

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2024.2-01>

IRSTI 11.25.09

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN TÜRKİYE AND INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN

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Received: 27.03.2024

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Accepted: 27.04.2024

ABSTRACT

This article explores how the soft power of Türkiye and India has been playing significant roles in their relationship with Afghanistan in the post-9/11 incident. After the US-led invasion of the Taliban in 2001, Türkiye, which has no land border with Afghanistan, engaged as a NATO stakeholder for post-war peacebuilding in the country. Türkiye also pursued non-military engagement through humanitarian and cultural institutions and achieved the confidence of the Afghan people. On the other hand, a diverse-natured regime at the doorstep, as well as the bitter relationship with Pakistan, triggered India to approach Afghanistan closely. India utilised its 'Neighbourhood First' policy through sheer civilian participation in delivering humanitarian aid and collaborating in educational and cultural fields, significantly strengthening its relationship with Afghanistan. However, the Taliban's takeover of power has narrowed India's engagement while Türkiye's engagement has increased, though non-militarily, having significant impacts on both countries' relationships with Afghanistan. This study, firstly, conceptualises the term 'soft power.' Secondly, it explains Türkiye's historical relations with Afghanistan and the role of soft power after 9/11 to consolidate the relations. Thirdly, it explains India's historical relations with Afghanistan and the role of soft power in expanding the relations after 9/11. Then, the article compares the roles of soft power by state and non-state actors of Türkiye with those of India in developing their relations with Afghanistan and the challenges and prospects that Türkiye and India may face in the future.

Keywords: Soft power strategies, Bilateral relations, Türkiye, India, Afghanistan.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is of great geostrategic importance due to its location at the cross-roads of Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. The country did not accept the domination of either the British or the Russians but rather expelled them from Afghanistan. It substantiates the nation's bravery and mighty resistance. The tremendously changing global political landscape after the 9/11 incident also opened the door for the USA to intervene in Afghanistan. However, the USA very tactfully utilised the 'war on terror' as a tool to intervene in Afghanistan, leaving heavy impacts. The USA-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation became the sole military role player in the country.

Türkiye, as one of the significant stakeholders of NATO, engaged in various rebuilding programmes—combat and non-combat—under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Regional Command Capital (RCC) of NATO in war-torn Afghanistan (Aydoğan, 2021). Türkiye's engagement extracted opportunities to win over the people of Afghanistan as the former was already familiar with its humanitarian stance for refugees of various origins including more than 320,000 Afghan refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

On the other hand, though India is not a NATO member and consequently has not militarily participated in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, it engaged in the development of war-torn Afghanistan in all civilian ways. There is a historical, political, and cultural blending between Afghanistan, a Muslim-majority nation, and India, a Hindu-dominated country. It plays an important role in facilitating India's soft power in Afghanistan. The post-9/11 Afghanistan necessitated more engagement from India. Moreover, the Taliban's taking over power in 2021 and Western non-cooperation with Afghanistan left the country more vulnerable and dependent on external aid that India, as one of the closest neighbours, can provide and renew its soft power. However, Pakistan's non-cooperation for access to Afghanistan rigidified India's aid programmes. The nature of the current Taliban government may further complicate the Indian presence in Afghanistan. This study relates these facts to compare the role of Türkiye's soft power with that of India in Afghanistan after the 9/11 incident. It is based on secondary data and applies the document analysis method.

The main aim of this study is to assess how Türkiye and India have been pursuing their soft power to strengthen their relationship with Afghanistan after the changed political landscape since the 9/11 incident. Though there are various kinds of literature for assessing the role of soft power in bilateral relations, this study explores the literature regarding the role of different state actors, different institutions/organisations, and non-state actors—cultures and religion—in assessing the soft power of Türkiye and India in their post-9/11 relations with Afghanistan. Erman (2010: 39-41) illuminated how Türkiye's soldiers under NATO worked as soft power actors in Afghanistan. Tanrıseven (2013: 155-170) argues that since 9/11, Ankara has used soft power to secure Afghanistan and Central Asia. Moreover, Anaz (2022: 755-771) discussed Türkiye's growing economic, political, and cultural ties more with the Asian continent than the Balkans and Africa and the role of soft power and public diplomacy in that. Moreover, Hajimineh et al. (2020: 303-332) extracted how the Ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Türkiye used language, ethnicity, and religion to boost soft power in Afghanistan since 2002. On the other hand, Ahmad (2022:

634-653) claims that India's soft power strategy in Afghanistan after 2001 became 'non-military', 'non-coercive', and cooperative. In addition, Ahmad (2019: 1520-1524) differentiated India's soft power, infrastructure assistance, from Pakistan's hard power in Afghanistan. Besides, Pate (2018: 320-351) depicts that the development and acceptance of India's 'regional power' status in the areas of 'civilisation,' 'democracy,' and 'economic-military' allows India to exercise 'regional' influence that can promote Afghanistan and India's shared benefits. Most of the studies above discussed India or Türkiye's soft power policies in Afghanistan. As mentioned above the literature, such as Ahmad (2019, 2022), (Gupta, 2023) compares India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. Ahmed and Akbar (2023) explore Iran's soft power in two of its eastern neighbours, namely, Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, no study compares and constructs the soft power of Türkiye and India in Afghanistan. This study weighs the post-9/11 soft power of Türkiye and India in strengthening their relations with Afghanistan.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SOFT POWER

The term soft power was introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr., a distinguished academic who served as the Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Nye's seminal paper, "Soft Power" was published in the renowned magazine Foreign Policy in 1990. According to him,

"Everyone is familiar with hard power. We know that military and economic might often get others to change their position. Hard power can rest on inducements ("carrots") or threats ("sticks"). But sometimes you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called "the second face of power." A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries-admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness-want to follow it" (Nye, 2004: 05).

The foundation of a nation's soft power is predominantly derived from three key assets: its cultural appeal in regions where it garners admiration, its adherence to political values both domestically and internationally, and the perception of legitimacy and 'moral authority' surrounding its foreign policies (Nye, 2004:11).

When a nation's cultural framework encompasses universally accepted values and its policies actively advance 'values and interests' that are shared by others, the likelihood of achieving its intended results is heightened due to the establishment of relations based on mutual 'attraction' and obligation. Societies with limited ideals and insular cultures have a lower inclination to generate soft power (Nye, 2004:11).

Nye (2004:06) further argues that, in contrast to rulers in authoritarian nations who employ force and dictate directives, authorities in democratic societies are compelled to depend predominantly on a blend of 'inducement and attraction'. Soft power is a fundamental aspect of everyday 'democratic politics'. The capacity to determine choices is often linked to invisible assets, such as a captivating demeanour, cultural background, political ideologies and organisations, and policies that are perceived as 'legitimate' or possessing moral authority. When a leader embodies ideals that appeal to others to pursue, the cost of leadership is reduced.

TÜRKİYE AND AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Ottomans closely cooperated with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who is known by the title of ‘Iron Amir’ and united and modernised Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901. Afghanistan followed the USSR in recognising modern Türkiye in 1921. The current Türkiye assisted in installing Afghanistan’s ‘military academy, medical school, Kabul University’s Political Science faculty, music conservatory, and public health service’ (Erman, 2010: 39-41).

It is worth mentioning that Uzbeks and Turkmens are two Turkic ethnic groups in Afghanistan (Sahin, 2016), who can speak Turkish well. Although there is no reliable data on the ethnic distribution of the population of Afghanistan, it has been estimated that Uzbeks are 9% and Turkmens are 3% of the population (Minority Rights, 2023). Türkiye and Afghanistan have been engaging in extensive cooperation since the Taliban regime was overthrown in 2001. Türkiye paid close attention to the incident of September 11, 2001, and the difficulties Afghanistan suffered in the years that followed. The AKP government, particularly, adopted new external policies that sought to extend its influence to areas of Turkish people as well as its positive relations with all of its neighbours through the expansion of ‘political and economic’ ties with them. Though the Taliban took over power again, Türkiye’s military and non-military engagements already achieved confidence in the people of Afghanistan. Turkish state and non-state actors working in Afghanistan can substantiate the confidence of Afghan people, playing a significant role in relations with Afghanistan.

THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN TÜRKİYE’S RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN

Turkish Ministry of National Education and Turkish Maarif Foundation

The Turkish Ministry of National Education collaborates with the Afghan Ministry of Education to run a girls’ school in Jowzjan province of Afghanistan (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). The ‘Turkish Maarif Foundation’ was formed through a statute signed into effect on 17 June 2016. Apart from the Ministry of National Education, it is the sole body with the legal capacity to establish Turkish schools in foreign countries. The Foundation is a public institution with the mission of disseminating Türkiye’s ‘educational’ innovations in ‘preschool to higher education’ and best practices to the international community at large. Most importantly, this effort continues because of the high standard of education offered by Maarif schools and the confidence of people in them. The Turkish Maarif Foundation serves a total of roughly 6,500 students across 19 campuses throughout diverse cities like Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-i Sharif, Aqcha, Maidan Wardak, and Sheberghan. One subset of the institution is all-female boarding schools. The majority of Maarif’s 6,500 students are female (Kasap, 2021), which is accelerating women’s empowerment in Afghanistan.

Turkish Diyanet Foundation

The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation was inaugurated on 13 March 1975, as a part of the benevolent actions initiated by the Chief of Religious Affairs of the

country. Currently, the foundation operates its programmes in 149 countries including Afghanistan (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2024). On 14 January 2019, the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV) distributed ‘food and blankets’ to four hundred war-affected families in Balkh province’s northern refugee camps in Afghanistan. The Turkish consul general in Mazar-i Sharif stated that Türkiye’s goal for Afghanistan is for the country to enjoy peace, prosperity, and a promising future. He also said that ‘as long as the Afghan people want it, Türkiye will continue being here and extending help’ (Sadat, 2019).

Moreover, TDV gives \$25 in cash to 74 orphans per month in Afghanistan, and they have high hopes that the number will increase. About 250 orphans have benefited from TDV’s assistance in various parts of the country. The TDV established a new orphanage in Mazar-i Sharif, providing shelter for fifty children without parents (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2021). In addition, the TDV inaugurated five ‘water wells and fountains’ as part of the ‘A Drop of Life’ initiative in Mazar-i Sharif, in the north of Afghanistan (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2022).

Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD)

With the Turkish Presidential Decree in 2018, AFAD was reorganised into a government entity reporting to the Ministry of the Interior. In the past, the Prime Minister was responsible for it. The agency is dedicated to creating the required plans and helping those in need both domestically and internationally (Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, Türkiye). Following the withdrawal of ‘U.S.-led NATO forces in August 2021’ and the subsequent takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the country found itself bereft of foreign aid. The prolonged absence of necessary assistance to safeguard the well-being of the populace in Afghanistan, a nation ravaged by conflict, has had severe economic repercussions. The responsibility of coordinating the response to the increasingly severe humanitarian situation has been delegated to AFAD. AFAD played a leading role in coordinating the humanitarian assistance initiatives conducted by Turkish charitable organisations throughout the nation. Within a brief period, trains became filled with humanitarian assistance, encompassing a wide range of provisions such as food and sanitary kits. On 23 January 2023, the seventh ‘Kindness Train’ full of humanitarian aid organised by AFAD successfully arrived in Afghanistan’s Herat province (Daily Sabah, 2023).

Yunus Emre Institute (YEI)

Yunus Emre Institute, connected to the Yunus Emre Foundation, carries out activities for Turkish education. Cultural centres founded in foreign states conduct cultural and artistic events to promote the Turkish nation and assist in scientific research. Kabul’s YEI Coordination Office launched a Turkish language course at Atatürk Children’s Hospital (Yunus Emre Institute, 2024). Since its founding in 2009, the institute, which bears the name of the celebrated Turkish poet who lived from 1238 to 1320, has instructed the Turkish language to thousands of learners and reached out to more through Turkish cultural events overseas. The majority of Türkiye’s development assistance goes to Afghanistan, mostly in the form of educational support. Afghanistan has one of the world’s lowest ‘literacy rates’, with only approximately 31% of adults being literate and only about 17% of women. The traditional belief, notably in the countryside, that girls should not go to school but instead run the household, is just one factor contributing to

the 'high illiteracy rate'. Challenges with safety in the war-torn country, where the Taliban poses a persistent threat, are also obstacles for women to participate (Daily Sabah, 2021).

Türkiye Scholarships under the Office of the President for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)

Turkish government scholarships provided by the Office of the President for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) have made Türkiye a study destination for students from all over the planet. Scholars at all levels of education, from undergraduates to those working towards a doctorate, are eligible to receive these awards. The goal of the scholarship scheme is to give students a well-rounded education in Türkiye. To do this, it offers social events and training courses associated with 'arts, culture, history, and sports'. It also connects recipients with 'academics, institutions, and organisations' acting in their areas and provides them with 'academic counselling services' while they are in school. Türkiye sees the programme as an exercise in 'public diplomacy', with the hope that its graduates will serve as unofficial ambassadors for the country in the nations from which they originally hail (Daily Sabah, 2021). Roughly 5,000 students around the world receive scholarships each year under the programme (Hurriyet Daily News, 2019).

Turkish Red Crescent

Afghanistan's population is famished, destitute, and jobless as a result of a 40-year war. Over the past years, the economy has been stagnant and caused a substantial rise in Afghanistan's 'poverty and food insecurity', with 55% of the people surviving on less than \$1 per day (Daily Sabah, 2019). Before American soldiers left, the Turkish Red Crescent had helped areas ruled by the Taliban. In addition, in the chaos that followed the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the Turkish Red Crescent also delivered food to help feed those who had been forced to flee their homes (Reuters, 2021). The Turkish Red Crescent stepped up to aid those affected by the earthquake in June 2022. Türkiye has also dispatched 'Kindness Trains' stocked with aid to countries, including Afghanistan, in need (Daily Sabah, 2022).

Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA)

Following the fall of the USSR, several newly formed nation-states arose. These nations, with which Türkiye shared 'historical and cultural' affinities, held high hopes for Türkiye. These nations faced significant challenges in their journey towards building market economies. Throughout the phase of transition, they heavily depended on development assistance provided by donor nations, as well as international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. In this situation, the establishment of TIKA in 1992 aimed to foster robust collaboration, particularly with the Turkic Republics, as well as within the natural geographical region that holds historical and cultural significance to Türkiye (TIKA, 2024).

TIKA provided medical treatment to more than 12 million Afghans from 2005 to 2022 through the Afghan-Turkish Friendship Hospital in Maymana of the Faryab region and the Children's Hospital in Sheberghan of the Jowzjan region. It was by a contract with the Afghan Health Ministry. Additionally, the Maymana Midwife Training School was founded by TIKA in 2010. The institution

also has an 'emergency service', 'polyclinic', 'general surgery', 'paediatrics', and a 'vaccination' facility. Approximately 94 women have received training to become midwives there. Additionally, TIKA worked across the nation to construct clinics that offer fundamental and comprehensive medical care, as well as to purchase home furnishings and materials for hospitals (Anadolu Agency, 2022). Moreover, as part of a collaboration with Balkh University of Afghanistan, TIKA inaugurated the Department of Turkish Language and Literature on 26 December 2023, at the university (Daily Sabah, 2023). As seen in this example, the Turkish language is being taught extensively in Afghanistan and many Turkish Language and Literature Departments are also soft power centres operating in Afghanistan (Nazary, 2018).

Turkish TV Serials

In Afghanistan, where Indian television programmes were formerly predominant, Turkish television programmes are topping ratings benchmarks. Due to the similarity between Turkish 'culture' and their family composition, Afghans enjoy watching 'action', 'crime', 'romance', and drama-type programmes on television. To prevent adverse reactions from religious sections and Taliban adherents, Afghan television, which is cautious in designating TV series, favours ones that are suited to Afghan culture. Fifty of Afghanistan's national and regional TV stations air dubbed versions of Turkish TV programmes in Pashto and Persian. *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, which is referred to as 'Uprising' in Afghanistan, is a weekly programme on three channels that recounts the history of the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. 'Muhteşem Yüzyıl' (Magnificent Century), 'Paramparça' (Shattered), 'Sen Anlat Karadeniz' (You Tell Me Black Sea), and 'Öyle Bir Geçer Zaman Ki' (As Time Passes By) are a few other programmes that are popular. Türkiye and Afghanistan share many 'cultural, historical, and religious' elements, which has increased consumer appetite for Turkish goods (Sadat, 2019). People who suffer from 'electricity' and internet difficulties in the countryside, travel to urban areas to purchase and download the episodes onto a 'memory card' or a 'flash drive' and then play them at home with their families. Even selling Turkish TV programmes brings in a lot more money than selling phones does (Daily Sabah, 2022).

INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Indo-Afghan relations possess deep-rooted historical and cultural ties. This relationship extends beyond the governments of both countries and has a profound historical connection through interactions between the people. Historically, the western part of Afghanistan has served as a crucial link between India and Afghanistan. Both countries share a historical resemblance. In addition, despite the strategic and political planning of all the states in the region, the relations between India and Afghanistan remained amicable. The Indo-Afghan ties experienced a solitary rupture when India acknowledged the Soviet regime in Afghanistan. Furthermore, throughout the civil conflict in Afghanistan, the Indian government provided financial assistance to Afghanistan. In 1990, India allocated substantial US cash to Afghanistan through the United Nations (Ali, 2019).

Under India's 'Look East' and 'Neighbourhood First' policies in the 1990s, India initiated a few bilateral educational cooperation projects in neighbouring countries, albeit with limited scope and quantity. Since 2002, India commenced active participation in 'scholarship diplomacy', wherein it has significantly expanded its provision of scholarships (Tang, 2021). Moreover, India's strategy of soft power diplomacy in Afghanistan focuses on 'nation-building and political stability' as a means to win over Afghan citizens' 'hearts and minds' and improve India's diplomatic and cultural ties to the country (Tandon, 2019).

India views Afghanistan as a prospective pathway for gaining entry to energy resources in Central Asia. The country is strategically considering Afghanistan as an option to mitigate and counterbalance the expanding influence of China in the 'economic and energy domains' of Central Asia. India was engaged in the construction of a port at Chabahar, Iran, with the potential to establish a connection to the 'Iranian hinterland'. This development holds the promise of facilitating the transportation of Indian commodities to Afghanistan, effectively circumventing the need to rely upon Pakistan as a transit route. Afghanistan exhibits promising potential as a destination for Indian 'goods and business' enterprises (Kiran, 2009). Thus, the more India gains economic access to Afghanistan, the more it favours India to apply soft power in Afghanistan as the economy is one of the most significant elements of soft power.

India's soft power strategy after 2001 is often held up as an example of success because it avoided providing soldiers by opting for a low-key policy centred on diplomatic backing for Hamid Karzai's new administration and on civilian participation in 'reconstruction and rehabilitation' in Afghanistan (Kugiel, 2017). Hymans (2009) argued that Afghanistan emerged as the initial instance of an intricate soft power tactic in Indian external policy (cited in Kugiel, 2017). A big part of this approach involved giving a lot of money to help with development, collaborating on education and culture, focusing on 'trade and investments', providing diplomatic support, and facilitating communication (Kugiel, 2017).

After the US-led attack overthrew the Taliban, Afghanistan became a focal point of national debate. Since 2002, President Karzai's range of 'visits' to India, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's two visits in 2005 and 2011, current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kabul in 2014, and reciprocal visits of foreign ministers, lawmakers, junta 'officials', and 'civil society' members for high-level conversation have occurred (Kugiel, 2017).

Furthermore, the Agreement for 'Strategic Partnership', signed between India and Afghanistan, on October 4, 2011, marked the culmination of ten years of low-key participation by the Indian administration in Afghanistan. This all-encompassing agreement aimed to deepen ties in four crucial domains: 'trade and economy'; 'politics and security'; 'capacity development and education'; and 'social, cultural, civil society, and people-to-people ties (cited in Kugiel, 2017). This study focused on the area issues for assessing India's soft power for strengthening relations with Afghanistan.

THE ROLE OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER IN AFGHANISTAN

Infrastructure Development in Education and Other Sectors

India handed out significantly to the education of Afghans because the education sector of the country lacks adequate 'infrastructure', trained educators, and

‘gender equality.’ It awarded Scholarships to ‘tens of thousands of Afghan students.’ Afghan Women and adolescents receive occupational ‘training and skill development’. The renovation of Habibia High School in India is a \$1 million endeavour. Through utilizing ‘educational development’, India has attempted to establish contacts with the ethnic groups of Afghanistan, particularly the Pashtun (Tandon, 2019). India is involved in the ‘School Feeding Program’ and contributed to the construction of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH). As per data from 2017, 3,500 Afghan officials receive annual training in India, where 15,000 Afghan students go to school (Prabhu, 2021).

In July 2020, India and Afghanistan inked five deals for the installation of ‘educational infrastructure’ in four Afghan regions – Farah, Nooristan, Kapisa, and Badakhshan – including the creation of ‘classrooms’, a complex for ‘higher education’, and a street on the Alberoni University campus (Hindustan Times, 2020). Since the end of 2001, one of the major international attempts to rebuild Afghanistan has come from India. The nation has given about \$3 Billion to Afghanistan’s infrastructure and ‘institutional development’, making it the greatest ‘regional donor’. New Delhi provides Afghan nationals with around 600 Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) positions each year (Prabhu, 2021).

India spent \$90 million to construct the new Afghan Parliament building, which Modi dedicated in 2015 as his nation’s gift to Afghanistan’s democracy. Modi refurbished the Stor Palace in Kabul, which once housed Afghan King Amanullah Khan in the 1920s. In 2016, he opened the Salma Dam, a massive infrastructural project in Herat’s western outskirts that provides water to nearby neighbourhoods and irrigates thousands of acres of land. India is one of the main regional funders to Afghanistan, having invested over \$3 billion in the infrastructure and ‘building projects’ to date.’ In 2017, India’s former ambassador to Afghanistan, V.P. Haran, stated that preventing Afghanistan from falling into the clutches of the Taliban or other forces sponsored by Pakistan has been a central focus of India’s ‘neighbourhood policy’ toward the country (Trivedi, 2021).

In addition, India increased its ‘development’ cooperation with Afghanistan in September 2017 and promised numerous projects in 31 provinces, including drinking water supplies, affordable housing, highways, and ‘polyclinics’ (Roy, 2017). According to V Muraleedharan, Union Minister of State for External Affairs of India, India and Afghanistan have been working together on more than 500 projects in crucial regions spanning all 34 provinces of the nation (ANI, 2022). Moreover, one of India’s important infrastructure projects in South-Western Afghanistan was the highway from Zaranj to Delaram, which was inaugurated by President Hamid Karzai and India’s External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on 22nd January 2009 (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2016).

Development of Cricket

Cricket, inaugurated by the British in India, is an important tool that retains Indian identity around the world, though currently, the game is mainly practised in Commonwealth member nations. Most of the Indians staying outside of India assemble themselves on the occasion of a cricket match. The game, which is also popular in Pakistan, the closest neighbour of India, unites all sections of people and solidifies their national identities (Devan, 2012). Though Afghans also became known to cricket through the British, a mass circulation of the game

happened by Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Afghanistan after their return. Afghanistan established a Cricket board in 1995, while the national team of the state journeyed in 2001 (International Cricket Council, 2018).

India's one of the key methods of exerting its soft power has been participation in and commitment to the growth of cricket in Afghanistan. India arranged the Indo-Afghanistan amity series in 2018 in Bengaluru, India, a type of test cricket that is lengthier, more competitive, and prestigious, highlighting the remarkable qualities of the Afghan team. This series marked a turning point for Afghan cricket and enhanced relations between the countries. The Afghan players were greeted with amazing hospitality by India. In addition, India designated the 'Greater Noida Stadium' as the Afghan cricket team's formal training site, as Afghanistan lacks one. The Indian government also paid for the construction of a stadium in Kandahar and contributed 'coaching and technical' resources. India utilized the sport of cricket as a medium for 'nation-building' in Afghanistan and to deepen ties with that country (Tandon, 2019).

Bollywood Films

Indian Bollywood and Afghanistan have been close partners for a long time. This connection strengthens ties between individuals in ways that go beyond what can be accomplished by government action. Cultural ties between India and Afghanistan are highlighted in works like Rabindranath Tagore's *Kabuliwala*, which contribute to stronger relations between the two countries. Afghanistan has consistently shown a strong interest in Indian films. Furthermore, Afghans, especially Pashtuns, have traditionally been portrayed as 'good guys' in Bollywood. Numerous Bollywood films, including *Dharmatma*, *Khuda Gawah*, and *Kabul Express* have been filmed in Afghanistan, expanding the fame of Indian movies in the country. The films foster a sense of camaraderie among Afghans and inform them of their affinity with India. Ashraf Ghani, the former Afghan president, remarked that Bollywood has a greater influence than \$1 billion on Afghanistan. This demonstrates the extent of Bollywood's soft power appeal by capturing the souls and minds of the Afghans (Tandon, 2019).

India Culture Centre

The India Cultural Centre was launched on September 14, 2007, at the Indian Embassy in Kabul, which has flourished cultural exchange between the two countries. Both the Afghan Embassy and Kabul University now offer courses in Hindustani vocal and instrumental classical music to local pupils. A professionally assigned, highly skilled musical instructor from India named Ustad Gulfam Ahmad teaches music. The Centre's music classes are offered at no cost to students. There are currently between 50 and 60 music students registered in the Centre and 35 music learners participating at Kabul University. The Centre's cultural programs have a significant impact on bridging the gap between the populations of the two nations (Embassy of India, Kabul, Afghanistan).

The India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF)

The India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) was created in April 2007 as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Governments of India and Afghanistan. The primary aim of this trust fund was to strengthen the relations between the two countries by facilitating 'economic, scientific, educational, technical, and cultural' collaboration. Additionally, the IAF seeks to

promote mutual ‘understanding’ and goodwill among the populations of both nations. The Foundation aims to facilitate travels and interactions between the two countries, specifically targeting researchers, scholars, experts, and artists engaged in fields of activities encompassed by the organization. It facilitates educational events like colloquia, symposia, and workshops centred around topics of shared significance. The Foundation also provides financial assistance to NGOs operating in both countries, whose efforts contribute to the realization of the Foundation’s goals (Embassy of India, Kabul, Afghanistan).

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Educational Cooperation

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an ‘autonomous’ organization as part of the legal authority of the Ministry of External Affairs of India provides an overall of 1,000 scholarships to Afghan students who want to study at Indian Universities at undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. levels. The Ministry of Higher Education is the designated entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of the scheme on behalf of Afghanistan (Embassy of India, Kabul, Afghanistan).

The Confederation of Indian Industries ran the India-Afghanistan Vocational Education Centre, which taught Afghan youngsters carpentry, plumbing, welding, masonry, and sewing. Additionally, the renowned Indian NGO Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) ran a women’s technical education centre in Baghe-Zanana to educate Afghan ‘war widows’ and ‘orphans’ in garment manufacturing, nursery planting, food manufacturing, and advertising (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2016).

Health and Medical Care

After the Taliban government fell in 2001, Afghanistan’s interim administration started a rehabilitation programme by sending out medical and paramedic teams and setting up camps for the fitting of prosthetic limbs for ‘amputees’ injured by ‘landmines’. Since Afghanistan could serve as a land route to Central Asia, and India has everlasting hostile relations with Pakistan, India started re-establishing partaking in Afghanistan. In the area of healthcare, India and Afghanistan signed a deal in 2005 titled “Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Healthcare and Medical Sciences” under which they agreed to collaborate in eight areas: family welfare, public health and nutrition, communicable diseases, medical research, indigenous systems of medicine, medical equipment and pharmaceutical products, hospital management, nursing, and midwifery. The agreement also included exchanging medical and health knowledge and professionals in certain fields, mentoring in mutually agreed-upon areas, deputising specialists to participate in international gatherings held in either nation, organising academic conferences, and intellectual and operational meetings.

The availability of ‘secondary and tertiary’ level medical care in Afghanistan remains inadequate despite recent improvements. Therefore, numerous Afghans travel abroad for medical care, spending approximately \$285 million a year (TOLO News, 2019). In March 2019, three of India’s health groups inked partnerships with an Afghan health enterprise to expand excellent ‘healthcare’ in Afghanistan. The \$6.5 million contracts intended to build a diagnostic clinic, dialysis centre, and pharmaceutical plant in Kabul (TOLO news, 2019). Howev-

er, western world sanctions on the current Taliban government deteriorated the situation more (The Guardian, 2021). India came to fill up the gap.

In recent times, India sent a “technical team” to its embassy in Kabul in June 2022, marking the reopening of Indian diplomatic missions in the city. Just after the Taliban took over in August of 2021, Indian diplomats evacuated the embassy out of fear for their safety. In response to the UN’s urgent requests for assistance with the Afghan people and as part of its continuous humanitarian support, India, in August 2022, provided the Indira Gandhi Hospital in Kabul and the World Health Organization (WHO) with its tenth shipment of medical supplies containing 32 tons of health aid in 10 batches (Business Standard, 2022).

Moreover, for years, there are currently five Indian Medical Missions (IMMs) operating in Afghanistan. These missions are located in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Each month, they treat 30,000 patients and distribute medicines to those patients. Patients from neighbouring provinces frequently travel to one of the five IMMs to take advantage of the free medical consultations and medications that are offered there. Annually, there are around 360,000 patients who take advantage of these services (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2016).

Yoga

The Momtaz Yoga Centre was established in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2016, and its members are committed female yoginis. According to Momtaz, owner of the institution, women need healthy mental and physical well-being to nurture their offspring as the country has been suffering years of war. She further argues that establishing a peaceful society is not possible as long as one is not quiet with oneself. Yoga helps women overcome stress and consciousness of themselves. However, Yoga classes for women have been hampered by insecurity & the belief that yoga is contrary to Islam (Qazi, 2019). Taliban’s take over the power of Afghanistan in 2021 further strengthened the possibility of Yoga’s being hampered.

COMPARING TURKISH AND INDIAN SOFT POWER IN AFGHANISTAN

Both Türkiye and India hold historical vestiges playing key roles for their soft power in Afghanistan. Türkiye’s soft power since the Taliban’s fall in 2001 was being pursued by its NATO alliance for rebuilding the war-torn Afghanistan. Besides Turkish state-owned institutions like Yunus Emre, Maarif Foundation, YTB, TİKA, Turkish Diyanet Foundation, AFAD, and Turkish Red Crescent have been acting as key soft power state actors in Afghanistan. On the other hand, India is not a NATO member and did not have any possibility to pursue what Türkiye pursued militarily. India utilized ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy to engage in the reconstruction efforts of Afghanistan which has been ravaged by war. This involvement is primarily driven by civil institutional participation facilitated through a bilateral strategic partnership. The Indian Embassy in Kabul, in collaboration with institutions such as the India Culture Centre, the India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF), and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), plays a crucial role in coordinating these efforts.

The construction of infrastructure in the medical and education sectors by TİKA has significantly improved Türkiye's reputation in Afghanistan. The Afghan students who have been obtaining education in the educational institutions established by the TİKA are likely to be motivated to further their studies in Türkiye. On the other hand, India, being the largest democracy in the world, contributed to the construction of Afghanistan's national parliamentary edifice, thereby enhancing its enduring values. The parliament played a significant role in promoting democracy both implicitly and explicitly, as it served as a platform for the discussion and formulation of all national laws. Though the current Taliban government does not adhere to democratic ideals and rather relies on consultation within the Shura, which serves as the supreme authority for the enactment of statutes by the teachings of the Quran and Hadith, the building will remind India's contribution to the Afghanistan. Similar to Türkiye, India's involvement in infrastructure development for education and medical services has made significant contributions to the progress of the Afghan people. India's provision of aid for Cricket infrastructure, as compared to Türkiye, emerges as a more efficacious approach for garnering the support and admiration of Afghan youth.

Both India and Türkiye have been offering medical services to the Afghan population, although Indian medical services appear to be more extensive compared to that of Türkiye. The medical service sectors of both countries have achieved a global reputation. Based on the Global Health Security Index (2021), Türkiye was placed 46th out of 195 countries, whereas India occupied the 66th position. Consequently, the healthcare services in both nations have the potential to attract a significant number of individuals seeking treatment in Türkiye.

In addition, the Indian ICCR provides scholarships to around 1000 students from Afghanistan annually. The cultural proximity, eating habits, social traditions, language medium of education, and availability of future employment market are key factors that attract Afghan students to pursue their studies in India. On the other hand, the Turkish Maarif Foundation primarily offers educational services at the pre-primary to high school levels. Indeed, it has the potential to foster a sense of interest and attraction among students toward Turkish education and culture, motivating them to seek further education opportunities in Türkiye. Because the schooling years are crucial in cultivating a strong attachment to a specific culture and civilization. Aras and Mohammed (2019) argued that Türkiye expects that students who pursue their education in Türkiye will adopt the role of brand ambassadors for the country upon their return to their respective home countries. Taking into consideration Nye's examination of the correlation between 'Soft Power and public diplomacy' (Nye, 2008), it may be further posited that Türkiye has been employing scholarships for international students as a means of conducting public diplomacy. However, the number of Türkiye scholarships for higher education of Afghan students is much less than that of India. Consequently, Afghan pupils have a greater preference for India over Türkiye. According to Ozoglu et al. (2015), the presence of educational standards and the comparatively reasonable costs associated with education and living serve as key factors that entice international students to pursue their studies in Türkiye. Nonetheless, international students encounter a myriad of obstacles throughout their educational trajectory, spanning the processes of application and enrolment, as well as their social contacts within Türkiye. There exists a subset of

the teaching faculty who have insufficient knowledge and skills to adequately interact with international students hailing from varied cultural backgrounds.

Sports-dominant games – hold significant importance as key components of soft power. The significance of the growth of Afghan Cricket concerning India's soft power in Afghanistan is noteworthy, given that the sport has become highly popular in South Asia. Many South Asian migrants residing in Türkiye seek to establish and maintain their cultural identity through their engagement with the sport of cricket. One notable observation is that the game of Cricket, which holds significant popularity in India, also enjoys a considerable fan base in Afghanistan. In contrast, cricket does not enjoy widespread popularity in Türkiye, with the country mostly being acquainted with football, hence aligning it with European nations.

India's Bollywood contains universally shared values that appeal to Afghanistan like other countries in the world. On the other hand, Turkish films and TV serials, in comparison with India, are not so popular in Afghanistan. It has been only in the recent decade that Turkish mega TV serials have gained unprecedented popularity around the world. It opened the likelihood of competition between Indian and Turkish TV serials in Afghanistan. Indian Yoga has gained huge popularity not only in South Asia but also in many other countries in the world including Türkiye. However, Yoga has Hindu cultural and religious contours that can create mixed reactions among the majority Muslims in Afghanistan. Taliban's current strict Islamic rules have strengthened the possibility of confrontation with Yoga. On the contrary, Türkiye, as a majority Muslim populated country is in an advantageous position from that point as Turkish TV serials which are mostly watched in Afghanistan do not represent anti-Islamic tradition.

Both countries accommodate a democratic system that is recognized domestically and internationally. India, as the largest democracy in the world, sustained its democratic journey since its independence in 1947. The construction of the parliament building will work as an everlasting soft power of India in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Türkiye's steady democracy since 2002 also created a democratic value in Afghanistan though the current Taliban government kept the democratic system aside. As long as the Taliban exists in power, it is less likely that Türkiye or India's democratic values will work for their relationship with Afghanistan.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Though the absence of a border with Afghanistan gives Türkiye an extra advantage to retain its soft power, the current pushback of Afghan refugees by Türkiye (Human Rights Watch, 2022), has a huge likelihood of giving birth to anti-Türkiye sentiment among Afghans. It will ultimately exert a negative impact on Türkiye's soft power in Afghanistan. A complicated situation for more than 15,000 registered Afghan refugees in India (Shah, 2023), may also create anti-Indian sentiments among Afghans. Existing complex politics between India and Pakistan heavily impact India's relation with Afghanistan and consequently the soft power of India. For ideological reasons, the current Taliban government would not be able to be close or to keep trust in India as would be with Türkiye.

After the Taliban took over power in 2021, the country introduced a new name 'Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan.' It entirely relates the country to Islamic rules based on Sharia. So Taliban would not allow any exterior programs that contradict Islamic law. It may suffer the Afghan people under acute poverty and lower living standards. Taliban's stance on women's empowerment can be an important issue that contradicts the policies of Non-Government Organizations and International Non-Government Organizations that work for women's education and women's employment. Till now, the Turkish Maarif Foundation has been educating a considerable number of Afghan female students at the school level. However, the continuity of female education is largely dependent on the policies of the Taliban government. Though Türkiye has not recognized the Taliban government formally, its softened voice for working with the Taliban and the Taliban's offering of security management of the Kabul airport to Türkiye along with Qatar (TRT World, 2021), are important prospects for Türkiye's soft power in Afghanistan. In that case, Türkiye must work for Afghan people irrespective of religion and race.

On the other hand, India's shutdown of its embassy immediately after the Taliban's taking over the power signals India's uneasy relations with Afghanistan. Moreover, China's receptive stance on the Taliban is another concern for India because of the regional rivalry between India and China. India's neighbourhood policy which is considered the prime basis for its relations focused on protecting Afghans from the Taliban, which was not received well by the Taliban. Nevertheless, the Taliban's expressing of interest in working with India in later days has made hopes for the normalization of the relations between them. However, as the two countries have two different religious directions, India should be more cautious about its relations with Afghans irrespective of race and religion.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that Türkiye's non-offensive military role as part of NATO and many state and non-state actors' engagement in the post-9/11 incident played significant soft power roles. India did not militarily engage in Afghanistan but rather engaged through state and non-state actors for its relationship with Afghanistan, with some similarities and differences with Türkiye. However, the Taliban's coming to power in 2021 terminated Türkiye's military presence like other NATO states except for some Turkish armed forces' duty of managing Kabul airport, while India unofficially left Afghanistan immediately after the Taliban came to power. In later days, Türkiye was in a high comfort zone while dealing with the Taliban, unlike the upheaval of India's relationship with the Taliban. Turkish mediation of the peace talks between the Taliban and the USA seems to have played a significant role in getting a favourable outlook on the Turkish authority. On the other hand, India's close relationship with the pre-Taliban regimes and explicit anti-Taliban stance destabilized their relationship. Obstacles to operating India's smooth humanitarian assistance using the passage of Pakistan is another important issue for Indian soft powers to be resumed or not.

Türkiye launched branches of multiple institutions abroad to provide economic, educational, cultural, and humanitarian aid. Afghan students receiving scholarships from the Turkish government for education have been employing the roles of brand Ambassadors for Türkiye, similar to the Afghan students studying in

India under Fulbright scholarships. India's "Neighbourhood First" policy in the 1990s resulted in bilateral educational cooperation programs with neighbouring countries, which have been further expedited since 2002 by India's "scholarship diplomacy." This has been playing a significant role in strengthening the relationship between Türkiye and Afghanistan & India and Afghanistan.

Historical factors also worked as significant soft powers for Türkiye and India's relationship with Afghanistan. Türkiye has been able to build strong ties with Afghanistan since the 1920s despite not sharing a border. Afghanistan, a country with a large Muslim population, was among the first countries to recognize the Republic of Türkiye. Reform programs by Afghan King Amanullah Khan were fuelled by Turkish influence. All Afghans, regardless of ethnic background, supported Türkiye's non-offensive activities, even though Türkiye is a NATO member and took part in military operations in Afghanistan after the 9/11 incident. Historical causes also worked as soft powers while explaining India's relationship with Afghanistan.

Other than religious characteristics, it is not possible to distinguish between Afghanistan's and India's cultures. While recent Turkish TV serials appear to have eclipsed Indian ones in popularity, Bollywood films appealed more to Afghans than Türkiye did. Beyond the border, Bollywood is a non-state cultural institution. The Afghan people find great appeal in the Afghan culture, as shown in several Bollywood films.

Turkish state-owned organizations, namely Yunus Emre and the Turkish Diyanet Foundation, have their roots in the religious-cultural characteristics and share sentiments with the majority of the Afghan population. In contrast, India's state actor that serves as a cultural ambassador is the India Culture Centre in Kabul, which may draw religious reservations. Indeed, Indian TV serials that represent a different traditional religion than Turkish ones have been competing with Turkish TV serials on religious grounds. However, people in Afghanistan and India feel closer due to shared ethnic and cultural traits. Afghanistan is particularly drawn to the Indian sports of cricket and yoga despite certain religious objections to the latter. All these factors, which neither Türkiye nor India is forcing to carry out, have been playing significant roles in the two countries' relationship with Afghanistan, albeit differently in some cases.

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