Leiden University

BSc Political Science: International Relations and Organisations

Final Thesis   *Bachelor Project IRO - 102*

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s2788179   *Word Count – 7979 words*

Date: 19 July 2024

Thesis

Embargo Statement: Immediate open access to my Thesis.

Table Of Contents

Title – Regional Hegemon to Benevolent Rising Power? India's leadership and their role in Regional Soft Power Interactions

A.   Introduction

The concepts of influence and power depend on a wide range of factors. It is important to understand how it is gained and exercised. Hard power is difficult to measure until exercised, whereas, soft power can be measured by analyzing the international perception of a country. The idea of soft power is not to coerce, but to elicit attraction and consent (Baldwin, 2016 p. 55).

For instance, Japan is considered a considerably influential country in the international community, even though it lacks adequate weaponry and military strength (Koji, 2024, p.1). This is due to Japan's economic strength, power of innovation, and production, among other factors.

Similarly, India, with one of the largest populations and economies in the world, uses its soft power for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Kumar, 2023). There is a definite move in terms of heightened and widespread cultural diplomacy, a deliberate globalized outreach of yoga, economic and trade tools, its stronghold over cricket diplomacy and viewership, and the spread of its fundamental values of non-violence and non-interference (Šerić, 2023).

India's first prime minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, was known for establishing India's 'grand objective' to achieve global recognition by projecting India's soft power (Abraham, 2007, p.4209). However, subsequent regimes switched to improving and utilizing hard power. This made India lose its credibility, its image, and the uniqueness of its objectives (Abraham, 2007, 4210). Under Nehru, India practiced non-reciprocity, non-intervention, restraint, and peaceful ways to curb conflicts. However, under successive leaderships, for instance, Indira Gandhi, it did not allow intervention in south Asia by other states, while it continued to intervene in the domestic affairs of its neighbors (Malik & Rather, 2015, p.182). This rendered India's regional image as hegemonic and threatening (Malik & Rather, 2015, p. 182).

Shashi Tharoor (former Indian Union minister of state for external affairs) argued that past classifications of major power status were becoming archaic and that India had now become influential mainly through its "soft power" (Blarel, 2012, p.28). Tharoor articulates that there

is waning importance of a country's military and economic might, however, what matters is the narrative of the country.

This paper seeks to answer the question: How do varying perceptions and methods of interaction by the political leadership of India affect its soft power in south Asia? Leadership ideologies tend to exert regional and international influence through underlying factors of interaction.

Consequently, this paper hypothesizes that improving India's influence in south Asia is not dependent on the improvement and exercise of hard power, but rather on decisions taken by India's leadership in interacting with the region which either leads to an improvement or deterioration of India's soft power.

After the literature review in the first chapter, the second chapter identifies and analyses India's major interactions with other south Asian countries. It accentuates the importance of the decisions and ideologies of political leadership in shaping foreign policy and modes of interaction.

The third chapter draws implications regarding the perception and image of India in south Asian countries due to the decisions made by its leadership. It does so by encapsulating all findings in a comparative analysis table that equates the decisions and policies of successive governments to the gain or deterioration of India's influence in south Asia. This table can be referred to at the end of chapter 3.

B. Chapter 1: Literature Review & Research Design

B1. Literature Review

At the outset, this paper notes that power dynamics in south Asia could challenge the global hegemonic order (Kugler et al., 2004, pp. 41-43). The Indian ocean is crucial for China's economic and military trade strategy. They have built ports, military installations, and other infrastructure developments in south Asia (Dutta and Dutta, 2024) (Singh, 2021). The western world, especially the US, wants to rein in China's hegemonic aggression. While Australia favored a triad to check increasing Chinese aggression in the Pacific, the QUAD with India was preferred so as to counter Chinese spread in the Indian ocean (Grant, 2022).

India is identified as an important study due to its cultural strength in the south Asia region, which is considered even greater than China's (Paul, 2018, pp.54-55). Sharing culture and values for centuries, south Asian countries maintain deep ties due to common language, religion, ethos, and traditions. For India, as well as for many other countries, it's influence in south Asia is of strategic importance. Therefore, it is vital that India needs to maintain good relations and interaction in the region to improve its influence, attraction, and soft power (Sibal, 2009, p.353) (Muni & Mohan, 2005, pp. 318-319).

The concept of power is relational. It has little or no meaning except when it's exercised or in the context of a specific situation (Baldwin, 2016, p.46). Once a decision has been carried out, the effect of the action can be better determined by checking if it elicits attraction. This is defined as soft power by Nye (2011, p. 13). This paper contends that it is important to understand the behavior and decisions made by the Indian leadership in different contexts rather than differentiating between "bases" of soft or hard power (Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2012) to determine how influence can be amassed in south Asia. Today, violence and conflict are fundamentally seen as illegitimate by the domestic and international community (Cerny, 2012, pp.184-185).

It is critical to note that the role of regime leadership has been overlooked in research concerning the rising power of states through foreign policy, furthermore, in recent times Indian leadership has been proactive in framing India's regional policy and interaction (Kesgin & Wehner, 2021, pp.374-389). Therefore, can decisions and actions be attributed to a country's leadership? Even the earliest philosophers in the field, like Thucydides, accorded a premium on regime leadership and pragmatism of prudence. Researchers have tried to define leadership and determine its role and scope in terms of behavior, power, and policy. While some scholars try to do this by understanding the importance and effects of leadership's actions, others tend to justify policy and use of power by comprehending the leader's personal ambitions, psychology, and goals (Preston, 2010, pp.1-3). The current study aims to understand a leadership's perception and their decisions that affect regional foreign policy and determine which methods of regional interaction in south Asia were most fruitful in gaining soft power. Consequently, this paper adopts Hermann's (1986) understanding of leadership, which notes that the comprehension of leadership style is possible by understanding the context or situation in which the leader makes decisions and the leader's individual beliefs, ideology (as cited in Preston, 2010, pp.3-4). It is only when a leader takes decisions in a certain context and the leader's ideology affects decision-making, can one

determine the effectiveness and image of the leader. According to Hermann, the context of a decision can be multifold and includes the wants of the public, the relation between the leader and the masses, and the domestic and international environment. As Hermann elucidates, a 'predominant leader' is popular, was elected with a comfortable majority, and can make authoritative policy decisions. On the other hand, a leader could face institutional and structural constraints in decision-making if not popular, especially if heading a diverse coalition (Preston, 2010, p.4). This paper identifies the context of being a 'predominant leader' as an important facet in determining the effect they have on foreign interactions.

India was largely considered a growing hegemony of the south Asian region in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly by its neighbors (Purushothaman 2010, p.9). However, It is argued that India practiced soft power even before the term was conceptualized or formalized and unlike the West, these soft capabilities preceded the improvement and exercise of hard power (Mishra, 2016, p. 40). However, given its deep cultural and friendly relations in the region, how did India come to be regarded as an intrusive hegemon of south Asia in the 1970s? This, as the paper will note, was because of the perception, ideology, and context under which India's leadership made decisions. As leadership and regimes change, so do a country's foreign policies and the methods/actions of interaction.

But what is perception in the context of foreign policy? Perception is fundamental to foreign policy analysis and helps compare the positive and negative image of a country. In this context, perception is not only defined as the way a leader understands their nation's values, beliefs, and wants (Hudson and Stengel, 2007, p.71) but also, the country's perception in the eyes of the international and regional community (MacDonald, 2020, p.14). One of the key facets of foreign policy study is the impact of domestic politics, pressures, and beliefs on the country's leadership (Kubâlkovâ 2001, as cited in Kaarbo, 2015, p. 191). As already noted, an improvement in the foreign perception of a country relates to an improvement in its soft power (Nye, 2011, p. 13).

What is leadership ideology and how does it relate to perception? The perception that a leader holds regarding leaders they interact with and the perception of the leader regarding their own country while making decisions to reach foreign policy goals is how a leader utilizes their ideology. (George, 1969; Walker, 1990, as cited in Özdamar & Canbolat, 2023, p.7). Furthermore, leaders of a state analyze domestic and international constraints to come up with strategies to remain in power (Rongkas & Sulaiman, 2019, p.90). Therefore, leaders

formulate foreign policy based on their perception and ideology regarding international/regional interactions (Rongkas & Sulaiman, 2019, p.90).

It becomes pertinent to assess the perceptions and foreign policy decisions of other leaders and assess them in retrospect. For instance, research has found that Kim Jong and Saddam Hussein posed aggressive foreign policies and interactions mainly due to the hostile and containment-driven foreign policy of the United States (Malici and Buckner, 2008, p. 798). Özdamar & Canbolat (2023) make similar claims attributing US interventions to the rise of ISIS and the war in Iraq (pp.7-21). However, why is it important to elicit attraction and gain soft power instead of exercising hard capabilities? According to Steinberg (2008), the Iraqi invasion failed to assess the elements of power needed to defeat the emerging terrorism threat (p. 157). In the short term, this failed to achieve its objectives, and in the long term, it dented American soft power (Steinberg, 2008, pp.157-158). The US did not realize that a leader is not supposed to inform the world (and his enemies) that his country did not possess WMDs (Junyent, 2023).

This suggests that a leader's perception and ideology influence their decisions and the consequences of these decisions help ascertain if the leader relied on hard or soft capabilities of power. It indicates that the decision made by the leadership, based on their perception, foreign policy, and method of interaction shapes a country's attractiveness or influence in the long run. However, do foreign policies and methods of interaction by leaders differ as regimes change over time?

The research must therefore ascertain what kind of leadership ideologies have existed in India and which foreign policy decisions and exercise of power are better for amassing influence in south Asia under various circumstances.

This paper contends that India's soft power in south Asia has differed from regime to regime based on their varying decisions in foreign policy and interaction. However, the study first needs to identify the basic factors of interaction with south Asia employed by Indian leadership through the years, since the study does not base its analysis on comparing bases of power (In India's case, yoga, Buddhism, Bollywood, cricket, for instance can be considered the bases of its soft power) but rather on behavior or exercise of power (which can be studied by comparing the exercise of soft power by subsequent regimes through their modes of interaction in the region).

Researchers have asserted that soft power contestation between India and China will include an explicit use of foreign aid and cultural diplomacy to counter each other's influence on large-scale Indian investment in international state broadcasting, and the mobilization of diasporas worldwide to oppose each other's interests in third countries' (Hazarika & Mishra, 2015, p.128). What authors usually fail to note is that India is a country rich in cultural and religious diversity. Thus, it has always had a strong fundamental base of soft power that makes it more attractive to the nations of south Asia when it comes to building multilateral relations (Hazarika & Mishra, 2015, pp. 127). Research aimed at understanding India's soft power through its international perception and foreign policy largely attributes the increase in India's soft power and improvement of perception to the mobilization of its diaspora (Landrin, 2023). However, this is not one of the factors on which India relies to gain soft power in south Asia. Even in the past, the majority of India's diaspora spread and influence were from the West (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Africa). For instance, the Indian diaspora in the West was influential in raising serious concerns over the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 (Desai, 2006, p.97). Therefore, even though this study recognizes diaspora mobilization as a key factor in determining India's foreign perception, it is not a factor for amassing soft power in south Asia.

Since this study aims to ascertain ideological transformations through India's regimes and compares them to their interaction and perception in south Asia, the following factors are identified as underlying and salient elements of interaction and formation of regional perception for India to gain soft power in south Asia (Hazarika & Mishra, 2015, p.128) (Kugiel, 2017, pp.101-120): Foreign Aid, Cultural Diplomacy, Interference/Intervention.

Foreign aid: This Paper refers to 'Aid' as developmental help as well as assistance in terms of relief and development. Aid and assistance are extremely important, especially for developing countries of south Asia that face adverse effects of poverty and climate change (Dutt, 2023) (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 108-109). However, India had always been a net receiver of aid until the 2000s. (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 109-116).

Cultural diplomacy: Cultural Diplomacy can be fundamentally understood as connecting with other countries and their people through the spread of culture, religion, sports, and values to create a common understanding and connect between people. It fosters an improvement of a country's perception by influencing people and countries internationally and gaining soft power. One of the most prominent examples of India's cultural diplomacy, apart from

religion, yoga, Bollywood, and Buddhism was spreading the values of and become the leader of the emerging non-aligned third block (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 94-95). It amassed a greater image amongst the developing and the nations with a recent colonial past. (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 94-95).

Intervention/Interference: The history of the region, especially India, has been marked with transgressions of territorial integrity, intervention, and disputes. It is fundamental, however, for India's behavior to not be perceived as 'arrogant and uncompromising' in the region because countries of south Asia would start to perceive it as a threat instead of a benevolent rising power (Dutt, 2023). Having the image of a 'hegemon' makes it difficult to build cooperative and robust relations with these countries (Dutt, 2023).

The changing leaderships' perceptions and decisions are compared to these fundamental characteristics of interaction which are necessary to gain power in south Asia. Differences in the perception and image of India due to these interactions will help the study determine which methods of interaction and policies employed by the leadership are more fruitful for gaining influence in south Asia.

B2. Research Design

This thesis primarily employs a case-centered approach of India to study the changing dynamics of foreign policy, interaction, and power through changing perceptions and ideologies of its leadership. This methodology should help in operationalizing and drawing conclusions about the Indian leadership's decisions that facilitated improved influence and soft power. Moreover, it could provide a blueprint for other countries in south Asia to amass regional influence. Therefore, this paper employs a theory-building process-tracing methodology to theorize that the changing perception and ideology of leadership causes differences in foreign policy and methods of regional interaction (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). This difference in the use and exercise of different methods of regional interaction and foreign policy determines a country's image and gain of soft power or influence in the region. This facilitates a comparative foreign policy approach as proposed by Rosenau (Hudson and Stengel, 2007, p.19). Comparative foreign policy analysis can be used to differentiate between leaders and their respective foreign policy interactions and images. The regimes and their respective leadership chosen for this paper are the ones who were elected for more than one term (ET Online, 2024) and had a parliamentary majority. Each of the leaders chosen is known to have a significant impact on India's foreign policy. Leaders who are popular and

chosen by the majority tend to affect the soft power of the country as they hold more autonomy over decision-making (Isoda, 2024, pp.154-173) (Hermann, 1986, as cited in Preston 2010, p.4). This context of leadership is important to the study. Furthermore, leaders with a longer term are chosen to identify major incidents during their tenure that portray their way of interaction and decision-making regarding foreign policy. Therefore, the following leaders are chosen for the study: Jawahar Lal Nehru (Congress: 1947-1964), Indira Gandhi (Congress: 1966-1977, 1980-1984), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP: 1996, 1998-2004) and Narendra Modi (BJP: 2014 – ongoing).

Chosen sources include policy and research papers, reports, books, and articles concerning India's foreign policy inclination towards hard and soft policies and India's interaction and perception with south Asia. These sources will be key to the thesis as it aims to ascertain the ideology of India's leadership in terms of its hard and soft power policies and its regional interaction and equate these to the improvement or deterioration of India's image in south Asia. Therefore, the sources chosen not only explore the interactions and leadership ideology from the outlook of the regime in power but also from the perception of the people. This paper also conducts a qualitative content analysis of news articles utilized as primary sources. These articles have been systematically coded and utilized to explain the perception and ideologies behind the decisions made by the leadership and the subsequent reliance on particular methods of regional interaction. It tries to examine the role of regime leadership in improving and exercising soft power to gain regional influence.

The study utilizes a source coding table based on key factors that determine how a particular stance/decision is perceived by the international community. The coding table employs categories that are fundamental to countries of south Asia that help gain soft power and then equate successive Indian regimes to them. This helps streamline and structure the study according to the most important and salient factors affecting the image of India. This table can be referred to in Appendix A. The table assigns codes to each observation sentence, helps identify its category, and lists whether the sentence implies a negative or positive connotation toward India's perception.

C.   **Chapter 2 – Regime Leadership and Varying Perceptions**

At the outset, it is vital to note that the differences in soft power influence stem from the popularity, trust, and character of political leadership (Isoda, 2024, p.151) (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012, p.561) (Wrighton et al., 2022, pp.21-24). This is so because support for, or opposition to, a country's leadership, will more likely be affected by issues of importance to the public.

India draws its soft power from its globally recognized culture aspects like yoga, diversity, religion, languages, and cricket, or its policies like the "Act East Policy" and other such multilateral relations it builds (Bunthorn, 2023, pp.190-194). Policies have varied through regimes and are also country specific. For instance, the leaders of India and Pakistan met to witness the 2011 Cricket World Cup semifinal, to restart dialogue between the two nations post the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai (Blarel, 2012, p.30). However, the next regime refuses to send the team to Pakistan for tournaments, primarily due to frequent terrorist attacks in India (Hussain, 2023). The Regime, however, continues to provide Indian stadiums and training facilities to the National Cricket teams of Nepal and Afghanistan. This contrast makes it essential to particularly understand how the utilization and dynamics of power and foreign policy have evolved in India with successive governments and their leadership.

C1. The Nehruvian Regime

The Nehruvian regime (Congress: 1947-1964), was marked by the fundamental stance of moral suasion and image building through identity formation in the international realm (Ganguly, 2020, pp. 2-3). Since India had emerged from a long, hard, and non-violent battle for Independence, Nehru's ideals and foreign policy agenda of global disarmament and non-alignment (during the Cold War) were pioneering not just for India, as a country trying to define its identity to the international community, but also for other young countries not strong enough to compete with established and developed powers of the West (Jayaramu, 2023). More importantly, Nehru pushed for global disarmament realising India's weakness in military capabilities and hard bases of power. This portrayed his strong emphasis on promoting India's benign image-building and the quest for friendly relations, especially within the third block (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 39-43). With the laying of the foundation of the United Nations and the world recovering from its most brutal war ever, the Nehruvian

ideology of foreign policy promoted the notion that no country should interfere in another's internal matters (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 39-43).

Notably, during Nehru's era, when Pakistan occupied India's territories (parts of Kashmir), Nehru relied on negotiations instead of retaliation. This was attributed to his intransigence over maintaining India's benevolent and peaceful 'reputation' (Shankar, 2018, p.63). His decisions, some authors note, costed India parts of strategically important Kashmiri territory (India News, 2023). However, contrary views opine that this was a farsighted policy decision for protecting Kashmir's people. An attempt to solve the Kashmir issue, even at the cost of accepting a compromise. His willingness for a plebiscite in Kashmir was also to meet this objective (Davar, 2024). The dispute, however, continues.

Nonetheless, even though Nehru's regime could not generate a global pursuit towards restraint and peace, it did help India gain legitimacy and goodwill among other developing and young nations while also securing seats for India in important multilateral organizations which would have not been possible considering India's visible weakness in terms of hard power capabilities (Kugiel, 2017, p. 44).

C2. Realpolitik and the Indira Gandhi regime

Under Indira Gandhi (Congress: 1966-1977, 1980-1984), a realist, India looked to amass material power and focused on gaining regional autonomy by posing itself as a powerful hegemon in south Asia. She relied on coercion for incentives in south Asia rather than eliciting attraction (Mishra, 2016, p. 40). This period of gaining and exercising hard power to achieve regional dominance and influence was marked by India's intervention and interference in south Asia. Instances include the 1971 intervention in east Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) or Sikkim (1975). Indira Gandhi portrayed India as a regional hegemon responsible for securitizing south Asia (Wagner, 2005, p.6). The most prominent blunders of this regime were the underground nuclear tests in 1974 (an attempt at acquiring nuclear weaponry against her Council's advice) and the declaration of a state of national emergency in 1975 (Kugiel, 2017, pp 46-50). Gandhi also routinely disrupted the nation's fundamental institutions, such as the parliament, and was regarded as an authoritarian (Jayaramu, 2023).

These policies of aggravation and regional dominance through conflict and intervention were in opposition to India's established image and fundamental ideas of non-alignment, peace,

and restraint. Ironically, Indira Gandhi and the successive Rajiv Gandhi regimes consistently insisted that the government was following Nehruvian principles of foreign policy (Kugiel, 2017, pp 46-50).

C3. Vajpayee and the resurgence of soft power

The Vajpayee government (BJP: 1996, 1998-2004) in complete contrast to its successive and preceding regimes, was proactive in the acquisition of a nuclear arsenal, countering Pakistan's intransigence, territorial disputes, and the Kargil war and set a clear international multilateral agenda while befriending the United States (Sagar, 2019). Vajpayee did face backlash from the international community particularly by the West in the form of sanctions for the nuclear tests. However, Vajpayee achieved an advantage in terms of hard-power capabilities from these tests. Right after the test, he announced that both Pakistan and India were placing unilateral and voluntary moratoriums on nuclear tests and that India was adopting a no-first-use doctrine (Diamond, n.d.). Vajpayee applied a neoliberal ideology to his foreign policy (Vanaik, 2018). India under Vajpayee was also different in with the intransigence and continued territorial conflict with Pakistan. A prime example of this is the Kargil war and Vajpayee's resolve. Terror attacks allegedly traced back to Pakistan, such as the 2001 parliament attack, were dealt with strategically and with restraint (Sagar, 2019). Furthermore, in contrast to his previous regimes, Vajpayee adopted the US as an ally while maintaining India's long-standing relationship with Moscow (Diamond, n.d.) (Sagar, 2019).

It is important to note that the Vajpayee regime while offering support to the US during the attacks on Taliban and Al Qaeda in 2001, refused to take part in the invasion of Iraq (2003) (Mitra, 2023) (Kulkarni, 2023). This may have made the international community question India's trustworthiness, however, over time, India has consistently stood up for its ideals, especially regarding territorial sovereignty, and the decision was well-received domestically (Mitra, 2023).

C4. The Narendra Modi era and Viksit Bharat

The current Modi government (BJP: 2014 – ongoing) has had certain accomplishments related to counterterrorism and territorial stance in the context of the region. Unlike previous BJP-led regimes, it has taken major transformative steps internally to improve and streamline the economy (demonetization, rationalization of indirect taxes, etc.). Recently, the Modi government has been concentrating on strategic modernization, institutional reforms, and enhancements in the technological industry, where it challenges China (Kharpal, 2024), and improving economic capabilities, through schemes such as the Make in India campaign (Som, 2018, pp.60-62) while maintaining and developing India's image as a large rising power. (Rajiv, 2023, p.11-12). Modi has been argued to have structured a hybrid ideology utilizing a Nehruvian, realistic, and neoliberal approach to foreign policy interactions (Bajpai, 2019).

In all cross-national dialogues, instead of traditionally holding meetings and talks in Delhi, the Modi government has been proactive in including as many cities and venues as possible (Mahapatra, 2016, p.7). For example, the visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping to Ahmedabad (Gandhi ashram) and also to the Shore Temple in Mamallapuram (for its ancient Chinese connections). Also, the visit of the Japanese PM Shinzo Abe to the religious city of Benares (Mahapatra, 2016, p.7). Modi's avowed focus is to generate tourism prospects for Indian sites. Another soft power factor under sustained exploitation by India. Modi also launched the 'Make in India' campaign to promote indigenous arts and production methods, promote India as the next global creation and production hub, and make it self-reliant. He has taken many other steps in an attempt to improve India's image (Patil, 2022).

However, the basic element of Modi's approach has been to focus on foreign relations and perceptions. Since 2014, the Modi government has made substantial investments in resources and projects to enhance India's capabilities in the realm of soft power diplomacy. These include increasing the number of embassies abroad, reviving ties with regional groupings like ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and SAARC, and intensifying strategic, cultural, diplomatic, and economic relations with eastern and south Asian countries through the 'Neighborhood First Policy', 'Act East Policy', and 'Look East Policy' (Kumar, 2024).

C5. Divergence of Ideology

It is important to note that a State's leadership plays a big role in determining its foreign policy effectiveness and gaining influence and soft power (Chandra, 2017, p.101). It is up to the leadership to identify and act upon signals of systemic change. This paper identifies a clear distinction in leadership styles. For instance, Indira Gandhi approached foreign interactions with a realpolitik ideology, while Vajpayee utilized a neoliberal ideology. The next section delves into the improvement of India's soft power in south Asia, how it was strategically gained, and how this rise or fall in India's soft power can be attributed to the leader's interaction with the region.

D. Chapter 3 – Utilizing Bases and Forming Perceptions

This chapter delves into the improvement of India's soft power and perception in south Asia and how it can be equated to the shifting policies and behavior of its leadership. As the last chapter indicated, the Indira Gandhi realpolitik government, shifted India's focus from cultural diplomacy to primarily using hard power. As Hazarika and Mishra (2015, p.115) note, in countries like India and China (especially countries of south Asia), the base of soft power has preceded hard capabilities. This is in complete contrast to the West, where hard capabilities were first established to facilitate the spread of global influence and soft power (for instance: through colonialism). Furthermore, India has shifted a lot of focus towards improving its influence in south Asia and among its neighbors and this is fundamentally seen as an important tactic for the country to amass greater international influence (Hogg, 2007, pp.6-7) (Ranjan, 2024).

China is now starting to develop a benign and friendly image since it is perceived as a threat in South and Southeast Asia (Das, 2023). Even though their soft power influence throughout the world preceded its hard capabilities, they have always been perceived as a "foreign policy/relations liability" or a "threat" (Das, 2023).

Emerging powers will be driven more by the prospect of maximizing their absolute gains, than by fear of relative losses or the temptation to make gains at each other's expense by exercising hard power (Schweller, 2011, pp. 292 – 293). Therefore, the literature review section identifies the following underlying and fundamental factors through which countries in south Asia interact with each other: Foreign Aid, Cultural Diplomacy, and

Interference/Intervention. Thereby, this paper ascertains which regime's decision regarding foreign interaction and relations helped gain or lose soft power in south Asia. The chapter formulates a comparative table to determine which regime's actions have resulted in gaining soft power and improving India's image.

D1. Results, Implications, and Discussion

a. Foreign Aid:

India was a young, poor, and developing country post-independence and thus could not provide aid to gain influence in its immediate region. Till the 1990s, India was a net major recipient of foreign aid, consequently, Indira Gandhi had a distaste for large aid packages and treated them as loans paying back all countries and institutions (Sawkar, 2022, p.362).

Furthermore, countries in the south Asian region found it difficult to cope with natural disasters and in building sustainable infrastructure, thus, India's attempts to protect and aid the less developed in the region perpetuated and expanded its fight for influence with China (Banerji, 2023). This re-defined India's image as a rising power trying to help the region grow simultaneously.

The most prominent effort of providing aid during the Modi regime would be the provision of free vaccines to many developing and poorer nations, especially in south Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bharti and Bharti, 2021, p.95), and the deployment of policies such as 'Act East' and 'Neighborhood First' (Patil, 2022). This reinforced India's claim of being a dominant benevolent power in the region (Kumar, 2024). During the 2019 Lankan economic crisis, while the IMF asked for time to respond, the current dispensation in India immediately rushed USD 2 billion worth of funds and fuel supplies to the country (ET EnergyWorld, 2023) (PTI, 2023). Even China, which had already invested heavily in Lanka for its strategic gains (Singh, 2021), could not respond as fast as India did. This alacrity in responding with massive monetary support during a neighboring country's crisis was a first for India.

b. Cultural Diplomacy:

The effectiveness of the use and exercise of hard and soft power approaches depend on the accessibility of power resources (Heywood, 2011, as cited in Wagner, 2021, p. 1). However,

as discussed, countries such as Japan even though lacking in military might, used soft influences to become a global rising power (Koji, 2024, p.1).

This was also true for India at the dawn of its Independence, as neither did the country possess substantial military capabilities. nor could it gain hard power rapidly. Therefore, Nehru utilized India's cultural diplomacy and its ingrained ideology of non-violence to emerge as one of the leaders of the global south and thus amassed influence (Baru, 2023).

The Modi regime has been working diligently to improve India's cultural and public diplomacy internationally by spreading the values of Buddhism and yoga which have gained extensive popularity and significance around the globe (Wade, 2016). While yoga is seen as a vital part of healthy living, the values of Buddhism portray, not just India's, but the region's rich cultural value and historic exchange (Wade, 2016). Modi has also urged the Indian base of social media content creators, the biggest base in the world, to spread the values and beliefs of India's cultural heritage (Tech Desk, 2024). Even when leaders of other countries visit, he makes it a point to address the public about India's rich cultural and religious heritage (Junuguru, 2019, p.84).

In contemporary times, one of the biggest sources of India's soft power has been its film industry Bollywood, and the major global fan following of its actors (Ann, 2021) (Forbes, 2024). Ironically, it has helped bridge people-to-people relations even with its adversary, viz., China. (Hong, 2021, p.350-351).

Modi has also extensively used cricket as a tool to amass soft power by holding talks and meetings with other leaders during important cricketing events. Modi, as a "charismatic and populous leader" (Heng, 2023), has been active in redefining India as a dependable and friendly global power. This is in contrast to the past distrust, both domestically and internationally, ascribed to India's leadership.

c. Intervention/Interference:

The idealist Nehruvian regime has been recently criticized by Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Modi's external affairs minister, for not taking appropriate action against the occupation of Kashmir by Pakistan in 1947 (Gupta, 2024).

On the contrary, if Nehru had exercised hard power (For instance the Indira Gandhi regime which intervened in the domestic matters of Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Maldives) while vouching

for ideals of peace, non-interference, and non-alignment, it would have contradicted everything that the nation stood for (Kugiel, 2017, pp 46-50). Furthermore, during the 1971 war with Pakistan, post India's intervention in east Pakistan (Bangladesh), a securitization treaty was signed by India and the USSR, emphasizing intervention by the USSR if India was attacked by China or Pakistan. This rendered India's orientation of foreign policy uncertain, ambiguous, and hypocritical (Kugiel, 2017, pp 46-50). Regional nations questioned India's ideology since India had chosen its side in the 'Cold War' while being a leader of the non-aligned world.

India of course went through wars and interventions during successive regimes. However, as discussed, it was only under Vajpayee that India's foreign perception regarding intervention changed from trying to establish itself as a tentative regional hegemon to a reliable power, practicing restraint but not afraid of escalation if aggravated. However, continuing to rebuild its relationship with Pakistan (Live Mint, 2018).

Under Modi, however, India has not only come out retaliating against terrorist organizations through surgical strikes (Sagar, 2019), which has improved India's foreign and regional perception (Heng, 2023) but also has practiced ideological intervention to promote democracy across the region via peaceful means (Wagner, 2010, 338) even though India's level of democracy has fallen substantially over time (Freedom House, n.d.). This could have negative implications on India's attractiveness globally, however, the study did not find this to be a factor affecting India's soft power in south Asia.

D2. Divergence of Perceptions

To facilitate the global spread of cultural strength, India under the Nehruvian regime, created and led the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the 'Cold War', whose membership largely constituted developing countries and also countries that were about to, or recently had become independent. These countries did not want to participate in the wars of the West or the developed world.

A shift towards developing hard capabilities in successive regimes saw India's foreign perception deteriorate. Even though the Nehruvian model acted as a catalyst for India to join many multilateral institutions at important positions, India's military weakness was emphasized through the loss of parts of its regions to Pakistan and China under his leadership.

This paper essentially argues that indeed such weakness can be dealt with by improving hard capabilities. However, the image and ideologies of the leadership and their policies of interaction are paramount while exercising power - be it hard or soft. Otherwise, in case of divergence, the international community sees the regime as hypocritical and the country's image as untrustworthy. As stated earlier, this happened in the case of the Indira Gandhi regime.

When it comes to the provision of aid and assistance to a region or internationally, in an attempt to gain soft power, the most fundamental point of difference between the West and India is that India works on a unique model of "mutual benefits" (Kugiel, 2017, p.123). It does not push its cultural strength and diplomacy, does not insist on ideological transfer, and does not provide conditional aid and developmental assistance (Kugiel, 2017, p.123). However, this has not been a constant theme and ideology of Indian regimes over the years. This image of India being benevolent, fair in trade, and supportive of developing nations has not always persisted. Since the 1960s there have been key differences in the ideologies of regimes especially between the Indira Gandhi and the Vajpayee regime. Even though both concentrated on amassing hard capabilities and building infrastructure for weapons of mass destruction, the Indira Gandhi regime tried to change the way India interacted and dealt with its neighbors. She shifted India's foreign policy from that of restraint and friendly regional existence to that of interference and a regional hegemon to be feared. Vajpayee, on the other hand, persisted on giving importance to image building and revitalizing India's perception of trustworthiness and stability.

It could be argued that this major concentration by past governments on strengthening, improving, and relying on hard capabilities in its interaction with the region, particularly the Indira Gandhi regime, was because of the regional atmosphere and circumstances in south Asia. However, it depends on how power is exercised which determines what the perception of a nation will be and how its interactions and relations can amass soft power.

It is important to note that India has deteriorated on the level of democracy (Freedom House, n.d.) under Modi's right-wing regime, and this might have a gradual negative impact on India's soft power. Although this study did not find any substantial decrease in India's soft power in the region due to this aspect, it can be tracked in further research.

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D3. Comparative Analysis Table

Regime	Ideologies/Policies/Decisions (Chapter 2)	Perception and Improvement of Soft Power Influence (Chapter 3)
The Nehruvian Regime (Congress: 1947-1964) (Nehruvian ideology of peace and restraint)	- Pioneering - Non-alignment - Global leader of the third block - Restraint - Peaceful negotiations - Non-Interference - Sovereignty (Kugiel, 2017)	- *Aid:* Net receiver of aid (Sawkar, 2022) - *Cultural diplomacy*: Joined many prominent multilateral institutions at positions of power even without hard capabilities. Perceived as natural regional leader (Kugiel, 2017) - *Intervention:* *Failed to address the intervention from Pakistan and China properly* (Kugiel, 2017)
Indira Gandhi regime (Congress: 1966-1977, 1980-1984) (Realism ideology)	- Realpolitik - Realist ideology - Regional hegemony - Opposing the original ideology of non-alignment - Coercion instead of attraction - Distrust in leadership (C. Wagner, 2005) (Kugiel, 2017) (Mishra, M. K., 2016	- *Aid:* She perceived aid as loan (Sawkar, 2022) - *Cultural diplomacy:* Shift in ideology Hypocrisy vis-a-vis foreign policy Distrust in the region and amongst domestic population Portrayal of confused and illegitimate image (Kugiel, 2017) - *Intervention:* Perceived as a tentative and unreliable regional hegemon (Kugiel, 2017)
Vajpayee Regime (BJP: 1996, 1998-2004)	- Development of hard capabilities - Confidence - Regional cooperation - Pragmatic prudence and foreign policy	- *Aid:* Still primarily receiving aid - *Cultural diplomacy:* Development of hard capabilities forcing the region to follow restraint. Clarity of foreign policy

(Neo-Liberal ideology)	- Reformation (Sagar, 2019)	Portrayal of a confident, decisive, and reliable image. Perception of strength and confidence in escalation as well (Kugiel, 2017) (Sagar, 2019) - *Intervention:* Redefining image as a reliable rising regional power. Practicing restraint and protection even after aggravation. Perceived as a stable power in the region(Sagar, 2019)
Modi Regime (BJP: 2014 – current) (Hybrid Ideology – Nehruvian, realism, neo-liberal)	- Neoliberalism - Pragmatic/Smart power - Economic improvement - Strategic institutional reforms in foreign policy (Look East Policy) - Spreading cultural heritage - Improvement of Hard capabilities with a keen focus on foreign perception (Rajiv, 2023) (Som, 2018) (Mahapatra, 2016) (Patil, 2022) (Kugiel, 207) -	- *Aid:* Look East, Act East, and Neighborhood First Policy and provision of free vaccines (Patil, 2022) (Bharti and Bharti, 2021) - *Cultural diplomacy:* *Buddhism* *Yoga* *Content creation and social media to spread cultural strength* *Charismatic leadership* *Tourism development* *Cricket Diplomacy* *Portrayal of strength and benign and friendly image* *Strong multilateral and regional relations* *Friendly & informal relations with all world leaders* (Tech Desk, 2024) (Heng, 2023) - *Intervention:* Surgical strikes and the improvement of military technologies to be more effective and precise in action have improved India's military perception. (Wagner, 2010)

E. Conclusion, Scope, and Limitations

This paper studies the transformation of ideology and foreign policy across India's successive regimes to determine which type of interaction improves the country's soft power perception. It notes the importance of leadership and how each Indian leader formulated and acted on their foreign policy using fundamental factors of interaction in south Asia. Over time it is seen that India has improved its soft power and even though it had to improve its hard capabilities, it is soft power that eventually helped India increase its influence. Also, this has helped India maintain its power, especially in a changing global order where conflict has to be averted.

Furthermore, as noted earlier in the study, the leadership's image is fundamental in defining a country's consolidation of soft power (Isoda, 2024, p.1) (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012, p.561) (Wrighton et al., 2022, pp.21-24).

All in all, the amount of influence gained by India in the region depends on how hard and soft capabilities of power are utilized by the leadership for interacting with countries in south Asia, based on recognized factors of interaction. While improvement of hard capabilities does not negatively affect this influence or perception of India, the potent and tentative use of them does. India needs to stick to its image of being benign and amassing influence primarily through aid and culture.

Therefore, this paper answers the research question in the following way: For India, gaining power in south Asia is based on actions taken by the political leadership in regional interaction through underlying factors of soft power improvement which are: aid, cultural diplomacy, and policies/decisions of interaction/intervention rather than improving/utilizing hard capabilities. Consequently, the analysis concludes that cultural diplomacy stands out as the most important method of interaction and improvement for India's regional influence.

Countries that have had negative rhetoric, such as China, due to their rise in power attributed to hard capabilities, are now trying to improve their image by promoting culture and facilitating a "peaceful rise" by relying on soft power (Das, 2023). Whereas, research show, China's aid in Africa has not improved its image, while the US has been able to increase its influence in Africa over time by providing aid and promoting ideals and beliefs of democracy and freedom (Blair et al., 2021, pp.1371-1362). Therefore, the current literature is in line with our findings that suggest even though aid is a beneficial tool for gaining more influence, it

depends on who is providing aid and how it is provided. Furthermore, the country's ideology and beliefs are important in determining how much soft power is gained.

Consequently, the improvement of cultural diplomacy is considered key to improving the perception of a country in south Asia. Since amassing influence through intervention is unlikely (Cerny, 2012, pp.184-185), and through aid is a contestation between India and China (Banerji, 2023), cultural diplomacy stands out as the factor that will not only help India build lasting relations but also get an advantage when it comes to gaining influence in certain countries that are likely to be more attracted to India due its values or historic ties. This is noticeable and better understood through the content analysis table present in Appendix A. As is apparent, leaders who utilize and spread cultural diplomacy tend to portray a better image of India in the region.

This provides a blueprint for other south Asian countries with an ambition to become a rising power, or to increase their influence in the region.

This paper also concludes, that under Modi, India's soft power has improved and this is attributed to his approach of utilizing a hybrid of interactions practiced by India's previous leaders. It contends that this allows Modi to deal with situations and contexts in different ways.

One of the limitations of this study is the context of leadership which is defined according to the ideology of leadership and the decisions they make. Instead, leadership could have been defined by how the psychology of the leaders affects their decision-making. Furthermore, the leaders were chosen on the basis of the context that they were popular and enjoyed a parliamentary majority to make sure only leaders with a major influence in framing foreign policy were chosen. Manmohan Singh, Modi's predecessor, was also a prominent leader however, rampant corruption scandals (PTI, 2021) and the label of a puppet ruler (Komireddi, 2017) plagued his regime (Palshikar, 2023). This suggested that he faced structural constraints and was thus not chosen for the current study. Hence, future research should explore the gain of soft power by leaders facing structural or institutional constraints in foreign policy and decision-making.

Another limitation arises due to the scope of perception chosen by the study. Instead of studying the perception of people in the region, future research could also look at the perception of people domestically and their perception of regional leadership.

Due to the inability and lack of proficiency of the researcher to read various languages of particular countries in south Asia, this paper could not ascertain India's perception of the vernacular media and articles from other south Asian countries. This is a limitation of the research and should be addressed in similar studies hereafter.

The current study did not consider the mobilization of the Indian diaspora as an important factor of interaction to gain soft power. Although a significant factor, the Indian diaspora influence has limited appeal in south Asia. Further research should be conducted on how India's regimes have successively used diaspora as a means to gain soft power worldwide since this is a crucial factor and one of India's major strengths in gaining soft power (globally). Future research should also employ the use of primary sources such as foreign policy opinion polls, soft power rankings, and manifestos/government decisions regarding India's foreign policy. This could be beneficial to the field.

Furthermore, the current study opens a wide array of research possibilities to compare the subject regimes and their power influences vis-à-vis contemporary regimes in similar countries (or similar situations). This would allow a comparison of any two countries and help determine if the international political and economic environment has a big effect on foreign policy ideology and decisions for developing countries. It may also be beneficial to compare the regional dynamics of soft power for India with another country in a different region. Further research should also cover possible gaps in this research, viz., changes in foreign policy by different types of regimes (democracy or autocracy) and its effect on the improvement of the country's perception. Research from here on should also identify more factors that might be salient when it comes to interaction in south Asia to gain soft power.

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https://www.smh.com.au/national/narendra-modis-yoga-diplomacy-or-how-india-is-winning-friends-and-influencing-people-20160909-grcp0u.html

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Appendix A - Study Sources and Coding Table
Coding Table

Categories of Iteraction	Description	Indicators	Code +ve	Code -ve	Positive/Negative implications due to Indicators usage Regime and Leadership
Foreign aid	Aid and assistance are extremely important especially for developing countries of south Asia who face adverse effects of poverty and climate change (Dutt, 2023) (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 108-109). Developing countries in south Asia have always provided Aid to the less developed and nations emerging from colonialism. India had always been a net receiver of Aid until the 2000s. Providing extensive regional Aid has helped India build a better image in south Asia (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 109-116)	• *Projects* • *FDI* • *Aid* • *Disaster Management* • *Credit* • *Strategic partnership* • *Assitance* • *Regional organizations* • *Regional integration* • *Mobility* • *Liberalization*	FA+	FA-	Nehru -ve Gandhi -ve Vajpayee +ve Modi +ve
Cultural Diplomacy	Cultural Diplomacy can be fundamentally understood as connecting with other countries and its people through spread of culture, religion, sports and other aspects of culture to create a common understanding and	• *Sports Diplomacy* • *Ethos* • *Non-reciprocity* • *Ties* • *Global Audience*	CD+	CD-	Nehru +ve Gandhi -ve Vajpayee +ve Modi +ve

Categories of Iteraction	Description	Indicators	Code +ve	Code -ve	Positive/Negative implications due to Indicators usage Regime and Leadership
	connect between people. It fosters an improvement of a country's perception by influencing people and countries internationally and gaining soft power. One of the most prominent examples of India's cultural diplomacy, apart from religion, yoga, Bollywood etc. was becoming the leader of the emerging non-alignment third block during the cold war. It amassed a greater image amongst the developing and recently independent group of nations (Kugiel, 2017, pp. 94-95).	• *Common Struggle* • *Modernisation* • *Benevolent* • *Content creators* • *Ethos* • *Jonest* • *Common struggle* • *Nonalignment* • *Press censorship* • *Cultural attributes* • *Cultural appeal* • *Cultural exports* • *Neutral* • *Press Censorship* • *Benign* • *Peace*			
Intervention/ Interference	The history of the region, especially India, has been marked with territorial	• *Intervention* • *Interference* • *Invasion*	II+	II-	Nehru -ve Gandhi -ve Vajpayee +ve

Categories of Iteraction	Description	Indicators	Code +ve	Code -ve	Positive/Negative implications due to Indicators usage Regime and Leadership
	integrity, intervention and disputes. It is fundamental, however, for India's behaviour to not be perceived as 'arrogant and uncompromising' in the region as countries of south Asia will then start to perceive India as a threat instead of a benevolent rising power (Dutt, 2023). This makes it difficult to build cooperative and robust relations with these countries (Dutt, 2023).	• *Sovereignty* • *Ceded* • *Non-reciprocity* • *Military aggression* • *Weak* • *Threat* • *Territory* • *Security* • *Intelligence sharing* • *Joint military exercises* • *Military aggression* • *Regional Cooperation*			Modi +ve

Study Sources (The indicators are italicized)

Content Analysis

- India News. (2023, December 6). Kashmir suffered for years due to Jawaharlal Nehru's blunders: Amit Shah. *NDTV*. Retrieved from https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/kashmir-suffered-for-years-due-to-jawaharlal-nehrus-blunders-amit-shah-4639634

If Mr Nehru had taken the right steps, a large chunk of territory would not have been *ceded* and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir would have been part of India. (II-)

Kumar Mishra, S. (2023, December 12). 6 controversial mistakes India's 1st PM Jawaharlal Nehru is often accused of committing. *Zee News*. Retrieved from https://zeenews.india.com/photos/india/six-controversial-blunders-that-jawahar-lal-nehru-is-often-criticised-for-2698039/the-socialist-path-2698044

His critics argue that he was *weak* and irresponsible in protecting the country (II-)

- Tech Desk, (2024, March 8). PM Narendra Modi gives "important task" to content creators in the country. *The Times of India*. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/gadgets-news/pm-narendra-modi-gives-important-task-to-content-creators-in-the-country/articleshow/108329791.cms

Prime minister Narendra Modi has urged digital *content creators* across the country to create content showcasing India's culture and heritage. (CD+)

you have to engage with a *global audience*," the PM said (CD+)

- PTI. (2023, July 8). "You saved us" and prevented "bloodbath", says Sri Lanka's Speaker Abeywardena; thanks India for help during Financial Crisis. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/you-saved-us-and-prevented-bloodbath-says-sri-lankas-speaker-abeywardena-thanks-india-for-help-during-financial-crisis/articleshow/101593953.cms?from=mdr

Expressing his gratitude to "trustworthy friend" India for saving Sri Lanka and preventing a "bloodbath" during its unprecedented economic crisis last year, Parliament Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena has said that not a single nation has extended that kind of *assistance* to Colombo as done by New Delhi. (FA+)

Abeywardena said, "India has always come to *aid* of Sri Lanka" in times of crises, and laid emphasis on the financial assistance given by New Delhi last year when the island nation was mired in the economic turmoil. (FA+)

"That way, India is not a new country to us. It's part of the *ethos* of our country, part of our life, part of our heart," he said, adding, "We are here to receive you, respect you, join with you." (CD+)

- PTI. (2011, January 11). PM leading the most corrupt govt in Indian history: Jaitley. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pm-leading-the-most-corrupt-govt-in-indian-history-jaitley/articleshow/7259467.cms

People say he (prime minister Manmohan Singh) is personally *honest*.... It is a strange honesty that he leads the most corrupt government in India since 1947," Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley said here.

- Komireddi, K. (2017, July 12). Farewell to Manmohan Singh, India's puppet prime minister. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from https://www.thedailybeast.com/farewell-to-manmohan-singh-indias-puppet-prime-minister

What other reasons lie behind the impassioned statements? Besides access, Katchatheevu is important to India for reasons beyond politics. It has cultural, religious, geographical and geopolitical significance. Indian fishermen also pray at St Anthony's shrine and seek his blessings. Beyond the feel-good factors, analysts identify the foremost reason to redevelop an interest in Katchatheevu is to contain China's expanding footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In this context, the little island between Rameswaram and Jaffna assumes new

strategic significance…………..What's hardly explained is that Katchatheevu was not handed over to Sri Lanka on a platter, or made possible due to a great friendship between the two women who were leading India and Sri Lanka at the time, Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The little island was *ceded* 50 years ago to settle a contentious maritime boundary. The India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line was delineated in 1974, followed by a 1976 agreement that demarcated the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal. (II-)

- BBC News. (2011, May 24). India prime minister pledges billions to Africa. *BBC News.* Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13515993

Manmohan Singh spoke of a unique relationship between India and Africa, which he said owed its origins to a *common struggle* against colonialism, apartheid and poverty. (CD+)

- Laskar, R. H. (2024, July 11). Nehru facilitated Austria's emergence as neutral country, says Chancellor. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nehru-facilitated-austria-s-emergence-as-neutral-country-says-chancellor-101720698587510.html

The role of India's first premier Jawaharlal Nehru in complex negotiations that facilitated Austria's emergence as a *neutral* and independent country in 1955 was highlighted by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer at a media interaction with prime minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday. (CD+)

Jayaramu. P.S. (2023, December 31). Reflections on Indian politics. *Deccan Herald*. Retrieved from https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/reflections-on-indian-politics-2830924

In foreign policy, Nehru's positions were informed by his opposition to colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, etc. He crafted the policy of *nonalignment* to pursue the nation's foreign policy. Nehru had great respect for Parliament as an institution. (CD+)

Indira was authoritarian, as was witnessed by the declaration of an internal emergency

leading to the arrest of key opposition leaders and the imposition of *press censorship*. (CD-)

- Kumar, S. (2024, June 15). Neighbours expect Modi 3.0 to transform the region. *The Sunday Guardian*. Retrieved from https://sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/neighbours-expect-modi-3-0-to-transform-the-region

One of the cornerstones of India's foreign policy under PM Modi has been the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. This initiative emphasizes building strong relations with neighbouring countries through enhanced cooperation and development *assistance*…..ceremony reinforces India's focus on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where India has played a dominant regional power role for decades. (FA+)

India's role as a regional leader involves addressing these inequalities through collaborative projects. Modi's government is expected to ramp up investments in connectivity, infrastructure (both physical and digital), technology, and healthcare across neighbouring countries. By providing development *aid* and technical assistance without stringent conditions, India can build goodwill and strengthen its influence. (FA+)

The Modi government has effectively leveraged soft power to enhance India's global standing and this trend is likely to continue. Initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga, cultural exchanges and educational scholarships have bolstered India's image as a *benevolent* neighbour. (CD+)

Strengthening *security cooperation* with neighbours, enhancing *intelligence sharing*, and conducting *joint military exercises* are vital steps towards ensuring regional stability. (II+)

PM Modi's foreign policy team, led by the experienced Dr S. Jaishankar is expected to introduce creative solutions to long-standing issues. This includes leveraging technology for diplomatic communication, engaging with *regional organizations* like SAARC and BIMSTEC, and adopting a multi-alignment approach to balance relations with global powers. (FA+)

Enhancing people-to-people connectivity is essential for deepening *regional integration*. (FA+)

Modi's government is likely to focus on initiatives that facilitate greater mobility, such as *liberalization* of visa, improved transportation links, and collaborative educational programs. (FA+)

- Wade, M. (2016, September 9). Narendra Modi's yoga diplomacy, or how India is winning friends and influencing people. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from https://www.smh.com.au/national/narendra-modis-yoga-diplomacy-or-how-india-is-winning-friends-and-influencing-people-20160909-grcp0u.html

But yoga is also a key asset in Modi's push to promote and develop India's soft power – described by Harvard academic Joseph Nye as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments". Hopefully when people think yoga, they will think of India in a positive way." From the glitz and glamour of Bollywood to the ancient wisdom of Buddhism, India is flush with *cultural attributes* that interest and engage people in other parts of the world. (CD+)

For years India's soft power potential remained largely untapped. But Professor Rory Medcalf, a former Australian diplomat to India and head of Australian National University's National Security College, says that is changing. "It's very clear that the Modi government has been working to harness Indian soft power and *Indian cultural appeal* more effectively that previous Indian governments have," he says. "I'm a great believer in the power of cultural diplomacy, whether you call it soft power or anything else," he says. (CD+)

What we've found is they have allowed us to very significantly broaden the range of contacts that we have from the narrow bureaucratic circles into the arts, the writers, intellectuals and people who are public figures - *culture* became a great way to connect with them (CD+)

Bollywood has won global recognition and now rates among India's most potent *cultural exports.* The film industry has a major following in many parts of Asia and the Middle East. But maybe India's greatest cultural export is Buddhism, which originated in north India and has gradually gained adherents through much of Asia. The region would be very different if

not for that ancient manifestation of Indian soft power. "India is taking the lead in boosting the Buddhist heritage across Asia." Indian scholars have dubbed this "Buddhist diplomacy". India's more assertive use of soft power has sparked inevitable comparisons with its giant regional counterpart, China. (CD+)

Professor Michael Wesley, director of the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Studies at ANU, says the key difference is that China starts out with a "significant set" of disadvantages. "China has an authoritarian regime and people are very aware of that," he says. "India is far from perfect but it doesn't have a Tiananmen Square in its recent past. India is a much more *benign presence* internationally … it is simply less of a threat." (CD+)

- Live Mint. (2018, August 16). Atal Bihari Vajpayee's legacy shapes how India is run today. *Mint*. Retrieved from https://www.livemint.com/Politics/8DlKLvks3VXq9zc9cf5a7J/Atal-Bihari-Vajpayees-legacy-shapes-how-India-is-run-today.html

Foreign policy under Vajpayee saw many innovations, particularly his attempts to reset India-Pakistan *ties*. (CD+)

In 2004, Vajpayee travelled to Pakistan for the south Asian Association for *Regional Cooperation* summit where Pakistan agreed not to allow its soil to be used for anti-India activities. (II+)

Vajpayee can be credited with putting the India-US relations on course for *the strategic partnership* that exists today (FA+)

The dialogue then concentrated on the removal of acrimony from the relationship and cooperation that led to the "Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership". (FA+)

- Kulkarni, S. (2023, March 24). Opinion: When Vajpayee worked with opposition to stave off US pressure. *NDTV*. Retrieved from https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/when-vajpayee-worked-with-opposition-to-stave-off-us-pressure-3885750

It was a triumph of Indian democracy, India's national interests and India's *peace*-promoting foreign policy. And it was achieved through dialogue and consensus-building between the government and the opposition. (CD+)

Sending our troops to join America and its allies in Iraq would demolish India's moral standing in the world, especially in the eyes of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America,".... India has never sided with *military aggression* anywhere in the world (II+)

*All Citations and the Reference list have been structured as per APA 7.

Appendix B – Embargo Statement Reasoning

Reasons:

- This thesis is based on data and information collected and viewed online and reference material accessed till the date of it's publication. Some of the findings, for instance soft power rankings of the country may get modified post publishing of Reports or Finding in the short term.
- Elections in India have just finished and the Government is being formed with coalition support. This can limit the Current Dispensation's (which hitherto enjoyed majority rule for the past 10 years), political flexibility and more importantly may affect it's foreign policy independence.