] and Buzan (1996)[8] have posited. Furthermore, it proves useful for understanding the role of allyship and geopolitical rivalry in the presence of a terrorist threat.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first section outlines the existing theoretical approaches to understanding terrorist groups, hegemony, and the relationship between the two. The second section explains the logic and mechanisms that undergird the criterion for engagement theory. Then, I briefly discuss the use of process tracing and the justification for the use of qualitative research design. I then describe the case studies, India, and Nigeria, that are used to provide evidence for this theory. The following section analyzes the case studies and summarizes the results of the analysis. Finally, I revisit the literature in light of the analysis and offer concluding thoughts on policy implications and future research.

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Terrorist Groups and Hegemony

In international relations, the literature on this particular relationship is broadly divided across the study of counterterrorism, non-state actors, and hegemony and a smaller body in regionalism studies. For the purposes of this research, the literature can be seen to exist in three ideological camps, each with its own assumptions about the behavior of terrorist groups and hegemons. Importantly, only a minority of scholars in this field consider the unique position of regional hegemons.[9] This research builds on the work of regional security scholars and extends some of the logic of hegemonic behavior to regional orders.

The first of the ideological camps focuses primarily on the role of states with non-state actors, like terrorist groups, existing on the margins. Waltz has argued that the unbalanced power of a hegemon leaves weaker states vulnerable and in pursuit of building up their own hegemonic status.[10] This logic is extended in Organski's power transition theory to explain how, and when, a secondary state may overtake a hegemon.[11] Assuming that all states are rational actors, this understanding of hegemonic behavior provides some insight into the motivating factors for states to do certain tasks, namely how it views other rival states. The theory presented in this paper offers an explanatory variable for one way that hegemonic states consider terrorist groups in this calculation. By entertaining the idea that hegemonic states consider threats vis-à-vis how they improve the standing of their rivals, we can understand how terrorist groups may play a part in worsening the relationship between a hegemon and its rival. Other realist scholars, like Mearsheimer, present a logic between states that can apply to terrorist groups too. They assume that powers strive for hegemony because great powers have military capabilities and can hurt each other.[12] While again the primary actors are states, one can extend the logic, as the second ideological research camp shows, to non-state actors that also have military capabilities harmful to great powers. That terrorist groups possess military capabilities that can threaten the hegemonic orders of states does not necessarily undermine structural realist theory — rather it forces it to consider violent non-state actors on an equal footing to some hegemonic orders. Realist scholars have also provided a number of hegemonic characteristics from which the present research draws.[13] Overall, this ideological camp provides some theoretical underpinnings for hegemonic behaviors but provides few explanatory variables for engagement with non-state terrorism.

The second ideological camp composes of a newer body of literature concerned with non-state actors as composite or rational actors but certainly does not eliminate state behavior entirely. After accepting the relevance of non-state actors, this scholarship often looked at these actors in a unitary fashion. Wendy Pearlman's study challenged this notion and instead posited that non-state actors are "composite actors." In this logic, one should not consider non-state actors as a single block but rather as multi-faceted characters, especially in their conflict behavior.[14] Pearlman pays special attention to the individual actors who drive the decision-making process in violent and non-violent non-state actors.[15] While the individual actors are not relevant to the present research, this approach

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reinforces the notion that violent non-state actors are complex and often sporadic actors. This rivals another model for understanding terrorist actors. The strategic model posits that terrorist groups are, like states in realist theory, rational actors that attack civilians for political ends only.[16] As I briefly mentioned in the introduction, under this model, terrorist groups expect a rational retaliation for their actions. States, on the other hand, must grapple with the magnitude of their retaliation.[17] Notably, whether or not a state retaliates is a given. Because it simplifies the behavior of terrorist groups, the strategic model has become the conventional wisdom. It is the premise that many states take in their counter-terrorism efforts.[18] The model also begins to establish a game theory tit-for-tat type of relationship (equivalent retaliation theory) between states and terrorist groups, with a slight deviation in that the two agents do not initially cooperate, instead, they simply do not interact. In this camp, we also find some research that looks at the effect of hegemony on terrorist activity — a different variation of our variables of interest. Principal among them is Thomas Volgy's research, which finds that hegemony, systemic conflicts, and contagion effects are structural determinants of international terrorism.[19] Still, the regionality is missing. This body of literature pays a great deal of attention to the independent behavior of non-state actors, including terrorist groups, but it does not situate them in the wider realm of regional or international hegemony.

The final camp, though much smaller, is the most closely related to the present research. Housed almost entirely in the 'hegemonic disruption model' developed by William Newmann, this approach posits that terrorist groups pose a significant risk to the hegemonic task of the United States.[20] In contrast to the balance of power and power transition theory, the hegemonic disruption model allows non-state actors to independently influence the hegemonic order.[21] As a result, its proponents posit that international hegemons, only the United States in this case, face an asymmetric challenge to its order. This model presents a basis for the present research, unlike the other two camps, it brings together the behavior of hegemons and non-state actors together. I attempt to extend this logic of an independent influence on hegemonic order to a specified region. The current gap in this literature across the three camps treats hegemonic states and terrorist organizations as two actors existing in the same field but never interacting significantly. This paper seeks to explain how these two actors interact, especially in the unique circumstances of regional hegemonic order.

A Criterion for Engagement: An Alternative Theory

As scholars of international relations have established, hegemonic states bear responsibility for the maintenance of their order.[22] We can extend that logic to regional hegemons by assuming that they seek to maintain and protect their regional hegemonic orders. A part of that responsibility emerges from repelling threats to the order. An underrepresented threat to regional hegemonic orders is organized terrorist groups due to their sporadic and irregular behavior. Terrorist groups are referred to in this way to exclude the terrorist behaviors of lone actors and unorganized groups as defined by the Global Terrorism Database ("GTD").[23] However, the relationship between regional hegemons and the terrorist group cannot be assumed. Frequent or unprompted engagement with terrorist groups by powerful states can often lead to their legitimization and become a source of recruitment for them.[24] So, if blanket responses can legitimate groups unnecessarily and no response can pose a security risk, how do hegemons come to a decision? I posit that regional hegemons employ a criterion for engagement with terrorist groups and use these indicators to decide their propensity to engage with a terrorist group. This theory takes from previous models, namely the hegemonic disruption and strategic model, and treats terrorist groups as independent actors. It builds on them by attaching their behaviors to the regional hegemonic state that they live in proximity to.

I theorize that there are three central considerations, or criteria, that a regional hegemon may use to decide whether or not to engage with an organized terrorist group. The propensity of a regional hegemon to engage with an organized terrorist group serves as this paper's dependent variable. Firstly, however, we must define the term regional hegemon. In this paper, it is a state with the capacity to impose regimes, influence other power, and inspire institutional imitators.[25] For our purposes, a state must be able to do the above within a specified region. Secondly, to 'engage' with a terrorist group is to undertake either a military attack or operation against the group or to enter diplomatic talks with the group. Although rare, diplomatic engagement refers to efforts to negotiate or bargain between the state and the terrorist organization. However, diplomatic engagement cannot be treated equally to military engagement because of their unreliable often unavailable accounting.[26] For this reason, we can think of diplomatic engagement as the unlikely response when the threat level to the regional hegemon is not too great. Put

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differently, it is the lesser of the two engagement types. Turning to our independent variable, I posit that the threat level to the regional hegemon's status causes their propensity to engage with the terrorist group. Central to this theory are three independent but related mechanisms that undergird the variable. These are essentially the criterion for engagement. That is to say, these mechanisms dictate the threat level posed to the regional hegemon's status in its regional order. Here, I will outline the logic of each mechanism.

Hegemonic Economic Capabilities

First, a regional hegemon's status is affected by the threat level posed by the terrorist group to its economic capabilities. A primary goal of regional hegemons, like any state, is the growth of its economy and economic development.[27] For regional hegemonic orders, in particular, this goal serves a key role in the maintenance of the order as it allows the hegemonic state to keep its preponderant economic power. Furthermore, trade serves an even more important role in regional orders because of its positive effects on investment and reduction of transportation costs.[28] This is evidenced by the rise and popularity of regional trade agreements.[29] We can assume that regional hegemons play an important role in that trade relationship and, as such, rely on it to sustain hegemonic status. Following this logic, threats by a terrorist group against the economic capabilities of a regional hegemon have the potential to disrupt trade, discourage investment and hamper economic development in the order. As a result, the regional hegemon may experience a loss of hegemonic status. This presents a propensity for the regional hegemon to engage with the threat in order to eliminate or mitigate any potential loss of hegemonic status. Since regional trade and economic independence are an integral part of economic supremacy for a regional hegemon[30], serious threats to economic capability should be treated with the most force and speed. It should be expected that this mechanism weighs more heavily in a regional hegemon's calculation. That is to say, it is a necessary condition for a regional hegemon to engage. Although regional hegemons do trade outside their geographic region, in keeping with the definitions used in this paper, they should be able to influence other powers, which is not possible without significant economic leverage within its geographic region.

Hegemon's Regional Allies

Second, a regional hegemon's status is affected by the threat level posed by the terrorist group to the hegemon's allies. In hegemonic orders, secondary 'weaker' states play a role in maintaining the order as well.[31] This logic extends to regional hegemonic orders. Whether out of necessity, or choice, scholars have argued that secondary states in a hierarchical order understand that the hegemonic state has the authority to make certain commands that they follow and, in return, the secondary state may rely on the hegemonic state's economic or security protections.[32] To become a regional hegemon, a state will have to gain the support of other states in its region to establish some variation of a contractual relationship.[33] As a result, regional hegemons consider the security of their closest allies in the region, especially those who have supported their pursuit of hegemony. In this logic, a threat to the hegemon's allies can threaten its status but also invokes the responsibilities carried by the hegemon in its contractual relationship with its ally. In relation to the other mechanisms, we should only expect a regional hegemon to rely on this threat level if it does not greatly neglect its own security. This is because the regional hegemon, first and foremost, has a responsibility to its own economy and security.

Hegemon's Geopolitical Interests

Third, a regional hegemon's status is affected by the threat level to its geopolitical interests. This mechanism largely concerns how a terrorist group may independently support the ambitions of the regional hegemon's closest rival. We assume that regional hegemons are aware of their closest rival and the threats originating from that rival. Consequently, the regional hegemon is prepared to counter efforts that would undermine its hegemonic status and support the hegemonic aspirations of its rivals.[34] In this relationship the role of terrorist groups is unique. I am not seeking to observe state-sponsored terrorism by the rival to destabilize the regional hegemon as that focuses on two state actors. Instead, I am observing whether terrorist groups' inadvertent or independent actions support the goals or objectives of a regional hegemon's rivals. While it is difficult to discern the motivations of terrorist groups, we can define them as actions that, without explicit state support, improve the relative power of the hegemon's closest rival. In seeking to independently destabilize the regional hegemon for its own goals, the terrorist group will attack its

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civilians, harm its trade routes, erode its territorial integrity, or otherwise undermine its geopolitical standing to the benefit of a rival state. As a result, a regional hegemon has an incentive to quell the terrorist threat. In this logic, a weakened regional hegemon provides a greater window of opportunity for the rival state to overtake the hegemonic state. Knowing this, the regional hegemon's propensity to engage with a terrorist group, in order to avoid this outcome, should increase.

In sum, I theorize that three mechanisms dictate how a regional hegemon views the threat level emanating from a terrorist group to its hegemonic status. These mechanisms can be thought of as criteria for engagement, the pretenses under which a regional hegemon chooses to dedicate resources towards engaging with a non-state actor. There is significant interplay between all three mechanisms, however, they should all change in the same direction as all mechanisms describe a particular threat level. We should observe a positive correlation between the dependence and independent variable. Given the integral role that economic power plays in the hegemonic status of regional hegemons, the mechanism of economic capabilities can be perceived as a necessary function for this independent variable. I hypothesize that as the threat level to a regional hegemon's status increases, defined by the threat level to its economic capabilities, its closest allies, and its geopolitical interests, its propensity to engage with an organized terrorist group increases.

Research Design

To test this hypothesis, this paper will process-trace the propensity of two different regional hegemons, India, and Nigeria, to engage with a terrorist group, JeM, and Boko Haram, respectively. I employ a cross-case and over-time case selection design of India and Nigeria's engagement with terrorist groups between 2000 and 2019 to demonstrate the best causal argument. The cross-case analysis will distill the key differences, or the presence of the treatment, between the two countries' propensity to engage with terrorist groups. For our purposes, India serves as the treatment group and Nigeria serves as the control group. The motivation to use qualitative methods is a consequence of the use and distribution of data relating to terrorism. The scarcity of publicly available and reliable counterterrorism data, government-terrorist entity communication, and terrorism-related government information makes it difficult to quantitatively evaluate this relationship. The GTD comes closest to open-source data. I utilize the GTD to supplement certain mechanisms and help buttress some interesting results and observations. But, ultimately, and self-admittedly, the GTD cannot always provide the most accurate information.[35]

Process tracing establishes a causal argument by tracing hypothesized mechanisms through the use of, in our case, two case studies.[36] In this process, I identify the 'primary hypothesis' in this relationship and brand my theory as the 'rival hypothesis'. To establish causation, I use several causal graphs and timelines as well as establish alternate outcomes.[37] Finally, I present different kinds of evidence that will ultimately support the 'rival hypothesis', noting necessary and sufficient evidence. By observing the behavior over time, India, and Nigeria's propensity to engage with a terrorist group can be best established in the context of the independent variable, as opposed to some unrelated event. For clarity's sake, the unit of analysis is the behavior of the Indian and Nigerian governments over the 19-year period. To observe a 'propensity to engage' is to see a clear directive from either government to undertake a military campaign with the express objective of eliminating the terrorist threat or to enter diplomatic negotiations with the group.

To observe a change in the threat to hegemonic status, I rely on three operationalizations, one for each mechanism. Threats to economic capabilities can be perceived in attacks by either terrorist group to the hegemon's primary economic outputs. For Nigeria, that is the oil and gas, service, and manufacturing industries.[38] For India, that includes military-industrial capabilities and service industries.[39] The GTD provides key supplemental data to identify the target of Boko Haram and JeM's attacks. And as the theory stipulates, a greater number of attacks on Nigerian or Indian economic capabilities will see a greater rise in the dependent variable. Threat levels to India and Nigeria's allies are operationalized via particular terrorist attacks by the given group against Sri Lanka, Bhutan, or Bangladesh for India, and Benin, Cameroon, and Mali for Nigeria. Threats to geopolitical interests will be measured in relation to the relative strength of the regional hegemon's closest rival. To our definitional framework, instances of an imposed regime or influence of other powers can be seen in the changing of governments or key government figures imposed by the rival power. For instance, should Pakistan attempt to undermine an Indian-friendly government in the

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region or change a particular foreign policy of some power as a consequence of a JeM attack on India, then we would expect to see India engage with JeM rather quickly. For Nigeria hegemonic rivalry is not as clear cut but, it is widely accepted that South Africa is the closest rival in the region.[40]

To support the cross-case and overtime design, we must first establish the similarities between India and Nigeria. At the turn of the 20th century, Nigeria's political transformation toward civilian democracy ushered in a new period of economic growth.[41] It is now the largest market economy in Africa with a GDP of US\$432 billion as of 2020, over \$US100 billion more than its closest competitor.[42] Nigeria's economic capabilities are most apparent in its oil and gas industries. In 2004, it granted several loans to Ghana, São Tomé and Príncipe, totaling US\$45 million for oil expansion and development projects.[43] And since 2006, Nigeria's five trillion cubic meters of gas reserves were the largest reserves on the planet and nearly double its oil reserves.[44] Nigeria's oil and gas sector has attracted investments from major corporations from around the world, including India, China, and its main export partner, the United States.[45] Like Nigeria in West Africa, India commands great economic power in the South Asian region. India consistently ranks in the top five economies of the world, measured by purchasing power parity, market prices, and military expenditures.[46] India's defense spending, the fourth largest in the world, has established a robust defense industry in the country.[47] The Indian government works with over 1,800 companies on development and procurement projects to the tune of USD\$7.7 billion.[48]

In shows of hegemonic power, Nigeria has demonstrated the ability to influence and impose on other powers in the region. It has consistently supplied electricity to the West African countries of Benin and Niger, pioneered foreign aid initiatives in Africa, and dominated the agenda of the African Union.[49] Nigeria's large peacekeeping forces and military arsenal also support its claim to regional hegemony.[50] In the same way, India has dominated the foreign policy directive of South Asia. In 1988, following a coup in the Maldives, India imposed a regime in the country, and, following the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka, India was able to install a friendly regime.[51] In fact, India's authority is so broad that it is informally said that India applies the "Gjural Doctrine" in the region — the policy that implies India's ability to receive unilateral concessions from its neighbors for nothing in return.[52] In further support of this model, both Boko Haram and JeM have been understood to have similar ideational goals. Both groups are of the Islamist extremist ideological camp and both groups have made an express purpose of establishing a caliphate in their regions.[53]

Testing the Hypothesis: Evidence from India and Nigeria

In the first step of process tracing, I identify a 'primary' and 'rival hypothesis. For our purposes, the 'primary hypothesis' is the established theoretical understanding of this relationship, and the 'rival hypothesis' is the hypothesis I present. The primary hypothesis derives from the logic presented in Volgy (1997)[54] and Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare (1994).[55] It argues that the relationship between a terrorist group and any state is based on equivalent retaliation. That is to say, it hypothesizes that as the terrorist group's attacks on the state increase, the state's propensity to engage increases. The hypothesis does not distinguish between a state and a regional hegemon. The present hypothesis states that as the threat level to a regional hegemon's status increases, defined by the threat level to its economic capabilities, its closest allies, and its geopolitical interests, its propensity to engage with an organized terrorist group increases. I should note that for each case study, like with any case study of this nature, there should be no expectation that non-engagement is observed. In reality, non-engagement in response to or in relation to terrorism is not an option for many states. Instead, to observe the treatment in the case of India and then solidify the claim by observing no treatment in Nigeria is to identify the motivation for a particular decision to engage with JeM and Boko Haram.

India and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM): The Treatment Group

Turning first to India, its propensity to engage with JeM can be understood most clearly after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks. Within the framework of this research design, it is at this point that the treatment is administered. The reasons for these are primarily to dispel any influence of state sponsorship on the part of Pakistan. Until 2002, Pakistani intelligence and government had been suspected to support JeM in its attacks against Indian forces.[56] Those reports, though continuously parroted by some Indian officials, were largely dispelled by 2002.[57] The

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storming of the Lal Masjid in 2007 presents evidence that Pakistan is no longer friendly with the JeM.[58] Following the timeline since JeM was founded in 2000, we can trace nine attacks orchestrated, in full or in part, by JeM against India. Taking, for example, the 2016 terrorist attacks on an Indian airbase and consulate in Uri and the region of Kashmir, we can observe at least two of the three mechanisms that undergird the independent variable. With India's key economic and defense interests in Northern India being the military-industrial economy[59], the JeM attack threatened its economic capability to continue those interests. As I have theorized, India's regional hegemony includes in some part a dependency on strong economic development and trade in the region. In targeting Indian military assets, including an airbase station in Punjab and a brigade station in Uri, the JeM attack threatened to harm the military-industrial economy. The entrenchment of public-private cooperation on defense and security in India reinforces the effects of this on economic development.

Secondly, the JeM attack undoubtedly threatened the geopolitical interests of India, and thus, threatened its hegemonic status because of the geo-strategic location of both attacks. Having occurred in Northern India, near the disputed provinces of Jammu and Kashmir, attacks like this can serve as a signal of weakness. That is to say, in the wake of this attack, the perception of a weak India motivated Pakistan's ability to exert hegemonic power as evidenced by its increased influence in Jammu and Kashmir.[60] In turn, the threat to India's geopolitical interests and, by extension its hegemonic status, increased. Unfortunately, however, we see no evidence that JeM's attacks threaten any of India's allies. Nonetheless, when put together, the present threat to economic capabilities and geopolitical interest presents an incentive, or a propensity, to engage with the terrorist group. And that stands to be true. Following the attacks in January and September of 2016, Indian Forces engaged with JeM by launching a series of 'surgical strikes' against JeM locations along the Line of Control between India and Pakistan.[61] Here, India began a military engagement with operatives of JeM. Particularly after the September attacks, referred to as the Uri Terrorist Attacks, Prime Minister Modi promised that the perpetrators of the attack would be punished.[62] There is no evidence to suggest diplomacy was used, in line with what was theorized earlier — that diplomatic engagement is the rarer of the two. And to dispel any evidence of state sponsorship, we observe that Pakistan provided both ministerial support in the investigation[63] and a public statement to that effect.[64] As opposed to the primary hypothesis, which would argue the 2016 attack was merely a provocation by JeM, the causal graph of the rival hypothesis illustrates the direct link between threats to economic capabilities and geopolitical interests to the threat level experienced by India's hegemonic status to its decision to engage militarily in September following the attack.

To help strengthen causality, we can look to several alternate or counterfactual outcomes. Should JeM have not attacked any of India's military-economic capabilities, India's propensity to engage with them would have been limited. Virtually no evidence supports the argument that India would have engaged with JeM without any particular threat to itself. Another alternate outcome is that India is attacked but does not feel threatened. For this to be true, the theoretical argument in the equivalent retaliation framework would need to show that India has no incentive to deter future attacks — which is the express goal of equivalent retaliation theory.[65] By extension, the damage to India's security would need to be limited in scope. Here, this alternate outcome fails. The attacks in 2016 were the deadliest in nearly two decades, so it would be unreasonable to argue that India did not feel threatened.[66] Further, should JeM have attacked a different part of India, with a less robust industry or a less geopolitically important region, we could have seen a different outcome. A final alternate outcome would posit that India does not care for its economic capabilities in this particular area, hence its hegemonic status is not threatened. By this logic, India could have chosen not to engage at all. This would not have been possible given the existence of valuable Research & Development centers, the Srinagar and Udhampur air stations, and numerous industrial craft and laboratories in the region, attracting investments of up to US\$85 million, according to the State Industrial Development Corporation in a given year.[67] As such, there is little evidence to support this as a viable alternative.

With no viable alternative and little evidence to suggest that the JeM attack is part of a retaliatory cycle, one can reasonably draw the conclusion some other criteria were followed. With key economic output in the region, from the R&D Centres and private businesses, a discouragement of investment or disruption of trade threatens the economic preponderance of power India enjoys. This is a necessary and sufficient piece of evidence. Further, the location of these attacks in particular was positioned to threaten India's geopolitical interests by increasing the relative strength of its rival, Pakistan. This piece of evidence is necessary but not sufficient and so it affirms the relevance of the

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present hypothesis, but on its own, cannot confirm it. To the primary hypothesis, evidence is required to show that the only mechanism by which India responds to JeM is to retaliate. The only evidence that supports this is the fact that India did respond. But its propensity to engage was not simply to retaliate. The threat to economic capabilities and geopolitical interests in this example demonstrate that a more nuanced mechanism was at play.

Nigeria and Boko Haram: The Control Group

Since 2002, Boko Haram has taunted and inflicted major harm on many parts of Northern Nigeria.[68] While the total magnitude of Boko Haram's attacks has been greater than JeM[69] that number is not relevant to explain the propensity to engage with Boko Haram. That is to say, the criterion for engagement has not been detected in the relationship between Nigeria and Boko Haram. As such, we do not observe the treatment in this case. Nonetheless, we can use this case to demonstrate a strong causal argument and counter the primary hypothesis. As with India, that the treatment is not administered here does not mean that Nigeria did not engage with Boko Haram. Instead, the goal is to distill what affects its propensity to engage with the group by tracing key events in the relationship.

Following the events since Boko Haram's foundation in 2002, we can observe from the reaction of the Nigerian government that the propensity to engage with Boko Haram is not motivated by threats to its hegemonic status. This is because Boko Haram does not appear to threaten Nigeria's hegemonic status. Though the first attacks occurred in 2003, Boko Haram's most threatening levels came after 2009, when the President of Nigeria established a 'commission of inquiry'.[70] To many observers, this reaction was rather muted and reflected the government's belief that Boko Haram was not a major threat at the time.[71] Between 2010 and 2014, Boko Haram has, according to the GTD, carried out over 1,000 fatal and non-fatal attacks with a majority of those targeting civilians in Nigeria's Christian minority communities.[72] Take, for example, the December 2010 attacks in the Plateau State. Here, we would expect that the existence of a threat to economic capabilities, allies, or geopolitical interests would affect Nigeria's propensity to engage with Boko Haram. However, the attacks targeted civilians and bore no significant economic cost. This is not to excuse the catastrophic harm of Boko Haram, but to show its effect on this relationship. The fact that the target of Boko Haram's attacks did not significantly alter Nigeria's economic capabilities is the first evidence that there was no threat to its hegemonic status. As Jacob Zenn has noted: "[n]or ha[s]...Boko Haram launched campaigns to disrupt the vital southern Nigeria-based oil and gas sector, which has enabled Nigeria to become Africa's largest oil and gas producer and one of the top sources of US oil purchases." [73] For one reason or another, Boko Haram did not seriously threaten any of Nigeria's oil and gas factories or assets and so could not harm the country's economic capabilities and, by extension, its ability to wield economic hegemonic power.

Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that Boko Haram presented a threat to Nigeria's allies or harmed its geopolitical interests. In 2015, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari recruited the help of Nigeria's allies, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to establish the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).[74] While Nigeria has aided in this regional initiative, Chad has been the most involved in the fight against Boko Haram.[75] The establishment of the MNJTF serves as evidence of regional hegemony by Nigeria but does not point to a propensity to engage as a result of a threat to an ally. As the majority of Boko Haram's attacks existed within Niger, this mechanism finds no evidence of the relationship between Nigeria and Boko Haram. Since 2016, there have been reports that Boko Haram operates out of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon but there is very limited activity in those areas.[76] It shows some evidence that the threat to Nigeria's allies could have played a part. On the geopolitical front, with Boko Haram's stronghold being in the desolate and barren northeast states of Nigeria the potential of a strategic loss is slim. Following the December 2010 attacks, South Africa did not impose any regimes in the region, nor did it exploit the relative weakness of Nigeria to its advantage. In fact, between 2013-2014, the South African government, among others, supplied arms to Nigeria in its fight against the terrorist group.[77] Therefore, we cannot establish a link between any causal mechanisms and the outcome of interest. The purpose of this exercise is to present a case study wherein we do not observe a treatment, as explained above. In India, we do see evidence of the use of a criterion for engagement based on the variables presented in this paper, whereas in Nigeria we do not.

Summarizing the Results

Though the number of total attacks is much higher in Nigeria than in India, this evidence suggests that the actual

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magnitude of the attacks is not relevant so far as it does not threaten the regional hegemon's status. Why Nigeria engages with Boko Haram can be explained simply by the threat Boko Haram presented to the international community as a whole, especially following the Chibok girls' kidnappings in 2014.[78] Regional hegemony was not jeopardized at any point, despite the international sensationalization of Boko Haram, and so Nigeria's propensity to engage with them was low, according to the present theory. This is confirmed by Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy, which has been characterized as slow and ineffective.[79] This is in contrast to India, where it was apparent that threats existed to its military-industrial complex and other economic outputs in the northern regions as well as an obvious opportunity for its greatest hegemonic rival in the region to overtake it motivated a propensity to engage. The similarity of both groups in ideology and structure further strengthens the cross-case analysis as it controls for the difference between different terrorist groups.

Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates some support for the criterion for engagement hypothesis. As the case of India shows, as the threat to India's hegemonic status increases, its propensity to engage with JeM also increases. However, this particular case study does not present evidence that the threat level to a hegemon's allies affects a propensity to engage. This is largely a result of a lack of threat to any of India's allies by JeM. And in the case of Nigeria, dealing with a similar terrorist group, we do not observe the same incentive to engage with Boko Haram. The lack of threats to economic capabilities, its allies, and geopolitical interests meant that Nigeria's regional hegemonic status was not under threat. In fact, the analysis shows that Nigeria's allies, as part of the contractual relationship, had come to aid Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram. This reverse effect does prove hegemonic status, but its effect on the larger relationship is the subject of future research. As the threat to Nigeria's hegemonic status did not change, neither did its propensity to engage with the terrorist group. Instead, the evidence suggests that the international counter-terrorism effort spearheaded by other powers was the main driver behind Nigeria's incentive to engage with Boko Haram.[80]

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explain what affects a regional hegemon's propensity to engage with a terrorist group. In the complexity of regional order, the decision and motivation to engage with a non-state actor cannot be assumed. While the conventional understanding has posited that states generally respond in a retaliatory fashion in order to dispel future attacks. This analysis provides an alternative theoretical understanding based on a categorization of key tenets of regional hegemony. These tenets, I argue, when threatened, create a propensity to engage with terrorist groups. The analysis provided evidence to support this claim from a cross-case and overtime analysis of India and Nigeria. Utilizing the process tracing method, this analysis yields some evidence of a causal argument in the case of India. With the presence of a threat to economic capability and geopolitical interests, India's propensity to engage with JeM was present. Whereas in Nigeria those threats were not present and the country's counterterrorism strategy demonstrated that.

Although the equivalent retaliation theory is useful in explaining some instances of this relationship, it does not effectively categorize the behavior of regional hegemons. Perhaps the simplicity of that model is attractive to defense policymakers and counterterrorism officials. However, given the nature of terrorist groups, simplicity can lead to ineffective policy decisions. This study does not seek to completely contradict the retaliation theory, but rather it provides additional complexity to its framework. In one-off instances of terrorism, it can be easy to turn to the retaliatory theory but the longevity of terrorism threats in modern-day render that understanding somewhat reductive. Identifying the key components of hegemony that regional hegemons may face threats against can help better protect them. For policy practitioners that can yield a better understanding of a regional hegemon's economic capabilities and bilateral relationships which by extension can lead to more effective resource allocation. With the increasing prospects of bipolarity on the international stage, the role of regional superpowers can yield significant security and strategic power. And so, this understanding of their foreign and counterterrorism policy can help researchers understand how they may behave in the face of future terrorist threats.

The hegemonic disruption and strategic models for understanding terrorist groups' logic are extended in this study. To the hegemonic disruption model, this study has added another consideration for how non-state actors independently affect the behavior of states and applies some of its logic to a regional setting. To the strategic model,

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this study does not refute that terrorist groups are rational actors but instead demonstrates an alternative consequence to their actions. As the Indian case study shows, a consequence of the JeM attacks was a threat to geopolitical interests and by extension hegemonic status. While the intended effect of the group is some lower-level political goal, there is an outsized effect on the state's hegemonic status. Most importantly, this analysis illustrates the relevance of non-state actors, specifically terrorist groups, to hegemonic orders. While the realist school of thought largely sidelines non-state actors, this study demonstrates that there is a real consequence to their actions.

While this qualitative research does well to encapsulate the complexity of this relationship, a quantitative analysis of this relationship can reinforce the theory. The scarcity of publicly available data makes this endeavor challenging, albeit worthwhile. Furthermore, another cross-case analysis to observe the threats to the regional hegemon's allies may reinforce the validity of the mechanism. In order to find preliminary support for this theory, the mechanisms were placed under the umbrella of one independent variable. Now that some have been established, it may also be useful to expand the three mechanisms into independent variables of their own. In any case, the existence of some evidence to support this paper's theory provides a wide field of future exploration at the nexus of hegemony, terrorism, and regionalism.

Notes

[1] Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism: Theory, Tactics, and Counter-Measures*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 50.

[2] Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10. Buzan and Wæver concur with Lake and Morgan (1997: 6-7) that in the post-cold war world, regions are the 'locus of conflict' and the place we should expect to see the most cooperation to avoid conflict. Such an argument rests on two main assumptions, as identified by Buzan and Wæver. First, that the decline of superpower rivalry reduces the global power interest in the rest of the world (See: Stein and Lobell 1997: 119-20; Lake 1997: 61. Second, that post-cold war international systems are 'lite powers' and are more concerned with domestic issues therefore, leaving local states to sort their own military-security relations (See: Buzan and Segal, 1996).

[3] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, 40.

[4] Harmonie Toros, "We Don't Negotiate with Terrorists!": Legitimacy and Complexity in Terrorist Conflicts." *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 4 (2008): 408.

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[6] Bryan Brophy-Baermann and John A. C. Conybeare, "Retaliating against Terrorism: Rational Expectations and the Optimality of Rules versus Discretion," *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 1 (1994): 196-197.

[7] David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan. *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

[8] Buzan, Barry and G. Segal. "The Rise of 'Lite' Powers: A Strategy for the Postmodern State." *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 3 (1996): 1-10.

[9] Most studies of hegemony and hegemonic states concentrate on the international politics as a whole. The United States is the obvious case study for unipolar hegemonic orders and as a result is the subject of much research, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union. A smaller body of literature does exist to challenge this conception. Excellent research was conducted by Chase-Dunn and Friedman (2016) and Meyer (2019) on regional hegemons and their behaviour. Amitav Acharya's study on norm localization in Asian regionalism (2004) also provides a good understanding of regional hegemon. For examples of research on regional security see: Lake and Morgan (1997), Buzan and Segal (1996).

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- [10] Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 29.
- [11] J. Kugler and A. F. K. Organski, 1989, "The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation," in Midlarsky, M., Ed., *The Handbook of War Studies*. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
- [12] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Updated edition. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2014), 84.
- [13] See, Waltz (1979), Mearsheimer (2014), Gilpin (2016) for detailed explanations of hegemonic behaviour from a realist perspective. For a regional that accepts unipolar hegemonic behaviour see Zhang (2015).
- [14] Wendy Pearlman, "A Composite-Actor to Conflict Behaviour," In *Rethinking Violence: States and non-state actors in Conflict*, eds. Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010,) 198.
- [15] Pearlman, "A Composite-Actor to Conflict Behaviour," 198.
- [16] For summaries of this model, see (Crenshaw, 1988:13–31), (Crenshaw, 1990:7–24) and (Gambill, 1998:51–66)
- For applications of the model, see (Abrahms, 2006:42–78) (Kydd and Walter, 2006: 49–80) and (DeNardo, 1985:3).
- [17] Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare, "Retaliating against Terrorism: Rational Expectations and the Optimality of Rules versus Discretion," 196-197.
- [18] Erica Chenoweth, *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, 623.
- [19] Thomas J. Volgy , Lawrence E. Imwalle & Jeff J. Corntassel "Structural determinants of international terrorism: The effects of hegemony and polarity on terrorist activity," *International Interactions* 23, no. 2, (1997), 209.
- [20] William Newmann, "Hegemonic Disruption: The Asymmetric Challenge to US Leadership," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 5, no.3 (Fall 2011), 75.
- [21] Newmann, "Hegemonic Disruption," 72.
- [22] See: Waltz (1979), Mearsheimer (2014), Gilpin (2016), Zhang (2015).
- [23] Global Terrorism Database, "Codebook: Methodology, Inclusion Criteria, and Variables" (Baltimore: University of Maryland, 2021), 11.
- [24] Seden Akcinaroglu and Efe Tokdemir. *Battle for Allegiance: Governments, Terrorist Groups, and Constituencies In Conflict*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 24-25.
- [25] This definition is adopted from Seva Gunitsky, "From Shocks to Waves: Hegemonic Transitions and Democratization in the Twentieth Century." *International Organization* 68, no. 3 (2014): 564. I recognize that this definition is rather broad in comparison to definitions used by other scholarly work (Jackson 2018, Zhang 2015 and Mearsheimer 2014). However, this definition best encapsulates the characteristics of a regional hegemon, especially because the ability to influence other powers and inspire imitators serves an important purpose in one of the mechanisms I propose.
- [26] Haris Pesto, "The Role of Diplomacy in the Fight Against Terrorism." *Connections* 10, no. 1 (2010): 66.
- [27] Hendrik Van den Berg and Joshua J. Lewer. *International Trade and Economic Growth*. (London: Routledge, 2015), 3-6.

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[28] David Ricardo, "On Foreign Trade." In *On the Principles of Political Economy, and Taxation*, (Project Gutenberg, 2010), 156.

[29] Rohini Acharya, ed, *Regional Trade Agreements and the Multilateral Trading System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.

[30] Filippo Di Mauro, Stephane Dees, and Warwick J. McKibbin. *Globalisation, Regionalism and Economic Interdependence*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[31] Lake, "Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics." 56.

[32] David A. Lake, "Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics." *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 58.

[33] Evan B. Montgomery, *In the Hegemon's Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers*. (Cornell University Press, 2016), 8.

[34] See Power-Transition Theory: J. Kugler and A. F. K. Organski, 1989, "The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation," in Midlarsky, M., Ed., *The Handbook of War Studies*. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 73. This theory explains that a rival state gradually builds up its ability to exert hegemonic influence until it is finally able to overtake the hegemonic state. For our purposes, we can assume that the regional hegemon understands that their rival state may seek to overtake it at some point in this way.

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[36] Jacob I. Ricks and Amy H Liu. "Process-Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide." *PS, Political Science & Politics* 51, no. 4 (2018): 842–46.

[37] For more in-depth detail on the steps of process tracing, see Ricks and Liu (2018).

[38] Heinrich Bergstresser. *A Decade of Nigeria: Politics, Economy and Society 2004-2016*. (Boston: BRILL, 2017), 17.

[39] A. Tiwari and Shahbaz, M. "Does defense spending stimulate economic growth in India?" *Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA)*, no. 30880, (May 2011): 3.

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[42] World Bank Data bank, "GDP (Current US\$) – Nigeria," *World Bank* (2021). South Africa's GDP is US\$300 billion as of 2020. To dispel the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I look at 2018 and 2019 numbers. In 2018, Nigeria's US\$397 billion was higher than South Africa's US\$368 billion. In 2019, Nigeria beat out South Africa by over US\$100 billion with its US\$448 billion. At its peak in 2011, South Africa's GDP was US\$416 billion. At its peak in 2014, Nigeria's GDP was US\$546 billion. See World Bank for data.

[43] Heinrich Bergstresser. *A Decade of Nigeria: Politics, Economy and Society 2004-2016*. 17.

[44] Bergstresser, *A Decade of Nigeria: Politics, Economy and Society 2004-2016*, 69.

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- [45] Bergstresser, *A Decade of Nigeria: Politics, Economy and Society 2004-2016*, 64.
- [46] Alan Chong, *International Security in the Asia-Pacific Transcending ASEAN Towards Transitional Polycentrism* 1st ed, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); 3.
- [47] Laxman Kumar Behera. *India's Defence Economy: Planning, Budgeting, Industry, and Procurement* (England: Routledge, 2021), 70-71.
- [48] Kumar Behera, *India's Defence Economy: Planning, Budgeting, Industry, and Procurement*, 1.
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- [51] Madhavi Bhasan, "India's Role in South Asia: Perceived Hegemony or Reluctant Leadership?," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 3, no.4(2008): 78.
- [52] Bhasan, "India's Role in South Asia: Perceived Hegemony or Reluctant Leadership? 78.
- [53] For Boko Haram see Zenn (2020), Faluyi, Khan and Akinola (2019) and Kendhammer and McCain (2018). For JeM see Smith and Schulze (2020) and Bhatt (2010).
- [54] Volgy et al. "Structural determinants of international terrorism: The effects of hegemony and polarity on terrorist activity."
- [55] Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare, "Retaliating against Terrorism: Rational Expectations and the Optimality of Rules versus Discretion."
- [56] Vinay Kaura, "India's Counter-Terrorism Policy Against Jihadist Terror: Challenges and Prospects." *Connections. The Quarterly Journal* (English Ed.) 16, no. 4 (2017): 62.
- [57] S. K. Saini, "Storming of Lal Masjid in Pakistan: An Analysis." *Strategic Analysis* 33, no. 4 (2009): 559.
- [58] Saini, "Storming of Lal Masjid in Pakistan: An Analysis," 554.
- [59] Kumar Behera. *India's Defence Economy: Planning, Budgeting, Industry, and Procurement*, 32.
- [60] Salona Kapur, "From Copenhagen to Uri and across the Line of Control: India's 'Surgical Strikes' as a Case of Securitisation in Two Acts." *Global Discourse* 8, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 68.
- [61] Ellen Barry and Salman Masood, "India Claims, 'Surgical Strikes' Across Line of Control in Kashmir," *The New York Times* (September 2016), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/world/asia/kashmir-india-pakistan.html?_r=0
- [62] Vinay Kaura, "India's Pakistan policy: from 2016 'surgical strike' to 2019 Balakot 'airstrike'," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 109, no. 3, (2020): 279.
- [63] Ministry of External Affairs, "Transcript of Joint Briefing by MEA and MoD," *Government of India* (29 September 2016). Retrieved from https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/27446/Transcript_of_Joint_Briefing_by_MEA_and_MoD,_September_29_2016
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[66] Kaura, "India's Pakistan policy: from 2016 'surgical strike' to 2019 Balakot 'airstrike'," 279-280.

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[71] Hussein Solomon, "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram." *The RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (2012): 9.

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[73] Jacob Zenn, *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria*, 6.

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[78] Daniel Jordan Smith, "What Happened to the Chibok Girls?" *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 13, no. 2 (2015):160.

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[80] James J. Hentz and Hussein Solomon. *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 136.

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