



### Utilizing Pakistan's Soft Power Potential in Foreign Policy Dynamics

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**Abstract:** Soft power has gained a significant role in foreign policy formulation process across the globe. States are pursuing national interests by influencing others using their soft power potential. The world's attention has changed gradually from hard power to soft power. Elements of culture and economy play dominant roles in foreign policy. World powers including the US and China have been dominating the global affairs using their soft powers. The Pakistani State also has started certain initiatives for inclusion of soft power in its foreign policy. These range from cultural promotion to provision of scholarships to international students, from developmental assistance to various bilateral/multilateral agreements, from providing humanitarian help to assisting global peace initiatives etc. The study aims to describe prospects and challenges of operating soft power element in Pakistan's foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Soft Power, Foreign Policy, Global Influence

#### 1. Introduction

Soft power has emerged in political discourse at the end of the 20th Century. Foreign policy experts in the Western countries especially the US and the UK elaborate on the notion of soft power in accordance with the different lived contexts. They are of the view that incorporating soft power into foreign policy is an efficient and cost-effective way to attain national interests of a certain country (Nye and Jisi, 2009). Lately, the scholars and the researchers in the Developing and non-Western countries such as India, Turkey, China started indigenizing and de-Westernizing the idea of soft power. This made soft power the most widely accepted notion among the students of International Relations and policymakers. Chitty (2016) states that regardless of the differences in contexts and interests within which they are manifested, soft power has become 'popular currency for many universities, foreign ministries, and think tanks across the world'. Issues emerging from nuclear proliferation, terrorism, cyber-attacks, pandemics, climate change and economic crises requisite the art of soft power in negotiation and resolution. Consequently, soft power has become an important subject of contemporary International Relations especially concerning foreign policy.

Various experts and researchers define soft power differently in academic landscape. This paper adopts and makes use of Nye's (2013) definition of soft power 'an ability to get what you want through attraction rather than payments or coercion'. In today's world, the context of international politics is very effectual and makes it difficult for the States to envisage and proactively respond to various issues regarding

foreign policy. Nye (2011) pinpoints that 'power diffusion' and 'power transition' are two significant changes in global political context that augment the significance of soft power in the foreign policy. He is of the view that power is transitioning from the Developed Western to Developing non-Western countries. This is labelled as the rise of the rest by Zakaria (2008) while the power has been diffused with the emergence of non-state actors in international politics which is a significant development. States are no longer significant actors in International Relations and are gradually losing their control over the distribution of power (Nye, 2011).

Ohnesorge (2019) mentions economic interdependence as a phenomenon where almost all the States including the Developing and the Developed countries are greatly affected by the global economic and financial crises. He is of the view regarding the rise of non-state actors in international politics that many of the multinational companies are generating more revenues as compared to a great number of nations which are pushing the economy off limits to the national power. For instance, the Talks between the US and Afghan Taliban before the Fall of Kabul in 2021, highlighted that how the non-state actors have gained the capability of negotiating with the powerful state who possess the hard power in the modern international politics.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent international financial crisis attest that indeed the world is a global village. Governments and those pharmaceutical giants across the border including Moderna, BioNTech and Pfizer, as well as multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organizations, collaborated to produce vaccines against COVID-19 and ensured that they are fairly distributed. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and other financial institutions stepped forward to support the Developing States to combat this upheaval of the economic crisis. Pandemics and natural catastrophes could not be addressed with hard power by governments, other non-governmental organizations and actors. Soft power has become a necessity to foreign policies of many countries to bargain for economic aid, vaccines, and trade to be carried on. The example of South Korean foreign policy that attempted to brand itself as an exemplar in the management of COVID-19, had even influenced G-20 forum in attracting foreign investment (Attias, 2020). The South Korean foreign policy example gives rise to the hypothesis that foreign policy of tangible actions and manifestation helps a nation to deploy soft power. This hypothesis is validated by Hill and Beadle (2014), who states that soft power works effectively in the practice of foreign policy only when it aligns with domestic values and is considered legitimate. According to Nye (2004), an arrogant, narrow and two-faced foreign policy can hardly resort to soft power.

Soft power is often argued to lack tangible results in comparison to hard power in the foreign policy. Nye (2011) responds to this criticism by stating that soft power often had real effects in history. Many other scholars join Nye and reinforce his idea that soft power accomplishes varied and significant objectives of a country's foreign policy. Measuring the results of exercising the soft power, however, is very complicated because of three reasons: the results come up in a long time period; the outcomes are much dependent on the recipient groups or country rather than the applicant; and governments lack control over soft power instruments. This research is an attempt to answer the question that, how soft power operates in the foreign policy of Pakistan? This study is based on the empirical observations of the researchers. By using descriptive and qualitative analysis of different manuscripts, written records, books, reports and press releases, the findings are summarized and subsequently highlighted the role of soft power in Pakistan's foreign policy.

## **2. Soft Power as an Ingredient of Foreign Policy**

There are three fundamental resources of soft power. Foreign policy is among the three primary resources of soft power. The other two resources are culture and political values (Johnson, Reynolds, Mycoff, 2015). One of the definitions of foreign policy is 'the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a State) in international relations' (Harrison & Lock, 2015). Usually, the foreign policy of a country includes bilateral and multilateral agreements signed with other countries, memberships of International Organizations such as the WTO and the IMF, support to the UN Peacekeeping Missions, settlements of territorial disputes, providing educational scholarships to foreign students, organizing international events, providing developmental assistance to the needy nations, and promoting democracy in other regions.

Combining soft power strategies into foreign policy greatly contributes to achieving the national interest of a country. It minimizes the fear factor among other countries, thus making other nations come on board

to share common interests. However, there are a number of conditions that have to be in place to effectively combine soft power into foreign policy. Among them is the alignment of foreign policy of a country with its domestic realities. In addition, diversity in the tools of foreign policy gives a country an opportunity of making selective choices and implementing various strategies toward achieving its desired interests. Pakistan has a rich and diverse soft power resource. However, little efforts have been made to exploit these for the achievement of foreign policy goals and objectives. This study solely relies on the role of soft power in Pakistan's foreign policy. Descriptive analysis has been done and the findings are documented in this research study. Resource categorization based on Joseph Nye (2011), Pakistan's soft power resources can be put into the three categories, which are categorized as:

1. Culture, which is one of the basic resources of foreign policy includes religion, history, sports, language tourism and media
2. Political values comprise of civil society, political culture, form of governance, democratic values and societal diversity
3. Foreign policy includes cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, trade relations, humanitarian interventions, developmental aid and peace-building initiatives

## **2.1 Pakistan, Foreign Policy and Soft Power**

Soft power is an embodiment of power accessible to all, including the Developing and the Developed countries. This notion augments to an inference that like all other States, Pakistan also owns this form of power. Historically, soft power has played a salient role in the foreign policy of Pakistan. Conception of soft power can be cited in guidelines developed by the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, to develop the foreign policy of Pakistan. Mehrunnisa (1990) quoted one of Jinnah's oratories of 15 August 1947. *Mr. Jinnah said that our main objective should be peace within and peace without. We want to live peacefully, maintain friendly and cordial relations with our neighbours and with the world at large. We have no aggressive designs against anyone. We are committed to the UN Charter and are fully willing to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world.* Jinnah underlined peaceful coexistence and alignment with the UN charter. He established the foundations of Pakistan's foreign policy as creating friendly relations with other countries and also establishing peace throughout the world. However, the inherited insecurities, geostrategic location and the great-game are some of the hurdles that Pakistan has to navigate in order to realize this vision of foreign policy.

Pakistan has inherited some of the issues of foreign policy from colonial times including the Durand line and the India-Occupied Kashmir (IOK) with its neighbors, Afghanistan and India, respectively. Pakistan since its origination has been striving to work on its soft power to address these issues. Despite this, there is a thin and sparse body of literature in academia about the efforts made by Pakistan to use its soft power. Pakistan has diverse soft power resources which are waiting to be harnessed by political will and effective strategies with which it can achieve its desired objectives of foreign policy. Loughhead (2018) accessed historical archives of the British Government, which made her know about the successfully managed diplomatic efforts of the newly established Pakistani Government. Pakistan utilized its soft power and mobilized international support over the issue of Afghanistan regarding the Durand line.

Contemporary literature adduces that the foreign policy of Pakistan has remained pro-nuclear, pro-Western and pro-Chinese during its entire span of existence (Mohammad, 2002). The foreign policy remains security-centered and tries to protect its independence, territorial integrity and national identity. Pakistan continues to stagger at attempting to make and sustain a strong relationship with other Muslim nations. It has maintained and adhered to global norms and standards (Rizvi, 2004). Regional equations and geostrategic landscapes create some security issues that have unfortunately dominated the agenda of foreign policy of Pakistan. Despite these challenges, Pakistan has gone ahead to implement some projects that could enhance soft power capital in its foreign policy.

## **2.2 Educational Exchanges - Scholarships for International Students**

The Government of Pakistan awards scholarships to international students. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) announces scholarships for students belonging to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Hungary, the OIC members and countries from the less developed regions. The Pakistani education system faces many issues which includes obsolete curriculum, lack of direction, untrained and unqualified teachers, a very high dropout rate, lack of financial and human resources, and poor management (Iqbal, 2014). Despite these problems, the country is providing scholarships to students of the Under-Developed

and the Developing countries. Internationalization of education has huge potential to produce soft power for Pakistan, especially in developing Muslim countries. Pakistan should learn from the experiences of China, Russia, Thailand, and India where international students are increasingly enrolling in institutes of higher education.

### **3. Aid for Development**

According to Nye, developmental assistance is one of the most significant tools of soft power. Hardly any examples have so far appeared in writing where a developing nation sends development assistance to another developing nation. Pakistan, although numbered amongst the top ten recipients of the largest amount of developmental aid in the region of Asia, faces a lot of economic upheavals and hindrances, still Pakistan is offering developmental assistance to Afghanistan for infrastructural, social and political development.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, speaking at the inauguration of Jinnah Hospital in Kabul, stated that Pakistan's bilateral developmental aid had reached one billion US dollars in 2019. He further said that such support was being provided to Afghanistan in pursuance of Pakistan's policy goal of broadening and deepening the people-to-people connections between the two neighbouring countries. This developmental aid is being used in various projects, such as agriculture, infrastructure, health, education, and the capacity building of Afghan professionals. Of course, it has significantly contributed to state-building in Afghanistan, but not very effectively in the way a positive image of Pakistan was to be created. Several factors lie behind this failure of Pakistan's soft power, including the interference of India, internal conflicts in Afghanistan, the vested interests of Great Powers, Pakistan's alleged relations with the Taliban, and perceptions of the antecedent ruling regimes and young generation in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has also provided emergency assistance to some of the Muslim countries such as Palestine, Syria, Lebanon. Different technical assistance program for friendly developing countries have been designed. The program intends to build up a soft image of Pakistan, fortify bilateral relationships, and share knowledge and experiences. Official training has been given to officials of developing countries. The major countries are Vietnam, Malawi, Iran, Indonesia, Senegal, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Maldives and Myanmar. Despite scarce resources, Pakistan has been trying to offer developmental cooperation, humanitarian assistance and trainings to other developing countries. In order to institutionalize developmental assistance, Pakistan needs an agency like the USAID, Australian Aid and the UK Aid, engaged solely in foreign aid for the accomplishment of objectives of the foreign policy. This shall help the state in materializing its soft power.

#### **3.1 Initiatives for Peace**

The UN peacekeeping missions participation, enhances the soft power of a country. Pakistan's role in the UN is characterized as a promoter of sovereignty, peace, respect, and the behavior of a good neighbour (Wasi, 2005). Pakistan is a founding member of the UN peacebuilding commission. The country stands among the top members in the list of 120 countries that are contributing to the UN peacekeeping forces in the world. Support by Pakistan for the UN peacekeeping was appreciated by Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, who, during his visit to Pakistan, said, "Thanks to the thousands of Pakistani soldiers who have served under the UN flag and to the many distinguished Pakistani scholars, economists, and international civil servants who have advanced our work for development and peace, Pakistan can truly call itself a leader in the work of the international community". Hameed Ali Khan Rai (1970) researched the role of Pakistan at the UN. He concluded that Pakistan has remained an active member of UN peacekeeping forces since its inception, did the crucial job of resolving the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956 and maintained its impartiality in doing it. Meiske and Ruggeri (2017) concluded that Pakistan uses its peacekeeping contribution to develop a soft image, minimize diplomatic isolation, and attract the international community for increased economic cooperation and developmental assistance. Krishnasamy (2002) wrote that Pakistan demonstrated its capacity to contribute significantly to international peacekeeping. He identifies two major fields where Pakistan has proved its excellence: its ground troops contributed as and when required, and providing expertise in implementing peacekeeping projects during emergency situations.

Contributions, recognitions, and sacrifices notwithstanding, Pakistan still could not use its soft power as one of the largest contributors of troops. Kiani draws attention towards the fact that Pakistan was not even invited to policy-level discussions on peacekeeping arranged by the UN in 2004. Peacekeeping missions

are rarely marketed by Pakistan at regional and international forums.

Pakistan should, devise a strategy to highlight its role as an international peacekeeper. The existing literature narrates some examples where Pakistan has also played a vital part in bringing peace to Afghanistan. For example, Pakistan has offered a setting as an avenue to host intra-Afghan talks between Afghanistan's democratic government and the Taliban. This simply means that Pakistan needs effective strategies on its role in regional and international peace-building efforts to achieve objectives in its foreign policy.

#### **4. Treaties - Bilateral and Multilateral**

Bilateral and multilateral treaties supplement the soft power of countries that grants even smaller nations the possibility of negotiating with larger and powerful ones. Gieger (2010) indicates that even smaller countries are now confident in their ability to confront more influential states like the US despite not having much hard power. Pakistan has entered into 60 conventions and treaties and has acceded to the various international undertakings in order to provide a check on drugs and crimes; science, education, and culture, the environment, human rights and disarmament. Pakistan has also sealed 1120 bilateral agreements and MoUs with 68 countries.

Still, they point towards unexploited potential of soft power for Pakistan. These arrangements strengthen the country's position to negotiate with other countries in pursuance of its national interests. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed two sub divisions to help in promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation which include Science Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy. Both initiatives are said to support the objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy. The initiatives also hint at Pakistan's inclination toward understanding its potential for soft power and begin making plans to realize it.

##### **4.1 Cultural Diplomacy**

Various initiatives were undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that have created a soft image for the country across its borders by projecting Pakistani culture abroad. Pakistan arranged various musical events at the UN General Assembly and received appreciative comments coupled with recognition of cultural resources and efforts of Pakistan's diplomats from the international community.

Former Pakistani ambassador to the US and the UN, Maliha Lodhi recalls her experiences when Pakistan used cultural diplomacy to win the election to an important UN body. She recalled inviting a famous Pakistani singer to introduce traditional music to the members of the General Assembly, a street food festival and photo exhibition, and celebrating Eid at the UN. She managed to win 151 out of 193 votes at the General Assembly. Besides, Pakistan started hosting festivals that attracted people around the globe to Pakistan. The Annual Literature Festivals in Karachi and Islamabad are among the top events utilized to introduce Pakistani literature to its readers all over the world. Professor Francis Robinson, a British historian of international repute, says about the prospect of Pakistani cities as tourist destinations. He said, "Pakistani writers produce outstanding works in English literature that enthralls readers everywhere."

Pakistan has begun to learn that public diplomacy is an essential element of its foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently established the "strategic communication division" for publicizing the narrative of the country before the world." Pakistan is a country that has great potential in cultural diplomacy that can create soft power to further realize the objectives of its foreign policy. Archaeological sites, traditional food, folk music, ethnic diversity, diverse landscape, sports, handicrafts and literature are some of the main sources to generate soft power. But even though it possesses these sources, the image of Pakistan is being presented as a country of extremism, transboundary conflicts and intolerance.

##### **4.2 Trade**

Pakistan has vast potential to exploit economic resources for creating soft power. The country is blessed with an abundance of water, land, sunlight, coal, minerals, metals, gemstones, crops, vegetation, herbs, birds and animals. These can raise the economy of the country. The landscape of the country is quite diversified, varies from the second-highest mountain in the world to the desert of Thar to the ocean. Despite this abundance, still the country is not in a position to use those resources effectively for converting them into valuable economic products.

Trade is one of the best tools to revitalize the economy. Trading with neighbors is low cost and also on time. Pakistan does not have good relations with its major neighbor, India. This significantly affects the overall volume of trade. Among the top twenty countries to which Pakistan exports, there are only two

neighbors: China and Afghanistan, to which it imports and exports. Limitation in trade with neighbors affects the economy.

Pakistan exports raw materials like cotton, fruit and vegetables and simple manufactured products like textile and sports goods while importing high-tech products like machinery, manufactured goods, chemicals, and oil. Country lacks advancement in technology and skills to convert these raw materials into value-added products of high global demand. It resulted in a disparity between exports and imports. Exports are almost half the imports. This leads to a huge trade deficit and, as such, a poor economy.

Giustozzi (2008) gives an example that Pakistan's economy helped the former increase its influence in southern Afghanistan. He detects that the economy is a strong factor in making better relations between tribes on the other side of the border. Pakistani rupee is used for trade in bordering areas of Afghanistan. CPEC also opens an avenue for Pakistan to boost its economy up. A stronger economy will directly add to the enhancement of soft power potential for Pakistan. The most crucial strategies to consolidate the economy of Pakistan includes successful integration of Pakistan into the global economy; solid macroeconomic policies; strong institutional and governance framework, investment in infrastructure and human development, and political environment stability. Pakistan is advantaged by geography, which provides an intra-regional trade and investment advantage. The law-and-order situation must become radically better, the government machinery rebuilt, learn and build up technology, strengthen democracy, and normalize relations with neighbors before Pakistan can tap the maximum potential of its economic resources.

### **4.3 Military Might – Complementing Country's Image**

Nye points out that military power used for humanitarian assistance and protection produces soft power. He adds that "non-coercive and benign uses of military resources can be an important source of soft power behaviour of framing of agendas, persuasion and attraction in world politics. Pakistan's military is among the largest militaries in Asia and has proved to be amongst the best in countering terrorism and improving domestic security. Pakistan's military has also proved its skill and ability in UN peacekeeping missions.

The world has recognized the professionalism of Pakistan's military and respects this, especially in Muslim countries. Whenever calamities or calamitous situations arise or development works take place in this land, the military always supports civilian organizations. People in Pakistan admire the support of the military towards development and humanitarian work. A survey conducted by an international research institution in 2018 concludes that nearly ninety-six percent of the people in Pakistan support the work done by the military. The other area where the Pakistani military is contributing highly is in education and training. The armed forces have developed schools, colleges, and universities where children of armed forces and civilian families may also be sent for studies.

Pakistani military is considered to be one of the professional and skilled militaries of the world in the domain of counter-terrorism and international peace building. The military training institutes train officials from other countries too. This reflects the likelihood that soft power is present in non-coercive use of the Pakistani military. Pakistan could provide its experience and skills pertaining to peace building, humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism to other countries.

### **5. Conclusion**

The concept of soft power is arguably the most discussed and popular debate in international relations today. Since 1990, Western countries have systematically explored and exercised their soft power resources. Non-Western countries such as China, Russia, India and Turkey learned from the West and indigenized their soft power strategies.

Many examples can be pinpointed regarding the contributions of soft power resources both to the Western and non-Western States in accomplishing their foreign policy aims. The concept of soft power is not well-noted in reference to Pakistan. Nearly a decade ago, Pakistan has initiated certain activities that can be regarded as efforts to amass soft power. These include foreign aid to Afghanistan, hosting millions of Afghan refugees, sending military troops for the UN peacekeeping missions, arranging international sports events, offering scholarships to international students for higher education, signing bilateral and multilateral agreements, backing Afghan peace and promoting international tourism. All these activities, though minimal in extent, speaks well of Pakistan's concern for its international reputation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spearheaded these efforts in consultation and coordination with relevant

ministries. Pakistan offered scholarships to thousands of foreign students, signed hundreds of bilateral and multilateral agreements, promoted bilateral and multilateral trade. The state, provided development assistance and humanitarian assistance, promoted Pakistani culture at international forums and provided peace building support at regional and global levels. Little, however, has been researched on the scope and scale of these initiatives. Pakistan is read and understood through the words of foreign writers at global level. The country is pictured as a weak state which favors the terrorist organizations making one side of the fuzzy picture clearer. All the scholars and researchers of Pakistan are struggling enough to explain the other end i.e. local perspectives to complete the jigsaw puzzle that is the political situation. More studies on Pakistan's soft power can help to strengthen the foreign policy of the country and to improve the image of the country.

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