



## Soft Power of US and India

**For Prelims:** Hard Power, Soft Power, [Non-Aligned Movement \(NAM\)](#), [Operation Brahma](#), [UN](#), [WHO](#), [BRICS](#), G20, [ICCR](#).

**For Mains:** India's Soft Power, Key Elements of Soft Power, Challenges to India's Soft Power Diplomacy, Veena Sikri Committee on ICCR, Recommendations and Way Forward.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

Recent policy shifts under the **President** Trump administration, driven by the "America First" agenda, have led to a **decline in US soft power**, diminishing its global influence and strategic standing.

### What is Soft Power?

- **Soft power** was defined by political scientist **Joseph Nye** as the **ability to shape the preferences of others** through **attraction and persuasion rather than hard power**.
  - It leverages **culture, values, and diplomacy** to influence global affairs.
- **Hard power** refers to a nation's ability to influence others through **coercion**, including **military force, economic sanctions**, and other forms of **pressure**.
  - A successful state balances **hard and soft power, coercion for immediate goals** and influence to shape their long-term attitudes and preferences.
  - Eg: The US employs hard power in military interventions and soft power through diplomacy and cultural outreach. China blends both, using military assertiveness and initiatives like [BRI](#) to expand influence.

### What are the Reasons for the Declining Soft Power of the USA?

- **Weakening Alliances:** Unilateral actions in global conflicts (e.g. [Russia-Ukraine](#)), criticism of [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) and [AUKUS](#), and **shifting policies on allies** like Japan and Canada have strained trust.
  - The **US's unconditional support for Israel in the Gaza** conflict has strained ties with the **Global South and West Asia**.
    - E.g. South Africa has sued Israel at the [ICJ](#) over alleged genocide.
- **Declining Humanitarian Engagement:** Massive funding cuts to [USAID](#) (down to 17% of programs) and the **closure of institutions** like the US Institute of Peace and Voice of America have **reduced US influence in diplomacy and development**.
  - The US's rejection of **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies** casts doubt on its **global advocacy for democracy, equal representation, and religious freedom**.
- **Unstable Trade and Immigration Policies:** The **US shift to protectionism**, including **"reciprocal tariffs,"** risks economic credibility and trade ties with Canada, Mexico, Australia, and India.

- A similar move, the **1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariffs**, worsened the **US economy during the Great Depression**.
- Mass deportations, **curbs on legal migration, tighter scrutiny on H-1B and Green Card holders**, and a **ban on birthright citizenship** weaken America's image as a land of opportunity and diversity.
- **Declining Higher Education Appeal:** Crackdowns on student protests, deportations of foreign students, and funding cuts for universities are reducing international enrollments, weakening a major pillar of US soft power.

## India's Approach to Reciprocity in Foreign Relations

- The **Gujral Doctrine** outlines **5 principles guiding India's foreign relations**, emphasizing that **its strength is linked to regional stability**.
- One of its key principles is to **prioritize friendly ties by offering unilateral concessions to smaller neighbors** like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka **without expecting reciprocity**, fostering **goodwill and trust** in the region.

## What are the Key Elements of India's Soft Power?

- **Cultural Influence:** Yoga, Ayurveda, Bollywood, Indian cuisine, and spiritual traditions like **Hinduism and Buddhism** enhance India's global appeal.
- **Historical & Diaspora Connections:** India shares strong cultural ties especially with Asia and Africa; a **35 million-strong global Indian diaspora** strengthens business, politics, and cultural influence.
- **Democracy & Global Leadership:** India's democratic model inspires developing nations. **Gandhian ideals of non-violence** influenced global leaders like **Nelson Mandela** and **Martin Luther King Jr.**
  - India has led the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and advocates for the Global South in international forums.
- **Economic & Technological Growth:** As a global leader in **IT, digital payments (like UPI and Aadhaar), and pharmaceuticals**, India played a key role during the **Covid-19** pandemic by providing vaccines and medicines through **vaccine diplomacy**.
- **Education & Knowledge Exchange:** India attracts students from across the world to its top institutions like **IITs and IIMs**.
  - Through **scholarships and training programs like ITEC**, India helps many developing nations build skills and knowledge.
- **India's Humanitarian Aid:** India provides global disaster relief and financial aid, including **Operation Brahma** (2025 Myanmar-Thailand earthquake) and financial assistance to **Sri Lanka**.
  - It supports **CDRI** and aids infrastructure and capacity-building in developing nations.
- **Multilateral Diplomacy:** India plays an active role in the **UN, WHO, BRICS**, and **G20**, India **promotes multilateral solutions over unilateral actions in global affairs**.

## What are the Challenges to India's Soft Power Diplomacy?

- **Institutional Gaps:** As per the **Committee on External Affairs Report (2022-23)**, India's soft power efforts remain **fragmented** due to **poor coordination** among institutions like **ICCR, AYUSH, and Tourism**. The **ICCR lacks a clear mandate and strategic direction**, while the **MEA has yet to assess India's soft power assets comprehensively**.
- **Limited Multilateral Diplomacy:** India has **yet to fully leverage multilateral platforms** like **UNESCO, BRICS, SAARC, and G20** for advancing its soft power diplomacy.
  - Also, **limited engagement in Track 2 (non-governmental) and Track 3 (people-to-people) diplomacy** has restricted its global influence.
- **Limited Financial Resources:** Unlike countries such as China and the US, India allocates **minimal funding for soft power initiatives**.

- This financial constraint **limits India's ability to expand** its cultural and diplomatic outreach globally.
- **Lack of Formal Study:** India's approach to soft power remains **sporadic**, as it lacks a **formal study** on global best practices.
  - While countries like **China (Confucius Institutes)**, the **UK (British Council)**, and **France (Alliance Française)** have systematically promoted their culture and languages, India has yet to adopt a structured model for cultural diplomacy.
- **Underutilized Diaspora:** Despite having one of the world's largest diasporas, India **lacks a structured mechanism** to effectively engage overseas Indians in shaping international perceptions.
  - While **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas** and **diaspora awards** exist, more **needs to be done to integrate** them into foreign policy.
- **Passive Approach to Public Diplomacy:** While India enjoys natural soft power appeal through its culture, it has **not proactively translated these assets into strategic influence**.
  - Unlike China, which actively invests in global media and education, India has **yet to fully capitalize on its cultural and diplomatic strengths**.

## Way Forward

- **Comprehensive Policy on Soft Power:** India must develop a **structured national strategy** for **cultural diplomacy** and formally **integrate Track 2 and Track 3 diplomacy** into its foreign policy to enhance global outreach.
- **Restructuring Institutions:** India should restructure **ICCR (Veena Sikri Committee)**, enhance **cultural diplomacy** via **PPPs**, expand **global media presence** (e.g., **Doordarshan International**), and improve coordination among **ICCR, Embassies, and MEA**.
  - A dedicated **cultural diplomacy task force** should be created to promote **yoga, Ayurveda, Hindi, classical dance, and cuisine** globally.
- **Leveraging Multilateral Platforms:** India should **enhance participation in UNESCO projects, expand cultural centers abroad**, utilize **global summits for cultural diplomacy**, and strengthen bilateral cultural agreements to deepen international partnerships.
- **Learning from International Best Practices:** India should conduct a **formal study of global soft power strategies** and adopt successful models similar to China, UK, France, and Japan's programs to strengthen cultural diplomacy.
- **Diaspora & Educational Diplomacy:** Establish a **structured framework** to involve the **Indian diaspora in advocacy, business, and policymaking** while expanding scholarships under **ITEC and Study in India programs** to attract global students.

## Conclusion

The decline of **US soft power** underscores the need for a **balance between military strength and cultural influence**. India can leverage '**Smart Power**' a **strategic blend of soft and hard power** to enhance its global standing by strengthening **cultural diplomacy and strategic partnerships** in a **multipolar world**.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

"Soft power is an essential component of a nation's global influence, complementing its hard power capabilities." Discuss the significance of soft power in India's foreign policy and suggest measures to enhance its global outreach.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims:**

**Q. Consider the following statements: (2016)**

1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (a)**

**Mains:**

**Q.** Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UN Security Council.(2015)

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