

India and China's Foreign Policy in West Asia: Soft Power Potentials

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Abstract:

In international relations, West Asia's physical location and closeness to continents and nations – such as South Asia, China, Central Asia, Europe, and Africa – give it a prominent place. In addition to the area's abundant energy resources and commercial routes to other regions of the globe, Abrahamic religions trace their ancestry back to this region. Approximately 34% of global oil production, 45% of crude oil exports, and 48% of known oil reserves are attributed to this area. With the wealth of natural resources in the area, many countries want a piece of the action. Because of external and internal hostilities, the area has long been one of the most unstable in the world. Europe and the United States have occupied the region at different points in time and with differing degrees of success. State governments, populations, ecosystems, natural resources, and economies have all suffered due to the infamous Great Game. The region has been characterized by internal and external transformations like civil wars, religious fanaticism, sectarian rivalry, and separatist movements. In light of this background, this paper studied the foreign policies of India and China in West Asia through the prism of soft power and using a more realistic approach to assessing the present state of affairs.

Keywords: Arab world, Resources, Global politics, Soft power.

1. Introduction:

Aspirations for greater influence in global politics are high for India, which wants to benefit from the expertise of other countries throughout the world. After taking office as Prime Minister, Modi made a trip to more than 30 nations in the span of less than a year and a half. Making in India is only one example of India's new foreign policy, focusing on the Diasporas. Like the United Kingdom and the United States, India has begun to invest in its 'soft power' to reach a broader audience on the world stage. India's energy security relies heavily on the West Asian area, which supplies roughly 60% of India's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports [1]. This region must be given more attention to combat or isolate Pakistan and implement the "Make in India" initiative. India's soft power will be significant when it comes to gaining a foothold in a new territory. India, which has a large Diaspora in the area, can play an important role in peace building due to the ongoing civil conflict. India merely needs to dive into its soft power as a resource. To better understand India's soft power potential in West Asia and the problems it confronts, the author focuses on China, which has also used soft power to make inroads in the region.

2. Historical Overview of India and West Asia:

Before the Non-Aligned Movement, Indian relations with West Asia were influenced by the idea of Afro-Asian unity. There is evidence of this in India's position on Palestine. Previously, India's relationship with the area was based on the country's political ideology. For example, the relationship between India and Israel may be taken into account. When Rajiv Gandhi was in charge, India began the process of establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel in the 1980s under his leadership. Later, Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a concerted effort to deepen the Israeli-Indian relationship. India's ties to Israel have grown stronger during the last two decades. The recent normalization of the diplomatic relations between Israel and Arab nations (such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain) has facilitated India's inclusion into the region [2].

India's diplomacy with the nations in the West Asian area has grown more forceful, despite the country's past ideological reluctance. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, India faced a significant policy quandary because of its ideological orientation in the area. As a non-aligned country, India might have opposed the West's participation in the area or supported the United States' objectives and condemned Iraq [3]. Even yet, India began to assert itself as an essential player in the region as multi-polarity, and China's involvement grew. There are no political consequences since India has followed its most attractive economic possibilities with a "strictly corporate approach" [4]. This may be seen in India's response to the US-Iran deal's collapse. Despite a drop in Iranian oil imports, the Indian government insisted that "trade or infrastructural development in Iran was not on hold." [5] As part of the "Make in India" initiative and the "Link West" policy, India is working on expanding its economic ties with West Asia by attracting investment in various areas.

3. India with the policy of "Link West":

India's prime ministers have strived to preserve a friendly relationship with countries in the Middle East throughout the years. Maintaining this connection has also been a priority for Indian PM Narendra Modi. India's Prime Minister introduced the "Link West" initiative further to improve ties with the area [6]. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh mentioned a "Look West" strategy during the UPA-I government, and he noted how crucial this area is to the country's energy security. Israel, Iran, and Arab Gulf nations are the primary target of India's "Look West" strategy [7]. While in New York, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with American Jewish leaders and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, breaking with long-standing tradition [8]. India has made several high-profile trips to the region in order to implement its "Link West" agenda. Many significant nations in the area, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran, have sought India. With the support of these high-profile trips, India could get investment from the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, for example, has committed \$100 billion to India's petrochemicals, infrastructure, manufacturing, refining, and mining industries, among others.

Additionally, the United Arab Emirates has announced a food corridor investment of \$ 7 billion [9]. Even in the defense sector, India and the UAE formed a comprehensive Strategic Partnership, after which Manohar Parikkar—first India's defense minister—

visited the UAE in 2016^[10]. Similarly, the Chabahar port is a pivotal moment in India-Iran ties. When it comes to dealing with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel all at once, India's "Link West" strategy has allowed it to gain influence ^[11]. India's West Asia strategy has helped prioritize and speed up economic involvement in the area. Even though India has yet to build an institutional structure to engage the nations in the area, residents of West Asian countries still see it favorably. This is primarily because Indian citizens are enamored with the country. The celebration of Yoga Day, which India spearheaded, has been warmly embraced by most nations.

4. The Concept and Nature of Soft Power:

'Power' is a debatable notion in the world of international affairs. As far as this notion is concerned, various IR schools have varied viewpoints ^[12]. Historically, the idea has been described on the grounds of military and economic strength to assess state capacity. But recently, Joseph Nye, in his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power," has differentiated the three dimensions of power as coercion via military threats, influence through economic incentives, and finally, the capacity to co-opt other nations (to which he refers as "soft power" and is distinct from the other two identified power which falls within "hard power" category)^[13].

Internationally, the notion of "soft power" has gotten a lot of attention since first coined. As a result, the notion has been widely embraced by theorists and political leaders and has established its way into the foreign policies of several countries. A further expansion of the idea was made in his other series of books published in 1990, 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2008. Nye, a Harvard political scientist describes soft power as "the capacity to obtain what you want by appeal rather than coercion." ^[14] Rather than turning to force and coercion, the use of soft power emphasizes persuasion or influence. Further, he discusses the origins of soft power, which he describes as culture, political principles, and foreign policy. However, in the current context, the sources of soft power have extended to cover all those intangible factors that possess an appealing or influencing power, including tourism, diaspora, theatrical and movies, international students, and so on. According to Nicolos Blarcl, soft power is the "capacity to influence the preferences of other states because of their perception of you." ^[15] Even though the notion of soft power is sometimes criticized for being sluggish in generating results, nation-states have widely acknowledged it as an option to accomplish their foreign policy objectives. But it cannot be stated that a nation's prosperity depends entirely on either soft or hard power. According to Nye, a nation's prosperity is dependent on a mix of hard and soft power, what he refers to as "smart power."

5. The Origins of India's Soft Power:

In contrast to hard power, India's power might be characterized as soft power. Indian foreign policy under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru demonstrates the importance of soft power. In the words of Kennedy, "Nehru's personal sense of moral relevance in public diplomacy and his favored use of soft power over hard might determined the essence of India's early foreign policy." ^[16] In addition, India's vast history and culture and the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and so n have consistently helped it

interact with the rest of the globe. India's many cultural offerings, such as its spiritualism and yoga and its popular music, film and television productions, cuisine, political institutions, election campaigns, and other landmarks, have all drawn tourists from across the globe. "The Spiritualism of India has drawn people from all over the globe, and its Gurus have toured throughout the world promoting yoga and mysticism," says C Raja Mohan, who acknowledges this. According to him, India has significant soft power assets that may be used to achieve its foreign policy objectives [17]. "The government's bureaucratic efforts haven't done as much good as Bollywood has done. India has now started to gain any soft power levers, from classical and popular music to its food and the rising impact of its artists and intellectuals." [18]

Former Union Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor believes that "it is not the strength of the army or the size of the economy that counts (two dimensions where India has failed to compete with other major powers like China or the US), but rather the nation that presented the 'best narrative' would qualify as a global actor." According to him, India's soft-power elements include "films and Bollywood, yoga, Ayurvedic and political plurality and religious diversity and openness to global ideas." [19] Furthermore, Rani D. Mullen asserts that "Soft power in India is no longer limited to Bollywood, yoga, or global icons such as Mahatma Gandhi. As a developing country with an established democracy and expanding economic prosperity, India has become an increasingly appealing development model for other developing nations". [20] A long history of cultural & civilization ties between India & Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East has been utilized by Indian diplomats to bolster their relations with these nations. China's deliberate use of soft power in its foreign policy has inspired India to use its soft power in its foreign policy endeavors. India launched a variety of policies, including the Look East Policy, the Act East Policy, the Link West Policy, the Connect Central Asia Policy, and the strengthening of its ties to Africa. For India's two-pronged purpose of fulfilling foreign policy objectives and strengthening its image in the targeted area, all of these programs work in tandem. This shows that India has begun a determined effort under this new global order to channel these resources — notably those of Indians living overseas — towards the generation of soft power that may result in good foreign policy results. [21] On the other hand, scholars believe that India lacks a well-defined plan for using its soft power capabilities.

6. The Growth of India's Soft Power:

Tharoor believes that India's soft power has developed without the influence of government programs that Nicolas Blarel refers to as soft power by default'. This is partly due to Indian diplomats' reluctance to acknowledge "soft power" as a major weapon of statecraft. A public Diplomacy Division (IDDD) was established by India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEEA) in 2006, which highlighted the government's determination to leverage its soft power capabilities in an organized way to accomplish its goals. There has been a strong focus on fostering a broader national and global conversation on foreign policy problems [22]. In 2013-14, this new division received an additional 240 million rupees in funding. An additional way to portray India as a diverse and cosmopolitan country is via the work of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations

(ICCR), which has established 22 cultural centers across 19 countries. These centers host film festivals, book fairs, and art exhibits. An annual & rotating World Hindi Conference is held, and lessons in Hindi are offered at various government facilities to promote its usage overseas.^[23] Mullen says that the institute was established immediately after independence to encourage cultural and intellectual relations with a budget that expanded from 850 million rupees to 1.6 billion rupees between 2008-9 and 2013-14.

In addition, India's present regime is working to increase the country's attractiveness and influence. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is drawing on the country's soft power to build ties with other countries across the globe. Establishing relations with India's global diaspora is the most prominent one. More than 25 million people live in India's Diaspora, which is the world's second-biggest, according to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister, attempts to connect India with other countries by tapping into the diaspora. His use of social media, a kind of soft power, also allows him to communicate with Indians both within and outside of the country. When Narendra Modi ran for president, he was the first Indian leader to exploit social media to its fullest extent. The Prime Minister's own app and daily tweets on various topics demonstrate that his social media effort is a top focus. While in the United States on a business trip, he visited Silicon Valley, California's information technology hub, and met Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg. The achievements of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom and the United States speak volumes about India's potential. PM Narendra Modi said in California on September 27, 2015, that he believes "brain drain may become brain gain" because of these potentials, and he hopes to make use of India's global brain drain. When he declared, "India is waiting for you," he urged young Indian-Americans working in the IT field to return to their homeland and employ their talents ^[24]. Modi's 'social media diplomacy' has undoubtedly bolstered India's international clout. In addition, India's soft power is expected to grow as a result of a wide range of ongoing political and diplomatic efforts, including enhancing its ease of doing business standings, unfurling its amazing India tourism campaign, getting international Yoga Day recognized by the United Nations, and investing in Buddhist diplomacy^[25] throughout the course of time. However, in a world where perception is everything, Indian officials are now really trying to expand India's potential in strategy to obtain other nation-states.

7. Soft power leverages in West Asia:

West Asia has a significant strategic & economic role in Indian foreign policy objectives. There are about 728 billion barrels of crude oil and 2,509 trillion cubic feet of proven worldwide natural gas reserves in the area recognized for their abundance ^[26]. Petroleum product consumption increased by 10 percent to 183 million tonnes 2 or 3.9 million barrels per day in the 2015-16 fiscal year (BPD).^[27] As a result, the oil demand is predicted to rise by a factor of seven to eight percent per year. In 2017, India's oil imports grew by around 1.8 percent to a record of 4.37 million barrels per day due to the growing demand in India (BPD). For India, the third-biggest oil subscriber in the world, the West Asia area is a critical source of fuel 63 percent of India's oil imports

come from the Middle East, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran accounting for the top three countries in terms of oil supply in 2017^[28].

India has the upper hand in the area in terms of soft power. Since the 'Civilizational ties,' India and West Asia have held the Civilizational decade for millennia. It's impossible to imagine India without the region's influence on its language and culture, whether it's Islam or Persian culture. With the lifting of sanctions on Iran, India has an opportunity to strengthen its economic connections and trade with the area, notably in the Middle East. In the context of Iran, it is argued that bilateral trade between India and Iran must go beyond the traditional export basket of crude oil, fertilizer, grains, and chemicals and instead include IT, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, agriculture, and financial services. The Indian private industry may play an essential role in supplying Iran with what it cannot acquire from Israel, the other major regional supplier ^[29]. Private Indian enterprises might play a significant role in the expansion of the whole area, in addition to Iran's government.

The diaspora population in the area is India's most powerful tool. Mr. Sinha notes stated that "people of Indian descent are enormously important sources of support for the Indian government in the implementation of its policies via the influence and respect they command in the nations in which they dwell." ^[30] The Indian diaspora, in addition to being contributors of soft power, can also serve as a representative of Indian soft power; the Indian living abroad community can help disseminate the other soft power shreds of evidence of India, such as culture, Ayurveda, Bollywood, cuisine, knowledge, and spirituality, and entice the populace all over the entire globe to visit ^[31]. The Indian population is the second-largest after China in terms of the world's diaspora. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, which comprise Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, are well-known as major migrant transit routes. About 6 million Indians are employed in Gulf countries, making it a key migratory route from India. India and West Asia have very different populations, which plays a significant role. India is the second-biggest country in regards to people, behind China, and has the biggest working-age population (15-54 years old) globally. Because of the enormous disparity between the pace of population increase and employment opportunities in India, many people are forced to leave the nation in search of work. A scarcity of working people in the Gulf States, on the other hand, has led to high demand for foreign workers in their businesses. Indians who are out of jobs might take advantage of the region's population disparity and relocate there.^[32] These folks are from various Indian states and are engaging in contract jobs in diverse occupations. Of these people, the vast majority are illiterate and semi-skilled, albeit small percentages work in professions such as medicine or management. Around 30 percent of all Indian immigrants are skilled workers, while the other 70 percent are semi-skilled laborers.^[33] The diaspora of Indians also aids in remittance collecting. As shown in a World Bank report, global remittances from Indian expatriates totaled \$70 billion in 2014. China received \$64 billion in remittances, while the Philippines received \$28 billion.^[34] Our soft power may be sent via this group if appropriately activated. To better include the Indian diaspora, measures have been taken in several years. Also, the celebration of

“Pravasi Bhartiya Divas” provides an opportunity for Indian diaspora communities to showcase their talents.

Mr. Narendra Modi’s interactions with the Indian diaspora population throughout the world show that he is taking strides in this regard. As a result of his latest journey to Dubai, the sizable Indian population in the United Arab Emirates has been invigorated.^[35] The current administration has even begun to show more profound respect for the diasporas’ benefits to the area. The diaspora is also included in several important official announcements on India’s interests and receives the same emphasis as energy.^[36] P.M. made an official visit to the United Arab Emirates during his time in office when he addressed a stadium full of Indian expatriates. Malayali was the language he used to announce that the United Arab Emirates had set aside land for the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi.^[37] His interest in the well-being of the employees in the camp led him to pay a visit to a nearby migrant labor camp. Similarly, the late Sushma Swaraj, who served as India’s foreign affairs minister, was a strong advocate for the acknowledgment of diaspora. On her visit to Bahrain in 2014, she attended the Overseas Indian Facilitating Centre’s first Diaspora Engagement meeting. ‘The well-being of the Indian diaspora is one of the main priorities of the Modi administration,’ she remarked during a visit to Oman in 2015. Additionally, she established the Indian Community Welfare Fund, which aims to provide housing, emergency medical treatment, plane passage, and legal support to migrants in need. Aside from energy security, she presided over the first India-Arab League ministerial conference in 2016 and was hailed by the MEA as “pivotal for our interests.”^[38] More must be done to incorporate the Indian diaspora in inappropriate ways, which would aid the country’s economy and foreign policy aims and aspirations.

8. China’s influence in West Asia:

China’s soft power, which people widely accepted throughout the globe, is a significant problem for India in the area, despite its historical ties and current interactions with the region. There are other players in the area, and India must recognize that it isn’t the only one. Other western superpowers, such as the United States and Russia, already significantly impact the area. Additionally, Japan and China play a role in the region’s supremacy in Asia. China is always attempting to expand its influence in the region via different forms of soft power. The Chinese growth poses unique dangers to India.

China is the most populated and biggest country on earth in terms of population. That’s why its economy grew at a rate of more than 9% year from 1978 to 2005. A country’s growth pace can’t be maintained without energy. Its supply of energy propels a country’s growth rate. As a result of China’s rapid economic expansion, energy demand has also risen. Chinese imports of crude oil have increased steadily since 1996. It has overtaken the United States as the world’s second-largest user of oil and the third-largest importer.^[39] A new analysis suggests that China is currently obtaining more Middle Eastern oil than the US. Only 41% of the US’s daily imports of 5 million barrels of oil come from the area, compared to China’s 5.6 million, with half of it arriving from the region itself.^[40] Chinese products and services are sold throughout the area, a significant source of foreign capital investment in China, notably in the oil and oil-

related sectors. With the help of China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) initiative, this area is being connected as well. Xi sees the BRI's objective of harnessing the Middle East's abundant resources as a crucial part of the strategy [41]. According to specific reports, China plans to create a mini-Marshall plan for the Middle East and North Africa in the near future (MENA region). This is because, as the China-Arab State Cooperation Forum demonstrates, China considers economic growth to be a means to address many of the region's security and humanitarian challenges. A further draw is that China's economic model is a global example of how an authoritarian state can coexist with fast-growing economies.[42] In addition, China's increased need for renewable energy, financial technology, artificial intelligence, and electric vehicles is welcomed by the area.[43] Chinese soft power is also being used to entice Arabs. "Chinese soft power in the Arab world is assuming more than on shape," said Mohammad Fayez, director of the Al-Ahram Strategic Studies Centre's Chinese Studies section in Cairo [44]. First and foremost, they are putting a greater emphasis on teaching Chinese in the Arab world, and they've done a fantastic job at it. Arab nations such as Lebanon, Jordan, UAE, and Bahrain are also home to several educational institutions. Additional efforts are being made throughout the Arab world by China to establish and grow Chinese language programmes at different academic institutions. For the first time in many years, China allows non-governmental organizations to engage in business with the Arabs. The third reason is that the concept of non-interference gives the United States an advantage in dealing with Arab nations.[45] As a result of China's many efforts, the Arab world has admired the Asian superpowers.

9. Conclusion:

India has been labeled as a nation that underutilizes its soft power because of the paucity of concerted efforts by the Indian government. However, India must maintain focus on the area's larger strategic environment by stepping up its attempts to connect more deeply with the region. To support its national interests, it must build and use its soft power capabilities in the area. India must establish strategies and mechanisms for enhancing its regional soft power. Hence, it is necessary to boost India's diplomatic influence outside of the Western Asian area to forward its foreign policy objectives. It is envisaged that this "Link West" program would help to expand India's soft influence in West Asia.

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