

India's Foreign Relations – Term Paper

**How can India be a responsible great power?**

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with India's quest to becoming a great power in the world sphere, by focusing on the use of soft power as an instrument to achieve this goal. Based on prior literature, it supports the argument that soft power is the more effective and efficient concept in contemporary global politics because of its endurance and sustainability as compared to Hard power – which is less useful today as the global system changes in its disfavour. It further explores the use of vaccine diplomacy as a method of exercising soft power and briefly touches upon the need for a responsible 'great India'.

## Literature Review

While China's ascension has received more attention, India's march to great power status during the past three decades has been one of the most dramatic shifts in the world system. While it had more people than any other country, India's economy was just a third as large as Italy's in the late 1980s, and its military still relied heavily on Soviet-era equipment (CIA, 1988). When comparing GDPs across countries, India is now the third largest in the world, behind only the United States and China (IMF, 2022), in PPP terms. It has risen from ninth place just a decade ago to become the sixth greatest source of industrial output in the world, with the fastest economic growth (according to the IMF).

Since 2008, when the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear deal was passed, India has been recognised as a legitimate member of the "nuclear club," and its military has gotten more modern and sophisticated as a result (Ciorciari, 2009). Achieving the status of a "great power" has not always been a stated goal of Indian foreign policy, and the pursuit of a more prominent global role has been met with scepticism by in a country with so many pressing domestic issues. However, with India's recent progress, especially in economic terms, more and more officials and members of the public are warming up to this viewpoint (Ciorciara, 2009).

In the late 1980s, Joseph Nye coined the term "soft power." According to Nye, power is the capability to direct the actions of others to achieve one's goals. One can either use threats, payments, or attraction and co-opting to get people to want what one wants. Making other people want what you want (soft power) is more effective than using force to acquire what you want (Nye, 2017).

Wagner argues that in modern global politics, the concept of soft power is more effective and efficient than hard power because of its longevity. However, the global system has shifted, making hard power less effective than it once was (Wagner, 2020).

How the West and the East employ vaccinations as a public diplomacy instrument to influence public opinion in other nations or continents to improve their worldwide image and reputation, exert international influence, or gain new friends is the subject of an article by Antwi-Boasiako. As a result, it concludes that covid-19 vaccinations are a form of soft power, which their producing countries can employ to influence the opinions of their intended foreign audiences, secure the loyalty of existing friends, and win over potential new

ones around the world. The major powers in the history of international relations have used vaccinations to advance their foreign policy goals. According to the article's results, the countries who supply vaccines to developing countries do so primarily for the purposes of enhancing their soft power (Antwi-Boasiako, 2022).

Thus, this paper will explore how India can become a responsible great power by focusing on its rising soft power and use of vaccine diplomacy to achieve its ambitious goals.

## **India's Rise in Soft Power: The Quest for Great Power Status**

### **Hard Power versus Soft Power**

The availability of power resources affects the efficacy of both hard and soft power strategies. Governments with stronger national incomes, like the USA or Russia, can afford to keep sizable armed forces and apply economic pressure on other states. These conventional instruments of hard power are more challenging to get for smaller governments. However, the availability of soft power resources is far less correlated with a state's size. Small states may absolutely develop soft power, as demonstrated by the example of Norway (which ranks 12th on the Soft Power 30 index, while India is still absent from the list).

The comparison of Chinese and Japanese soft power techniques demonstrates the significance of the type of soft power resources. For instance, China's autocratic political system and competitive state-led model prevent it from fully utilising its soft power potential. Japan's war past is the key constraint on its soft power. As a result, a state's soft power resources, such as its sociocultural structure and historical legacy, influences its strength and, consequently, its efficacy.

The European Union is an illustration of how soft power can be effectively applied - specifically its capacity to draw in new members. Since the EU is a successful intergovernmental organisation, other countries are motivated to join the project of European integration (this stands true despite Brexit). The EU's soft power is derived from its willingness to grant a place at the decision-making table based on this promising foundation. This allure guarantees peace and security among European nations, and the enlargement process of the EU further solidifies its standing on the international stage. As a result, both the EU and its member states profit from the EU's soft power.

### **A Focus on the Modi Regime**

By fusing modern soft power components, the Modi government is currently setting fresh trends in Indian diplomacy. Today, the state has successfully achieved diplomatic victories and advanced the country's national objectives by utilising special soft power assets of India,

such as the diaspora, yoga, Buddhism, ayurveda led alternate healthcare and economic backing.

To assess the success of the nation's soft power outreach, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has decided to support a "soft power matrix." The MEA's objective will serve as a crucial test scenario in the aforementioned aspect. Additionally, programmes like "Destination India" and "Know India" have been introduced. India may advance quickly to become a leader of the global knowledge society, according to cultural institutions like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which even conducted a national conference under the "Destination India" project for the first time in 2019. Following COVID-19, "Namaste diplomacy" and "Medical diplomacy" of India have gained popularity.

India's leadership in space technology and diplomacy is a significantly enhanced soft power tool with limitless potential. With the launch of the GSAT-9 satellite, also known as the South Asia Satellite, which was designed to provide South Asian countries with space-enabled services, India's regional diplomacy has expanded into space.

India is an old civilisation with the greatest democracy in the world, a secular culture, and a rapidly expanding market that in 2019 surpassed the UK and France to become the 5th largest economy (in nominal terms). It will need to strengthen its foreign policy and diplomacy in order to establish multilateral and bilateral partnerships with other countries in order to further increase its communication, tourism, cultural appreciation, and soft power overall.

Owing to China's communist/totalitarian/opaque governance framework and in contrast to the attractiveness of India's democratic governance, culture, social values, and perceived neutral fairer foreign policy, as well as the country's growing economic and military might, we seem to have advantage, in terms of growing as an Asia based global soft power.

Additionally, under the "Neighbourhood first" policy, the Modi administration has actively tried to enhance ties with most of India's immediate neighbours (such as Srilanka & Bhutan), while also extending its outreach to inter alia Iran, Afghanistan, Middle east, some African & other countries (such as Brazil, Fiji, Jamaica). With some catalysts, such as our economic progress, strategic geography, strong digital-IT services expertise, culture, regional collaboration and geo-economics; the inevitable desire of development & improving security,

India appears to be more potent than ever, particularly in influencing many of our neighbours.

### **Vaccine Diplomacy during COVID-19**

The United States has changed over time as a result of politics, diplomacy, and electronic foreign policy. Between "developing" and "developed," India is a nation that is both a significant beneficiary and a country that is gradually becoming a big supplier of foreign aid. It has therefore transformed into a generous contributor to its neighbours as a result of its "neighbourhood first" policy, providing all forms of foreign help, including technical and economic collaboration as well as loans to neighbouring governments. The Modi administration used vaccine diplomacy actively during the COVID-19 epidemic to generate soft power, visible contribution & influence, by actioning in a timely manner, on one of the most critical problems of the planet, on which we already had somewhat of strong base – as one of the world's biggest production centres of basic vaccines and pharmaceuticals.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic raged on, a glimmer of hope appeared. International collaboration among scientists led to the creation of several top contenders, including vaccines created by Pfizer, Moderna, and Oxford-AstraZeneca.

India was not involved in the initial research and development efforts, but it was inevitable that it would eventually play a large role in vaccine development and manufacture. India, which is referred to as the "pharmacy of the world," produces nearly 60% of all vaccinations used worldwide and is a major pharmaceutical manufacturer – particularly of generics.

The world's largest maker of vaccines, the Serum Institute of India, is based in India. The Serum Institute has agreements with a number of vaccine manufacturers, including Oxford-AstraZeneca and Novavax. Adar Poonawalla, the CEO of the Serum Institute, declared that the doses will be distributed 50-50 between India and the rest of the world after signing the agreement with Oxford-AstraZeneca to manufacture one billion doses of Covishield.

The Serum Institute's global sales of dosages opened the possibility for India to contribute positively to the effort to immunise everyone, especially when higher-income nations prioritised caring for their own citizens first. Additionally, India can effectively employ



vaccinations as a tool to push back against Chinese influence because it also competes with China in the area.

A \$150 million contract was also signed by Poonawalla with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide 100 million vaccines to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) and its COVAX facility, which would help 92 low- and middle-income countries. This was a strong message to convey, especially considering that the US had then turned down the COVAX vaccination effort. It also emphasised India's ongoing dedication to humanitarian causes and acknowledged the part the country will play in ensuring that everyone around the world receives vaccinations.

By January 2021, it was clear how important India was to the worldwide immunisation campaign. After India's national immunisation drive kicked off on January 16, 2021, numerous nations started requesting vaccines from India. Politically, it would be simple for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to put export restrictions on vaccinations given that India set an ambitious goal of immunising 300 million residents by July 2021. However, as evidenced by its exports of hydroxychloroquine, and other critical healthcare PPE such as masks, & protective medical gowns - India was able to strike a balance between meeting the needs of its own people and its obligations to the rest of the world. While vaccine diplomacy has commercial advantages, it is also a continuation of India's ongoing efforts to project its soft power abroad.

India has thus been able to bolster its soft power through vaccine diplomacy, display its technological development & manufacturing superiority, provide its businesses access to new markets, and proclaim to its local audiences that India is a significant player on the international scene.

In this context, it may be pertinent to mention that given India's size and potential, India has rightly pushed for a permanent place on the UN Security Council for many years. India has however, only managed to secure a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council and is slated to host the G20 summit in 2023, as the president of G20 – since December 2020. As a consequence of its wide ranging agenda, including for addressing climate change & global development /impact - its "vaccine diplomacy" could result in crucial influence and votes for joining as a permanent seat in UNSC. Through its diplomatic efforts involving vaccines, and

its current neutral stance on the war and energy procurement & general trade, India may benefit in the long run.

### **A View for the Future**

To increase its international clout notably, given its growing competition with China, India will have to use its soft power in a more systematic and planned manner. This process will most probably take time as it may require a domestic debate on how to balance national interests and political values and norms. The resolution of this debate will determine how India finds a right mix between soft and hard power in order to achieve real influence. For India to continue to be an attractive power, and most importantly for it to present a more compelling development model than China, it will also need to continue to improve its economic performance, which so far portends well.

India must also address its limited social and economic equality if it is to maintain its advantage in soft power, which has a shifting worth. India's remarkable economic growth during the early 1990s has been one of the key causes in the country's rise to prominence. India's economic system overnight gained popularity as a viable alternative to China's centralised and authoritarian system. However, to maintain this favourable worldwide reputation, India will need to concurrently develop into a more just and efficient society, a global economic power, and an economy that commands a significant portion of global innovation and wealth, particularly from global commerce and investment. Foreign investment has decreased over the past two years, but the global economic crisis cannot account for all of it. Major investors have been discouraged from investing in India because of its inadequate physical infrastructure, restrictive government rules, cumbersome and ineffective bureaucratic structures, and perceptions of widespread corruption.

### **Soft Power → Great Power**

A nation that is able to exert its influence and sometimes authority, wherever in the world is considered a great power. It is a powerful worldwide influencing force that can implement a global plan, control significant economic power, and convey a global ideology. A nation must be dominant in a wide range of areas in order to acquire this status, including military might,

political and soft power, economic expansion, and reaping the benefits of other characteristics like size, population, culture, brand and resources.

India enjoys a high level of respect around the world as a result of its vaccine diplomacy efforts, various other humanitarian efforts on behalf of other nations, and our neutral stance in the Russia-Ukraine war, whereby we have repeatedly pushed for the peaceful resolution of differences – on which many countries, including some now in the West, have resonated with. As the largest democracy in the world, we will likely be able to take on the role of permanent member of the UN Security Council as we assume the G-20 leadership for the 2022–2023 session. India's defence industry has also experienced significant enhancements as a result of the government's efforts to improve the country's defence capabilities by reducing reliance on imports. What will actually assist us in achieving "great" power status is a mix of our hard and soft power, as well as steady economic prosperity & development.

### **India - A Responsible Great Power?**

What constitutes a major power as "responsible"? The framework of vaccine diplomacy, which was previously covered in this paper, has the answer to this query. Fundamentally, our government has an obligation to put its citizens first. Even though the economy is expanding quickly, unemployment is still a problem in both rural and urban areas. India has benefited from having a large population of English speakers, although the country's illiteracy rate is still very high. Many Indians lack access to running water and other basic necessities. The burden of bureaucracy and incompetence is straining India's public services. Economic expansion is expected to help lift the impoverished in India out of poverty. However, economic growth has been rather uneven thus far, with the wealthy and highly skilled benefiting disproportionately.

Perhaps it is time to also take a step back and concentrate on the issues that are actually affecting the Indian economy/society as we try to progress on being a greater power on a global scale, further strengthening our diplomatic relations, aiding our neighbours, etc.

We are fortunate that we have a more balanced demographic mix of youth and older, experienced population, unlike most of the developed world and China, where the proportion

of youth has been declining – owing to various reasons. How we leverage this potential, will require improvements in our infrastructure, on all the gaps pointed out above – as well as strengthening our education infrastructure – so as to further improve the quality and capability of our population.

We have the potential, how we leverage our strengths and mitigate our gaps - will be the key.

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