



# Soft Power, Hard Interests: A Decadal Analysis Of Diplomacy And Image-Building In Indo-US Relations (2014–2024)

AYUSH BHARGAVA

Research Scholar

Political Science department,

Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundelkhand University

Chhatarpur Madhya Pradesh

India

**Abstract:** This study comprehensively analyses the strategic integration of soft power initiatives with hard geopolitical objectives in shaping Indo-US relations during the Modi administration from 2014 to 2024. It demonstrates how Prime Minister Narendra Modi adeptly utilised public diplomacy, diaspora mobilisation, and cultural narratives to bolster India's global image while simultaneously pursuing core strategic goals with the United States. Key successes include significant advancements in defence cooperation, technology access, and a strengthened role in the Indo-Pacific. The paper highlights how high-profile events, such as the "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" rallies, and the institutionalisation of the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogues, meticulously aligned symbolic gestures with substantive policy pursuits. Despite these achievements, the analysis also addresses persistent challenges, including India's unwavering commitment to strategic autonomy, its continued engagement with Russia, and the impact of domestic political narratives on its international standing. Ultimately, the Modi government's calibrated application of soft power served as a potent vehicle to project national strength, accumulate diplomatic capital, and negotiate from a position of enhanced legitimacy in its evolving relationship with Washington.

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the Modi administration (2014-2024), India's relationship with the United States underwent a significant transformation, marked by a strategic blend of soft power and hard geopolitical interests. Prime Minister Narendra Modi adeptly used public diplomacy, diaspora engagement, and cultural narratives to enhance India's global image while simultaneously pursuing core strategic objectives with the U.S. This approach was evident in high-profile events like the "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" rallies, the establishment of the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogues, and India's active role in the Quad. The analysis shows that these symbolic gestures were meticulously aligned with substantive policy goals, including boosting bilateral trade, deepening defence cooperation, securing access to crucial technologies, and strengthening India's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific. Essentially, the Modi government leveraged soft power as a sophisticated tool to project national strength, accumulate diplomatic capital, and negotiate from a position of greater legitimacy in world politics with Washington.

This period represents a pivotal shift in India's foreign policy, moving away from its historical non-alignment and occasional anti-American stance toward a more pragmatic, interest-driven approach. This evolution unfolded within a dynamic global environment characterised by China's increasing assertiveness, a fluctuating degree of U.S. engagement, and a weakening Russia. The bilateral relationship progressed from being described as "hopelessly adrift" to a "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership."

To fully grasp this transformation, it's crucial to understand the concepts of soft power and hard interests. Joseph Nye states, "Soft power is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion. It relies on a country's culture, political values, and legitimate foreign policies." However,

governments often find soft power difficult to wield directly, as many of its resources lie outside governmental control.

In contrast, "Hard power involves the direct use of military and economic means to influence other nations through threats or incentives. This includes military action, economic sanctions, and the formation of military alliances, and is tied to tangible resources like population size, natural resources, and military strength." The fundamental idea is that the Modi government skillfully blended these two types of power, employing soft power as an advanced tool to build diplomatic capital and project national might, thereby making it easier to pursue hard geopolitical goals. This strategy represents a reinterpretation of India's long-standing notion of "strategic autonomy," enabling it to more aggressively pursue its national interests, even if doing so implies tighter alignment with the United States while preserving relations with long-standing allies like Russia. This change in perspective is essential to comprehending how soft power was successfully used to further hard interests.

## II. MODI ADMINISTRATION'S SOFT POWER STRATEGIES (2014-2024)

The Modi administration has actively leveraged India's cultural and civilizational heritage as a key component of its foreign policy, moving soft power to the forefront of its diplomatic efforts. These strategies are a deliberate attempt to enhance India's global image and influence.

### A. Public Diplomacy and High-Profile Engagements

The Modi administration utilised public diplomacy to enhance India's global standing and strengthen U.S. ties, notably through large-scale rallies like "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump." These events were strategically designed to project Prime Minister Modi as a global leader, leverage the Indian diaspora, and advance mutual diplomatic and economic interests. They also served as a means for Modi to manage his domestic political image and for the U.S. President to appeal to Indian-American voters. This approach reflects a broader shift in India's foreign policy towards informal diplomacy, prioritising symbolic gestures and personal rapport to facilitate broader strategic goals.

The detailed descriptions of "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" reveal that these events were far more than mere public spectacles. They were meticulously designed to serve a critical dual purpose:

Firstly, they aimed to bolster Prime Minister Modi's domestic image and legitimacy, particularly amidst internal political and economic challenges such as the economic slowdown, protests against the citizenship law, and the Kashmir issue. By appearing alongside a sitting US President, Modi gained significant international validation, which could be translated into domestic political capital.

Secondly, this international endorsement and the positive optics generated were intended to be leveraged in subsequent bilateral negotiations with the US. The fact that trade talks were ongoing or anticipated around the time of these rallies suggests that the "optics" were intended to create a more favourable environment for "hard interest" discussions.

The success of these public diplomacy events in generating positive perceptions, even if immediate substantive policy gains were limited, provided Modi with enhanced legitimacy and a stronger negotiating posture. This directly embodies the assertion of "calibrated use of soft power as a vehicle to project strength, gain diplomatic capital, and negotiate from a position of enhanced legitimacy." It highlights a sophisticated understanding of how public perception can influence diplomatic outcomes.

### B. Diaspora Mobilisation

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi considers the global Indian diaspora a key strategic asset, referring to them as a "secret ingredient" and "soft power multipliers." This marks a significant shift from previous governments, which were less engaged with overseas Indians. Events like "Howdy Modi" are designed to foster a "transnational identity" among the diaspora, encouraging them to participate in lobbying, investment, and technology partnerships to strengthen bilateral ties and promote cultural diplomacy. Their influence can lead to tangible policy outcomes, such as the declaration of Diwali as a school holiday in New York City.

Some of these activities are subject to U.S. law, as demonstrated by the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP), a U.S. affiliate of India's ruling party, registering under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). This act requires organisations engaged in political activities on behalf of foreign political parties to publicly disclose their actions and financial ties. The OFBJP's registration, for example, revealed its efforts to mobilise support and influence Indian elections, highlighting the dual nature of diaspora engagement.

Historically, India often viewed the emigration of its skilled citizens as a detrimental "brain drain". The Modi administration has consciously and effectively reframed this narrative, promoting it as a "brain gain", emphasising the diaspora's invaluable contributions to their host nations and their potential to enrich India through remittances, technology transfer, and influence. This shift is not merely rhetorical; it is underpinned by active and formalised mobilisation efforts. The "activation of their transnational identity" transforms them from passive expatriates into active agents of Indian foreign policy. The diaspora's influence extends far

beyond mere cultural exchange, encompassing direct advocacy for India's interests in the US, with the potential to shape US policy towards India. This establishes a clear and direct causal link between India's soft power (people-to-people ties and cultural affinity) and its hard interests (policy influence, trade negotiations, and strategic partnerships). This signifies a sophisticated understanding of soft power, where human capital abroad is strategically converted into tangible political and economic leverage.

### C. Cultural Narratives and Image Building

The Modi government has placed significant emphasis on promoting India's rich cultural heritage and its historical contributions across various fields, including science, mathematics, philosophy, and arts, aiming to position India as a unique "civilizational ethos" among rising global powers. This narrative includes highlighting ancient Indian achievements like Aryabhata's invention of zero, the origins of Ayurveda, and contemporary successes in space programs such as Chandrayaan-3 and Gaganyaan, to showcase India's scientific excellence. Values, such as secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and the cross-fertilisation of culture, are consistently emphasised as intrinsic to India's civilisation. The theme of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) adopted during India's G20 presidency in 2023 serves as a prime example of this universalistic narrative. The administration has actively cultivated the narrative of India as 'Vishva guru' (the world's teacher), promoting values like environmentalism, clean governance, and peaceful co-existence.

Popular in the West, yoga is one of India's most common cultural exports and has been used more and more as a crucial tool of India's soft power. India's 2015 successful convincing of the UN to establish June 21 as International Yoga Day—a resolution endorsed by 177 nations—was a noteworthy diplomatic accomplishment. This institutionalisation gives Indian embassies and consulates a recognised worldwide venue to hold sizable yoga gatherings, workshops, and cultural displays. This strategy aims to portray India as embodying deep historical wisdom and the universal values of unity, harmony, and peace.

Bollywood, the globally recognised film industry based in India, serves as a powerful "cultural ambassador" for the nation. Its films are noted for their ability to transcend language barriers through deeply captivating emotions, constant innovation in cinematography, and timeless music and dance.

India's use of cultural elements like Yoga and Bollywood to build a positive global image is complicated by a conflict between its external projection of universal values and internal nationalist undertones. While these cultural assets are presented as unifying, they are sometimes seen as promoting specific political ideologies, such as Hindu nationalism. This contradiction can weaken India's international credibility and create a confusing global image, ultimately hindering its ability to gain genuine diplomatic influence, especially with partners that value democracy and pluralism. The long-term success of India's soft power, therefore, depends on the consistency between its domestic conduct and its external message.

## III. PURSUIT OF HARD GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS (2014-2024)

The Modi administration has actively pursued India's hard geopolitical interests, marking a departure from a more traditionally cautious foreign policy. This shift is characterised by a more assertive stance and a willingness to use hard power when deemed necessary to protect and advance national interests.

### A. Boosting Trade and Economic Ties

During the Modi administration, bilateral trade and investment between India and the US witnessed significant growth, with the US emerging as India's largest trading partner and most important export market. A key early development was the resolution of a long-standing dispute over agricultural stockpiles in November 2014, which paved the way for the signing of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). A forward-looking objective, "Mission 500," was set with the ambitious goal of more than doubling total bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. Furthermore, plans were announced to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

Despite the overall positive trajectory, trade tensions persisted, particularly under the Trump administration. President Trump frequently criticised India's "very high" tariffs and "most strenuous and obnoxious" non-monetary trade barriers. The US imposed a 25% import duty on various Indian goods, including textiles, telecom products, automobiles, and gems, leading to significant friction. India, in turn, staunchly maintained its position on restricting US access to its sensitive dairy and agriculture sectors, citing political, religious, and livelihood concerns. The 14th Trade Policy Forum (TPF) in January 2024 addressed these ongoing issues, with discussions focusing on mitigating non-tariff barriers, advancing a Social Security Totalization Agreement, and lifting bans on wild-caught shrimp exports.

Table 1: Key Milestones in Indo-US Trade Relations (2014-2024)

Year	Key Agreement	Major Issues/Outcomes
Nov 2014	Resolution of the WTO agricultural dispute, TFA	The US agreed to indefinitely extend the "peace clause" for farm subsidies, and improved relations.
Jan 2015	U.S. delegation to Vibrant Gujarat Summit	Discussions on the U.S.-India strategic partnership and economic growth.
2019	Howdy, Modi Rally trade discussions	Efforts to score a trade deal amidst existing tensions.
Feb 2020	Namaste, Trump Rally trade discussions	Major trade deal unlikely due to Indian tariffs.
2021	12th Ministerial-level Trade Policy Forum (TPF)	Discussions on bilateral trade concerns, agreement to work towards concrete outcomes.
2023	Operation Broader Sword	Cooperation to stop illegal drug/medical device shipments.
2023	Air India's purchase of Boeing aircraft	Supported over one million American jobs.
Jan 2024	14th Ministerial-level TPF	Agreement on Joint Facilitative Mechanism for non-tariff barriers; discussions on Social Security Totalization Agreement, lifting shrimp export ban.
2024-25	Bilateral Trade	India had a trade surplus of \$35.32 billion (goods in 2023-24).
By 2030	"Mission 500" Goal	Aim to more than double total bilateral trade.
Ongoing	US Tariffs & Market Access	Trump imposed a 25% import duty on Indian goods, criticised India's high tariffs; India maintained restrictions on agriculture/dairy access.

## B. Deepening Defence Cooperation

The institutionalisation of the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogues, involving the Defence and External Affairs Ministers from both countries, was a cornerstone of deepening strategic cooperation. These dialogues were established to facilitate regular high-level communication and strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership. Key outcomes included reaffirming India's designation as a "Major Defence Partner" (MDP) of the United States and committing to expanding the scope of this status, fostering better defence and security coordination.

A significant achievement under the Modi administration was the signing of all foundational defence agreements with the US, which had previously been avoided by Indian governments due to concerns about compromising strategic autonomy. These critical agreements include:

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016: This agreement permits the armed forces of both India and the US to use each other's military bases for logistical purposes, such as refuelling and replenishment.

Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018: This agreement establishes a secure communication framework between the two nations' military platforms, which enhances their ability to operate together.

Industrial Security Annexe (ISA) in 2019: As an extension of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed between India and the US in 2002, (a bilateral military treaty that allows to securely share classified military information and intelligence to enhance cooperation and interoperability between the militaries of US and India), the ISA allows Indian private sector companies to exchange classified information with US defence companies, integrating the private sector more deeply into the bilateral defence partnership.

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020: This agreement enables the sharing of geospatial intelligence, offering substantial strategic and maritime benefits, including real-time intelligence on troop movements (e.g., Chinese PLA near Tawang in 2022), enhancing its defence posture.

The US significantly expanded defence sales and co-production opportunities with India, leading to the integration of numerous US-origin defence items into India's military inventory. These include C-130J Super Hercules, C-17 Globemaster III, P-8I Poseidon aircraft; CH-47F Chinooks, MH-60R Seahawks, and AH-64E Apaches helicopters; Harpoon anti-ship missiles; M777 howitzers; and MQ-9Bs unmanned aerial vehicles. Plans were also announced for new procurements and co-production arrangements for "Javelin" Anti-Tank Guided Missiles and "Stryker" Infantry Combat Vehicles in India. Both sides committed to creating a new tri-services exercise and pledged to elevate military cooperation across all domains, air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace through enhanced training, exercises, and operations incorporating the latest technologies.

India's decision to sign foundational defence agreements with the US represents a profound shift from its historical non-alignment and a deliberate move towards deeper strategic engagement with Washington. This enhances interoperability and strategic alignment. However, the available information also consistently highlights that India simultaneously maintains "long-standing ties with Russia," particularly concerning defence and energy engagement. This dual engagement has led to "rising strategic divergences" and direct pressure from the US, including tariff threats. India, in response, firmly defends its Russian ties by asserting that its defence and energy sourcing decisions are based solely on "national security imperatives and strategic assessments" and prevailing global market conditions, rather than being dictated by a third country's perspective. This complex dynamic clearly illustrates a clash between India's pursuit of "strategic autonomy" and the US's implicit or explicit demands for alignment in great power rivalries. This reveals a sophisticated and complex balancing act in India's foreign policy. This approach, while occasionally creating friction, also demonstrates India's growing confidence and assertiveness as an independent global player, capable.

### C. Gaining Access to Key Technologies

A significant pillar of the Indo-US strategic partnership has been the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET), launched in January 2023. This initiative is designed to elevate and expand defence industrial cooperation and technology partnership between the two nations. Its scope includes crucial areas such as Quantum Computing, Telecommunication, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Semiconductors. Complementing this, the "U.S.-India TRUST" initiative further catalyses collaboration across government, academia, and the private sector, specifically promoting the application of these critical and emerging technologies.

Recognising the importance of seamless technological cooperation, both the US and India are actively reviewing their respective arms transfer regulations, including the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), intending to streamline defence trade and technology exchange. A core goal of ICET is to unify export regulations and dismantle existing regulatory obstacles that impede technology transfer. There is an explicit commitment to "redouble efforts to address export controls, enhance high-technology commerce, and

reduce barriers to technology transfer," while also working to counter unfair practices in export controls by third parties.

The pronounced emphasis on initiatives like ICET and specific technologies such as AI, semiconductors, quantum computing, and space clearly indicates that access to and cooperation in these advanced technological domains are paramount "hard interests" for both India and the US. The concerted efforts to streamline ITAR and other export controls directly address historical barriers to deeper technological partnership, signalling a strategic imperative to overcome past mistrust and facilitate critical transfers. For India, gaining access to these advanced technologies from the US, while simultaneously bolstering its own domestic manufacturing and innovation capabilities ("Make in India"), is indispensable for realising its ambition to emerge as a "leading global power".

#### D. Strengthening India's Role in the Indo-Pacific Region

India's assertive engagement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising India, the US, Australia, and Japan, has been a defining feature of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Emerged informally in 2004 when Australia, India, Japan, and the United States collaborated to provide humanitarian aid and disaster relief following the devastating tsunami. This successful cooperation planted the seed for a more formal partnership.

In 2007, then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed the official formation of the Quad as a strategic dialogue, intending to create an "Asian Arc of Democracy." This led to the first official meeting and a large-scale naval exercise. However, the group soon became dormant in 2008 when Australia withdrew, primarily due to concerns about antagonising China.

Largely driven by shared concerns over China's growing military and economic assertiveness, the Quad was reactivated in 2017 and subsequently upgraded to hold regular leader-level meetings, establishing itself as a "significant group for maintaining strategic deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region". The Quad's overarching objective is to promote a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and deliver tangible benefits to the region across various domains.

The 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region laid a crucial foundation that extends beyond traditional security to include critical areas such as maritime domain awareness, cybersecurity, quality infrastructure development, health security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Further solidifying its commitment, India became a full member of the US-commanded Combined Maritime Forces in 2023, demonstrating a shared interest in maritime security and regional stability.

The consistent emphasis across multiple sources on the Indo-Pacific region highlights it as a core shared strategic imperative for both India and the US. India's "Act East" policy and its proactive role in the Quad demonstrate a strong convergence of strategic interests, primarily driven by a shared concern over China's growing assertiveness in the region. However, the US's "inconsistent signals" or its continued engagement with Pakistan can occasionally create "strategic unease" in Delhi, indicating that while the broad strategic vision is aligned, tactical approaches or perceived inconsistencies can introduce strains in trust.

The Indo-Pacific strategy provides a robust and enduring framework for the alignment of hard interests between India and the US. India's deep commitment to this framework, even as it maintains its broader strategic autonomy (e.g., its relationship with Russia), underscores the critical importance it places on regional stability and the balance of power. This suggests a maturing partnership capable of managing tactical divergences due to an overarching strategic convergence on a critical geopolitical theatre.

#### IV. CONVERGENCE AND CALIBRATION: SOFT POWER AS A VEHICLE FOR HARD INTERESTS

The high-profile "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" events served a strategic purpose beyond public display, which created a favourable atmosphere for sensitive trade and defence negotiations amid ongoing tensions. While some critics saw these events as mere "optics," their careful timing alongside trade talks and subsequent defence agreements suggests they were a deliberate means to an end. This shows that the Modi government views soft power not as a separate tool, but as an integral part of achieving hard power objectives.

By fostering attraction and trust, this strategy lessens the need for compromises during discussions, increasing the effectiveness of pursuing national goals. India's reputation as a peaceful and culturally diverse country was enhanced by cultural initiatives like "Yoga Diplomacy," which raised its diplomatic stature and credibility in international negotiations.

Additionally, diaspora mobilisation created a direct link between soft power and hard interests. By cultivating the Indian diaspora, the government leveraged them to lobby for Indian interests in the U.S., directly influencing policy on trade and defence. This demonstrates how people-to-people ties were strategically used to achieve concrete policy outcomes. The positive image cultivated by these soft power initiatives provided India with the diplomatic leverage to pursue its national interests, even when they differed from U.S. preferences, without jeopardising the strategic partnership.

Table 2: Interplay of Soft Power Strategies and Hard Interest Gains

Soft Power Strategy	Specific Event	Intended Hard Interest Gain	Observed Outcome
Public Diplomacy	"Howdy Modi" Rally (2019)	Boost Trade Talks, Enhance Diplomatic Capital	Occurred amidst ongoing trade tensions, aimed to create a favourable environment for the trade deal; it elevated Modi's global image.
Public Diplomacy	"Namaste Trump" Rally (2020)	Enhance Diplomatic Capital, Project Strength	Bolstered Modi's image, distracted from domestic issues; Trump's presence is seen as an endorsement despite limited substantive trade gains.
Diaspora Mobilization	Diaspora Lobbying Efforts (e.g., FARA registrations of NRIM/OFBJP)	Influence US Policy, Boost Trade/Investment	Active cultivation translated into lobbying for Indian interests, including trade and defence; it influenced local policy (e.g., Diwali holiday).
Cultural Narrative	International Yoga Day (2015)	Enhance Diplomatic Credibility, Project Strength	Global recognition (177 countries) positioned India as a leader in wellness and peace, contributing to diplomatic legitimacy.
Public Diplomacy/Tech	ICET Launch (2023) & INDUS Innovation	Gain Technology Access, Deepen Defence Cooperation	Elevated defence industrial and technology partnership; efforts to streamline ITAR and reduce regulatory obstacles for tech transfer.
Public Diplomacy/Defence	2+2 Ministerial Dialogues (institutionalised)	Deepen Defence Cooperation, Enhance Diplomatic Capital	Facilitated signing of foundational defence agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, ISA, BECA); reaffirmed India's MDP status; regular high-level communication.

Cultural Narrative	Promotion of "Vishwa Guru" & Civilisational Identity	Project Strength: Gain Diplomatic Capital	Positioned India as a unique civilizational ethos; showcased scientific achievements and universal values to enhance global standing.
Diaspora Mobilization	Modi's direct engagement with the diaspora abroad	Economic Contributions, Political Influence	Activated diaspora's transnational identity; encouraged investment and technological partnerships; built morale and confidence.

## V. CHALLENGES, CRITICISMS, AND NUANCES

Despite notable progress under the Modi administration, the Indo-US partnership has faced significant challenges. A major point of friction is India's continued defence and energy ties with Russia, which has created "strategic divergences" and "irritation" in Washington. India consistently defends its right to make decisions based on its national security imperatives, asserting that its bilateral relationships should not be viewed through the "prism of a third country." This highlights a fundamental clash between India's strategic autonomy and the U.S.'s demand for greater alignment against rivals.

Persistent trade issues also remained, with the Trump administration criticising India's high tariffs and trade barriers. India's steadfast position on restricting access to its sensitive agriculture sectors, driven by domestic concerns, was a major sticking point.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Modi's domestic policies, particularly those regarding Kashmir and the controversial citizenship law, drew criticism from human rights organisations and some U.S. Congress members. These actions have been noted to tarnish the goodwill generated by India's soft power efforts, potentially making India appear as an unreliable partner.

Academically, some analyses suggest that India's soft power initiatives are somewhat fragmented due to limited resources and a lack of a coherent strategy. For instance, while "yoga diplomacy" has a global reach, its effectiveness is seen as limited by the contradictions of India's domestic politics. The politicisation of yoga and its association with Hindu nationalism risk undermining its universal appeal. This disconnect between India's external messaging and its internal realities erodes international trust and limits its diplomatic influence. For soft power to be truly effective, a nation's domestic conduct must align with the values it promotes internationally.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE TRAJECTORY

The Modi administration's tenure from 2014 to 2024 transformed Indo-US relations from a period of strain into a robust "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership." This was achieved by strategically combining soft power with hard geopolitical interests. High-profile public diplomacy events, active diaspora mobilisation, and the promotion of cultural narratives were used to enhance India's global image and accumulate diplomatic capital. This facilitated significant gains in critical areas like increased trade, deeper defence cooperation, access to key technologies, and a stronger role in the Indo-Pacific.

Under Modi, India has positioned itself as a "leading global power," with its soft power assets being utilised more coherently and ambitiously than in the past. However, this rising status has its complexities. The partnership faces persistent challenges, including institutional gaps in soft power projection and the negative impact of domestic political contradictions on its global image. The Indo-US relationship is anchored in shared democratic values and converging strategic interests, particularly concerning the Indo-Pacific, defence, and technology. Despite this, it continues to navigate "deep-seated structural mismatches," particularly regarding India's relations with Russia and unresolved trade disputes.

India's ability to balance its "multipolar vision" with a pragmatic bilateral approach will be crucial for the relationship's stability. The future of Indo-US relations will likely remain a complex interplay of strong cooperation and occasional friction, reflecting India's increasingly confident strategic autonomy. The Modi administration's foreign policy has consciously and systematically adopted Joseph Nye's concept of "smart power," which is the effective combination of both soft and hard power. By deliberately using soft power

tools to achieve hard interests, India demonstrates an evolving capacity to leverage all instruments of national power to advance its interests on the global stage.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Nye, J., 1990. 'Soft Power', Foreign Policy
- [2] Big message! PM Modi strikes defiant 'Make in India' note in face of Trump's tariff & penalty threats; India to continue buying Russia oil, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/big-message-pm-modi-strikes-defiant-make-in-india-note-in-face-of-trumps-tariff-penalty-threats-india-to-continue-buying-russia-oil/articleshow/123086241.cms>
- [3] Joint Statement on the Inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue
- [4] Bhatti, U. and Hanif. M. 2010. Validity of Capital Assets Pricing Model.Evidence from KSE-Pakistan.European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science, 3 (20).
- [5] <https://in.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-the-inaugural-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>
- [6] Explainer: What do Donald Trump's 25% tariffs on India mean? What happens if they stay, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/explainer-what-do-donald-trumps-25-tariffs-on-india-mean-what-happens-if-they-stay/articleshow/123001393.cms>
- [7] Modi's US Bet Falters as Trump Turns Hostile - Frontline - The Hindu, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/trump-modi-us-tariffs-trade-relations-russia-oil-exports/article69896536.ece>
- [8] SOFT POWER AND INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS Asima Sahu, Ph.D, Reader in Political Science, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, In-sris.com, <https://www.srjis.com/downloadPdf/146857575611.%20Dr%20Asima%20Sahu.pdf/1438/9>
- [9] India-U.S. Relations: Repaired, Revived, Revitalised | Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/india-u-s-relations-repaired-revived-revitalized/>
- [10] Transforming India-US Relations Under Prime Minister Narendra <https://icpsnet.org/comment/transforming-india-us-relations-under-prime-minister-narendra-modi-200225>
- [11] U.S. Relations With India - United States Department of State, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-india/>
- [12] Chaos as opportunity: the United States and world order in India's grand strategy, <https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-worldviews-on-the-united-states-en/woldviews-on-the-united-states004.html>
- [13] United States-India Joint Leaders' Statement - The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/>
- [14] The United States Is Losing India – The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/07/the-united-states-is-losing-india/>.
- [15] How Bollywood has Influenced Cinema and Viewers Both Locally and Globally - IdeaExchange@Uakron, [https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3395&context=honors\\_research\\_projects](https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3395&context=honors_research_projects)
- [16] India's Multi-Alignment and Rising Geopolitical Profile | Hudson Institute, <https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/indias-multi-alignment-rising-geopolitical-profile-aparna-pande>
- [17] Indian diaspora divided as Modi's office lobbies US fans to influence vote - Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/5/27/indian-diaspora-divided-as-modis-office-lobbies-us-fans-to-influence-vote>.

[18] At Trump's India rally, Modi bets on bolstering his image | PBS News  
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/at-trumps-india-rally-modi-bets-on-bolstering-his-image>

[19] Distinguished Lectures Details - Ministry of External Affairs, <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?855>

[20] A Decadal Snapshot of India's Soft Power Strategies (2014-2024)

[21] The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific Region | The White House

[22] Joint Statement: Second India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue  
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2023-11-20/joint-statement-second-india-australia-22-ministerial-dialogue-new-delhi>

[23] Press Releases Archives - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in India, <https://in.usembassy.gov/category/press-releases/>

[24] India's footprint in the Indo-Pacific - Gateway House, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/indias-footprint-in-the-indo-pacific/>

[25] Soft Power by Joseph Nye - DiploFoundation, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/soft-power-the-means-to-success-in-world-politics/>

[26] Influence of Soft Power in shaping Diplomacy and Foreign Policy - Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies, [https://www.ejsss.net.in/article\\_html.php?did=15392&issueno=0](https://www.ejsss.net.in/article_html.php?did=15392&issueno=0)

[27] Amid criticism, India backs strategic ties with US,  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/amid-criticism-india-backs-strategic-ties-with-us/articleshow/123050432.cms>

[28] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/22/howdy-modi-trump-attends-indian-pms-rally-in-houston>

[29] 'Namaste Trump': Pomp and Ceremony Sans Strategic Progress - New Lines Institute,  
<https://newlinesinstitute.org/strategic-competition/namaste-trump-pomp-and-ceremony-sans-strategic-progress/>

[30] How Modi Mobilises the Indian Diaspora - The Globalist,

[31] <https://www.theglobalist.com/narendra-modi-indian-diaspora-politics-india/>

[32] Full article: 'Everything is fine in India': crafting emotional proximity among the Indian diasporas - Taylor & Francis Online, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21567689.2024.2419675>

[33] Soft power diplomacy in India's foreign policy under the Modi government: Challenges and prospects,  
<https://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com/uploads/archives/5-1-13-976.pdf>

[34] Full article: India's Use of Yoga in Diplomacy,  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15570274.2025.2491265?src=exp-la>

[35] From stress to serenity: How India's yoga diplomacy can benefit H-1B holders,  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/green-carrot-americas-work-visa-crisis/from-stress-to-serenity-how-indias-yoga-diplomacy-can-benefit-h-1b-holders/>

[36] India's Soft Power: Cultural Diplomacy and Global Influence, <https://sleepyclasses.com/india-soft-power-diplomacy/>

[37] The Popularity of India's Cinema and the Role of Soft Power - CSPS, <https://cspcindia.org/the-popularity-of-indias-cinema-and-the-role-of-soft-power>

[38] 'Trump is speaking nonsense against India & Modi is silently listening': Congress slams govt over US' latest tariff threat, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/trump-is-speaking->

[nonsense-against-india-modi-is-silently-listening-congress-slams-govt-over-us-latest-tariff-threat/articleshow/123100391.cms](https://www.ijcrt.org/nonsense-against-india-modi-is-silently-listening-congress-slams-govt-over-us-latest-tariff-threat/articleshow/123100391.cms)

[39] United States - India Joint Leaders Statement - U.S. Embassy

[40] <https://in.usembassy.gov/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/>

[41] 'Unjustified and unreasonable': India calls out US, EU over oil trade with Russia; pans double standards

[42] 14th Ministerial-level meeting of the India-United States Trade ... - PIB, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1995749>

[43] Tariff threat: Congress's 'dost dost na raha' swipe at PM Modi; mocks 'Howdy Modi', 'Namaste Trump' events, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/tariff-threat-congress-dost-dost-na-raha-swipe-at-pm-modi-mocks-howdy-modi-namaste-trump-events/articleshow/123110330.cms>

[44] India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises - Congress.gov,

[45] [https://www.congress.gov/crs\\_external\\_products/IF/PDF/IF12438/IF12438.29.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF12438/IF12438.29.pdf)

[46] Lobbying for Trade Policy: Theory and Evidence from India, <https://www.unige.ch/degit/pdf/saha.pdf>

[47] Evolution of India's soft power Dynamics: Insights and Perspectives - JETIR.org, <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2407802.pdf>

[48] (PDF) India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy

[49] C. Raja Mohan, Foreign Policy Under Modi: Between Aspiration and Achievement. In: Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India.

[50] Indian Foreign Policy Under Narendra Modi: A Decade of Transformation, The Diplomat

