

India's Soft Power

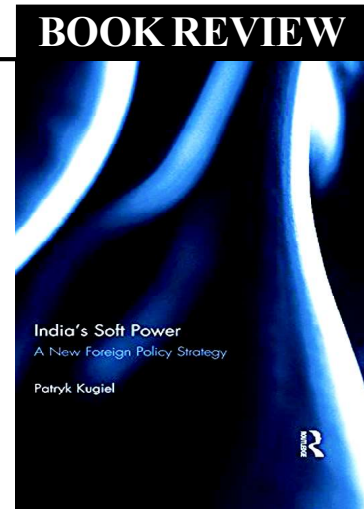
A New Foreign Policy Strategy

Author: **Patryck Kugiel**

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Book Review by: **Sudarshan Ramabdran***



One of the most interesting inferences that one makes through the book 'India's SoftPower: A New Foreign Policy Strategy' by Patryck Kugiel, a Polish scholar, is that India has its own way of crafting its soft power strategy although the term has its genesis in the West. Whenever we look to understand the term 'soft power', the essential understanding of its import is in the conceptual framework. The introductory portion of the book is an analysis of the conceptual framework of soft power as opposed to hard and smart power, titled 'Soft Power in the International Relations: An International Framework'.

In the initial parts of the book, the author in his own words has tried to provide answers to some of the following questions that are raised in debates over soft power, such as: What constitutes soft power? Who can have it? How can it be measured? How does it work?

The overall assessment of the book is that a country can enable a pragmatic soft power story in a globalised world with a strong hard power foundation. The analogy that the author draws to enable parallels between hard and soft power are also interesting. About its difference in the context of its use, he writes, 'hard power works through

coercion, command, and threats to realise its aims; soft power works through persuasion, attraction and seduction'. In this sense, hard power resources, including military assets, can be a source of soft power if they are used properly. In other words, 'the real differentiation of power is in the context of its use.' The author also cautions against aggressive promotion of the use of a country's soft power that can lead to the undermining of its hard power.

During the course of the book, the author considerably delves into how soft power has been 'de-Americanised' and has been taken up by countries in their own way. The important point of a strong national brand attracting foreign investments is highlighted with the help of authentic studies. The subtle nature of soft power has to be understood by the students and practitioners of this form of foreign policy. The author writes, 'Soft power is more subtle and invisible, and unlike coercion and threats, aims to change the preferences and interest of other states, which cannot happen overnight.'

If the reader is looking out for the author's definition of soft power, then in his words, 'In a very broad sense, soft power means "soft use of power"'. He adds that it works indirectly through agenda setting, persuasion, and attraction, in contrast

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to hard power, which works by coercive means.

The focus of the book is to highlight that soft power regained its mainstream role in the foreign policy circles in India at the turn of the millennium. A very important facet of the book is the glaring inattention of Indian scholars to the field of soft power. He has contrasted this with the approach of China in producing monographs and literature surrounding soft power. The author alludes that India has been consistently honing and spreading its soft power advantage in the world today. Needless to state that there is still considerable distance to cover. What is remarkable is the focus of the author to highlight the potential strength of India's diaspora and the need to leverage it in terms of soft power potential.

The author has highlighted the importance of Yoga to India's soft power discourse but has also delved into the contribution of India to global soft power in the past, via the values of ahimsa (non-violence) and universalism in Hinduism and Buddhism. Some instruments of India's soft power are laid out and briefly mentioned. That public and private partnership has to drive India's soft power story is also a key inference from the book. Subsequently, the author has explained the current status of India's reliance on public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, foreign assistance and relations with its diaspora. Afghanistan as an important case study for India's success in soft power is also presented.

That current surveys and indexes are possibly not the best judge for India's soft power potential due to their heavy reliance on western minds has also been rightly conveyed by the author. Even after two decades of the term 'soft power' existing in foreign policy circles, its exact definition and

contours remain unknown or, at best, evolutionary in nature. This becomes all the more real in the Indian case.

In the final portions of the book, the author posits for a greater need for research and policy-making in the field of soft power. It is here that the author brings to the fore that India may in the future play a lead in the role of a smart power, a country that uses both hard and soft power to advance its foreign policy goals. The author also believes that a stronger soft power narrative could enable and assist India to play the lead in the South Asian region, attract more investments and also strengthen its position in the United Nations Security Council.

Another invaluable takeaway is the prism with which India looks at its soft power policy as a whole. In the words of the author, 'India does not simply follow or replicate the Western approach to soft power; on the contrary, it assertively stresses its different and unique model based on 'mutual benefit' and partnerships with other countries. It does not pursue aggressive cultural promotion or development assistance based on conditionality. Instead, India tries to act in consonance with foreign partners and take its cues from others' requests. It presents "soft use" of soft power. In this way, it can better escape controversies and concerns customarily associated with the use of soft power by the great powers. Its benign approach to soft power decreases resentment and criticism from foreign partners. This augurs well for the policy's success.'

India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy is thus a recommended book, even though the author could have delved deeper into some of the instruments of India's soft power.

