

Is Diplomacy a New Tool for Deterrence?

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ABSTRACT

The main argument of this paper is to project how diplomacy can be used as the new tool for deterrence. In addition to conventional methods of deterrence, diplomacy is also considered to be an alternative tool. India has jumped on the bandwagon of using its diplomatic clout towards global engagement, addressing pressing issues of human sufferance, security and world order. India's diplomatic advances have bypassed the South Asian region, after giving due preference to its neighbours, with far reaching impacts on its bilateral relations with other global powers in far west and east. India's timely confrontations with its tough neighbours have posed immense challenges that New Delhi often tactfully decided to handle diplomatically. This paper delivers a detailed study of India's diplomatic outreaches and how New Delhi has off late placed itself in a position where it can maintain distinctive relationships with individual countries at once. The world rightly acknowledges India's ability to talk to different countries at different levels at the same time, especially at the time when the global order is very seemingly divided. This puts India at an advantageous position diplomatically, providing it with the ability to use its diplomatic clout as deterrence.

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Introduction

In today's inter-connected world, building relations has been the key ingredient for successful foreign policies. Diplomacy is a phenomenon of engagement between countries with converging interests and is fundamental to foreign policy. In an ever-changing world order, alliances are prone to constant re-shaping. From the realist perspective, every nation seeks power and security as core to their national interest. A country derives power on the basis of its performances as well as moral responsibilities and seek security by establishing relationships. As author Stefano Guzzini had put out, realism not only talks about nations' competitive self-interests but also harmony and cooperation. Diplomatic relations serve as the basis for signing up for political cooperation and diluting differences, ultimately leading to countries' much sought after security. The most preferred tool for establishing relations across the board is through diplomatic channels, which is indeed a common traditional practice [1].

Diplomacy can be studied in two categories, that is, traditional and contemporary. In a traditional set up, diplomacy is usually done through diplomatic missions by establishing missions in foreign countries, led by representatives of states as diplomats. Diplomacy has helped the international system in a multiple ways as diplomatic communications are often used to prevent confrontations, elevate relations and address global issues. Diplomatic communications have been instrumental in solving conflicts in many cases and helped countries to reach agreeable solutions in dignified ways. Diplomacy is also used to negotiate between conflicting states which is commonly known as multilateral diplomacy, usually overseen by multilateral or inter-governmental organisations, for example United Nations Organisation, that can be understood as traditional or conventional styled diplomatic practices. The newer age has also witnessed diplomacy in a contemporary form, such as digital

diplomacy. Taking advantage of the rise of technology, leaders and diplomats are making use of internet and social media platforms to boost international relations at a mass level. In the age of digital diplomacy, relations are not only built on the basis of leader-to-leader equation or other high echelons but are also shaped according to the political perceptions of ordinary citizens. The internet-age has also empowered the general mass to form political opinions and in some cases, it had the potential to affect leadership change. With wide accessibility of internet today, leaders across the world are able to reach the mass and gain popularity not only within their countries but also beyond the borders [2].

Having said that, diplomacy is understood to be designed to influence countries' foreign policies, and leaders' far-reaching approaches have a direct correlation with diplomatic influences. In addition to that, political developments can also re-shape diplomatic relations, and give rise to new power blocs. This article we will discuss if diplomacy can be used as a new tool for deterrence, using both conventional as well as contemporary methods. India's geo-political developments with her neighbours and the diplomatic discourses it is using to redefine its foreign policies makes a suitable case study to understand how diplomacy can be used as a tool for deterrence.

Literature Review

What do we understand by deterrence and diplomacy? Deterrence is an act of deterring potential attackers by the possibility of retaliation. And retaliation, some argued, can be done using various means, such as conventional military actions, economic sanctions or diplomatic means [3]. In context of international relations, the objective of deterrence is to prevent the use of force or dissuading another actor from carrying out proscribed behavior [4]. And under such circumstances, when military balance is

unfavoured and use of force is provoked, defensible means are used to counter aggression. Therefore, deterrence under such occurrences can provoke the very behaviour they are designed to prevent [5]. Some pointed out that deterrence is an effort to stop or prevent an action, as opposed to a closely related concept of compellence, which signifies an effort to force an actor to do something. Of many approaches to understand deterrence, the two fundamental approaches are by denial and by punishment [6]. Denial involves efforts in making the target unattainable for the aggressor whereas punishment involves physical aggression and inflicting level of pain. Therefore the downside of deterrence is that it not only creates catastrophic losses but also becomes an added cost bearer with military intensifications, economic sanctions as well as nuclear escalations [7].

States can deter adversaries by using diplomatic means therefore upholding that deterrence can also be achieved through diplomacy [8]. Diplomacy contributes to long term security and stability in the international arenas. Diplomacy results in the creation of international norms, which is a shared understanding between states that accommodates both shared as well as diverging interests [9]. Countries use diplomatic means to create influence and increase global presence, at times to deter assertion of any growing adversary. Diplomatic engagements, using dialogues and roundtables, have been successful in re-shaping the post-war worlds. Anne Sartori explained in her book how standard understandings of deterrence can be challenged and analysed them in the form of talks, in order to reach optimistic conclusions and maximise the effectiveness of diplomacy. Using diplomatic means helps in many ways, such as, open channel of communication, create transparency as well as enhance the ability of resolving future disputes using diplomacy rather than force [10]. Richard Nethercut, argued in his winter 1985 article, that United States' deterrence strategy towards Soviet Union should be more economical and non-provocative which will allow the two powers to explore areas of common agreement in an atmosphere of reduced tension [11]. In context to territorial attacks by non-state actors, some pointed out that military might is indeed necessary, but for a longer resolve using diplomatic means as deterrence is a scholarly advice rather than using military strength or targeted strikes which will only legitimize the terrorist actions [12]. And diplomatic means, in this case, could be about establishing approachable relations between the two actors, developing better communication as well as understanding local and regional dynamics.

Apart from the practices of conventional diplomacy, dominated by ruling elites and diplomats, public diplomacy took the centre stage especially at the end of Cold war. Public diplomacy can be defined as a task of communicating with the larger audience or overseas public, while not keeping the diplomatic communications circumscribed [13]. Today, with an increased access to technology, it is relatively easier to reach the wider audience, thus making communication far reaching. Access to technology empowers one with news and information, which helps shape popular perception towards global leadership, while at the same time providing the leadership with a transparency regarding the popular perception of the country they are establishing relations with. Therefore, public diplomacy is about building relations, while understanding the countries' cultural and popular needs. Relations like these, where engaging people is fundamental, are more likely to correspond with the power of influence, rather than traditional economic and military might of countries [14].

For a better understanding on how states can use diplomacy as a tool for deterrence, we must focus on the diplomatic outreaches in

international politics and the outcome it generates. And what better research area as a case study than India. India, in the past couple of years, has been in the news for various reasons such as tackling territorial challenges with its neighbours as well as speeding up its diplomatic outreaches in the region as well as internationally. As the Indian leadership has time and again reiterated that today's era is not of war, it could be perceived that such a statement possibly hints towards an inclination towards increased diplomatic and non-provocative relations [15]. Therefore, making the country's diplomatic outreaches self-explanatory. This article attempts to discuss how India is using its diplomacy to deter external challenges and how its new age foreign policy practices have changed the global perspectives towards India.

Method

The methodology used for this study was qualitative research, in which the author attempts a qualitative approach to determine how the concepts of deterrence and diplomacy functions in international politics, and how diplomacy can be regarded as a tool for deterrence. Countries around the globe are constantly recalibrating their foreign policies, given the ever-changing dynamics of world politics, thereby making diplomacy indispensable while making the international space less provocative. This work is a descriptive study of India's diplomatic outreaches and how the outcome is considered as an alternate method of deterrence, being non-coercive and non-provocative, coupled with India's preemptive behaviour. The sources of data collection are primarily library research, including a thorough research of books, journals and articles, both printed and digital version. Government official press release reports were also referred. References were made from print and digital media, in places where recent occurrences on India's diplomatic extents were to be referred, and thereby had been incorporated in this work.

Discussion

India's Diplomatic Challenges- India has been into a troubled relation with her neighbours for quite a long time now. India's fight with its north-western neighbour, Pakistan, is now considered as a historical enmity and it refuses to arrive at a negotiable ground despite multiple diplomatic attempts. Islamabad's attempt to meddle into India's internal political matters on Jammu and Kashmir has been handled bilaterally by New Delhi, with the latter not entertaining any third-party involvement. India's dispute with Pakistan is not only border related but also addressing proxy wars that take place through infiltrations of non-state actors or terrorists. After decades of conflicted relationship and diplomatic failures, New Delhi has learned essential tactics to handle its western neighbour's constant attempt to disturb the region, and rightly has the ability to fight the malignancy that Pakistan or its 'state-sponsored non-state actors' pose.

On the north-eastern front, India is indulged into a recent brawl with China. Post the 1962-war with China, New Delhi's relationship with Beijing has survived through both diplomatic progresses as well as unprecedented instabilities. China claims over 90,000 square kilometers of Indian territory in north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. China's extra-judicial claims over-rule the 1914 Shimla Agreement which birthed the de-facto boundary between India and China, also known as Line of Actual Control (LAC) [16]. Envisioning a settlement to the territorial dispute, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China in July 2003 to pen down an agreement that recognized Himalayas as a natural boundary. According to the Joint Declaration, India conceded primacy to China in Aksai Chin area and in return China was expected to give up its claims on Arunachal Pradesh [17].

Things however did not go as planned as China got back to its malign intentions once again, by reviving its claims on Arunachal Pradesh. Going one step forward, Beijing had released a renewed their national map which included parts of Arunachal Pradesh within its international boundaries. China refuses to acknowledge the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory, rather considers the eastern state to be a part of Southern Tibet, which it occupied in 1951 [18].

Alongside Arunachal, India is also fighting China on the borders of eastern Ladakh. The 2017 Doklam military-standoff between India and China was one of the longest military standoffs in recent times, and armed forces of both nations refused to budge from their position despite harsher weather conditions. Despite the mutually agreed military disengagement between Beijing and New Delhi, on August 28, 2017, China continued to establish its military bases and shelters, alongside their patrolling and stationing in Dong Lang (Doklam area) [19]. Unfortunately, maintaining a consistent relationship with China, in particular, appears to be quite hard for India as Beijing repeatedly fails to live up to the commitments that its foreign officials or political leaders make during state visits.

In another such incident China flexed its muscles against India in the Galwan valley in the northern state of Ladakh. Since early May of 2020, Chinese People's Liberation Army started to interfere in India's regular patrolling patterns in Galwan valley area which resulted in an ugly faceoff between armed forces on both sides. After the violent encounter, series of discussions took place through diplomatic and military channels for de-escalation and disengagement processes in June 2020. Despite understanding, the Chinese side departed from the consensus and took to unlawful constructions across the LAC, which resulted in further clashes leading to casualties [20].

Responding to the border developments, leadership from the Indian capital of New Delhi has not only stressed on how expansionism has hurt humanity in a multitude of ways in the history of mankind but has also reiterated that the era of expansionism is now replaced with an era of evolution [21]. Evolution can only take place with pragmatic decisions of avoiding conventional confrontations and include more diplomacy into actions. In this context, let us determine how the principle of deterrence by diplomacy plays a major role for India in her fight against territorial challenges. India diplomatic approaches to deter her adverse neighbours has drawn her closer to new allies, resulting in renewed diplomacies which we will discuss in the following section.

India's Diplomatic Outreach

Diplomacy in the West- Policy makers in the capital of New Delhi have been eyeing to renew India's foreign policy strategies. The intention behind is to develop a diplomatic armour to confront external challenges. India is gaming up to spread its influence both regionally as well as globally. As we have learnt before that key to diplomatic relations is developing consistency in relationship management as well accommodating each other's national interests. In recent developments, India began with, what we can call, the 'West-Asian diplomacy'. India's high-level ministerial visits to West Asian nations, amidst the challenging conditions of the pandemic-struck world, have turned heads.

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2020 kick-started New Delhi's attempt to re-establish its West-Asian diplomacy. The November

24 visit focused on strengthening India-Bahrain relation amidst the covid-19 crisis which made the whole world stand still. In the gamut of bilateral relations, both nations committed to cooperate in defence and maritime security, space technology and trade relations [22]. External affairs minister's November 25-26 visit to United Arab Emirates (UAE) too focused on cementing the multi-faceted India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership, including the ever-evolving political developments across nations. In the unprecedented covid-19 situation, the India-UAE relation touched new heights especially after India's rapid response to UAE medical emergencies and New Delhi's assistance by sending teams of doctors and nurses to help the country fight against the pandemic. In return, UAE too had helped India by sending medical supplies at the time when every country was fighting its own war to survive the virus crisis [23].

The visit of Indian Chief of Army Staff, M.M. Naravane to UAE and Saudi Arabia in December 2020 is considered to be historic and holds a greater significance for India's growing diplomatic relations with the Gulf countries. The significance not only comes from India's petroleum purchases from the region but also the West Asian countries' stance on India's role in Kashmir, a reaction which stirred Islamabad and its high echelons. Both Saudi Arabia and UAE had maintained silence after New Delhi revoked the constitutionally granted special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019. The abrogation had ruled out the autonomous nature of Kashmir, bringing the state fully under Indian administration and this angered Pakistan in full potential. Not only the silence infuriated Islamabad, but also UAE's decision to stop issuing work or travel visas to citizens from Pakistan, along with 12 other countries, deteriorated relations between the two Islamic countries a little too further, ultimately bringing New Delhi a notch closer to the West Asian states [24].

Dr. S. Jaishankar's stand-alone visit to Qatar in December 2020 is also considered significant in brewing the India-West Asia relationship. Alongwith maintaining an undisputed bilateral relation in trade and energy cooperation, New Delhi also appreciated Qatar's newest labour reforms which is expected to benefit the Indian labourers employed in the country. On September 8, 2020, Qatar introduced significant labour reform measures, according to which migrants labourers are permitted change employers before completion of existing contracts and are also subjected to a higher minimum wage [25]. One significant political development for Qatar is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries ending their rift and lifting the embargo they had imposed on Qatar on 2017. In June 2017, Qatar distinctly pronounced its pro-Iranian policies and support for Muslim brotherhood, including their terror practices. This not only angered GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain, but also resulted in cutting ties with Qatar by imposing land, air and water blockades.

The West Asian countries are clearly showing signs of ending regional disputes to promote stability in the Middle East [26]. For maintaining regional stability, the West Asian countries are clustered against a nuclear state like Iran, and it's call for Islamic revolution. Pakistan and Iran, who apparently supports non-state actors, are both strategically driven closer to China, which has been another cause of concern for India. Thus, it becomes clear why India wants to earn confidence of the West Asian countries, while putting pressure on its unappalling neighbours, using diplomatic tools. Therefore, India's relations with West Asia are not merely known for oil or energy, or the living Indian diaspora, but the relation has become more strategic than ever. Having said that,

if we zoom out from Middle East, we will see India is widening its diplomatic clout beyond this region.

Diplomacy in the East - As part of its diplomatic measures, New Delhi is also using military diplomacy as a tool for greater alliances. Indian Army Chief General's visit to South Korea on December 29, 2020 is testimony to the fact how New Delhi is trying to keep the doors open to East Asian nations too. South Korea, as a matter of fact, is a high-quality manufacturer of defence equipment in shipbuilding, electronics, aeronautics and missile technology sectors and is a major weapon supplier to Indian defence. Seoul's New Southern Policy, which is a diplomatic initiative that aims at greater ties with Southeast Asian nations and India along with its existing relation with United States, China, Japan and Russia, highly resonates with Indian Act East Policy in security and strategic realms [27]. It is at India's advantage that Seoul is broadening its horizon and expanding cooperation beyond its traditional allies, especially China. Amidst the growing geopolitical risks that has emerged from China in the last few years, South Korea is seeking to expand its relations with India and other Southeast Asian nations in order to rebalance its unusual trade and production dependence on China [28]. Under such circumstances, India stands at a fairly advantageous grounds as it not only gives New Delhi a fair share of space in East Asian geopolitics but can also utilize the opportunity towards its intended diplomatic advances.

Having talked about India's presence in the East Asian geopolitics, securing a free and open Indo-Pacific is one of the highest priorities in India's security strategies. The Indo-Pacific region is crucial for India's trade and energy supplies through the water routes and freeing it from the clutches of Chinese domination is one of the main objectives of most stakeholders in the region. The initiative of Asia-Africa Growth Corridor has provided a prominent role for India to play in the Indo-Pacific and that resulted from India and Japan's idea in 2016 to link Asia with Africa through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This initiative is largely considered to counteract China's Maritime Silk Road, as both stakeholders are contesting China in their own ways [29]. Japan is fighting against Chinese expansionism in the contested Senkaku island in South China Sea and India's month-long military-standoff and Chinese encroachment in the Indian Ocean backyard has drawn worldwide attention.

Taking a step further, India had participated in the Second India-Australia-Japan-USA Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo on October 6, 2020, which aimed at maintaining an inclusive as well as free and open Indo-Pacific Region (IOR), and also creating a diplomatic confrontation to Beijing's assertive measures in IOR. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or commonly known as Quad, features a clear objective of sending a tough message to China regarding its expansionist moves in the region. Even though the ministerial meet largely aims at developmental and security issues, the underlying interest of the powers are to establish a rebalancing strategy in the IOR [30]. Therefore, being a part of the Quad is essential for New Delhi to be in the game of balance of power in the Oceania and maintain its presence in the region. It does not seem outrightly possible for Japan and South Korea to directly confront China, given the volume of bilateral trade relations these countries have with Beijing. However, they certainly have the diplomatic ability to pressure China and deter its aggressive moves in the region. The initiative of Quad is a suitable example in this circumstance and India's role in the Quad amplifies New Delhi's most desired presence in the IOR.

So far Southeast Asia is concerned, out of many diplomatic alliances, India has amplified its bilateral relation with Myanmar. Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Chief of Army Staff General M.M. Naravane visit to Myanmar in October 2020 consolidated certain community developmental projects. Out of the many, one significant move was India's five tranches of relief supplies to the Rakhine State Development Programme to Bangladesh. India has also undertaken a trilateral cooperation with Japan and Myanmar to provide essential supplies in Rakhine, a step which is argued to have been taken to keep China out of the scope. India is apparently taking every measure required to stay close to Myanmar, which is considered as India's gateway to ASEAN countries. Out of many cooperative initiatives, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and Trilateral Highway are one of the most crucial projects for India as it is designed to connect India, Myanmar and Thailand. In the energy sector, both Indian public and private sectors are playing a major role to make Myanmar energy efficient. Therefore, New Delhi is vying to keep up with the regional competition and winning over Myanmar could prove to be a strategic advantage for India's Act East Policy [31].

Diplomacy in South Asia - Nepal is an indispensable South Asian neighbour for India and in New Delhi's recent diplomatic outreaches, the Indian Foreign Secretary paid a high-level visit to Kathmandu in November 2020. In a recent development, India and Nepal were caught into a border dispute after Indian defence minister virtually inaugurated an 80 km-long highway in the Himalayas, which connected the China border at the Lipulekh pass. Nepal challenged India's decision claiming that the road crosses Nepalese territory and nation-wide protests followed in the country. It has been pointed out by many that Nepal was well aware of the Indian roadbuilding and had kept a closer eye on Indian advancement in the region. Despite Kathmandu's knowledge on India's move, their surprised reaction came as a shocker for many at the New Delhi government. In retaliation to these developments, Nepal issued a new map which included areas that are claimed by India, including the Lipulekh. Some pointed out that Nepal took such a measure at the behest of Chinese pressure, who at the same time was involved in a military standoff with India [32].

In order to ease the rift and deepen bilateral relations between the two nations, several high-levels visits took place. Indian Chief of Army Staff M.M. Naravane held meetings with Nepal's top echelons and engaged into bilateral cooperation. Followed by which, came the visit of India's Foreign Secretary and Chief of India's principal intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and focused on an array of issues that catered the countries' interest. India is committed to take all the required measures to keep Nepal as close as possible because China is supposedly working hard to influence Nepal's domestic politics to serve its malign intentions [33]. Beijing's influence in shaping Kathmandu's politics will have greater impact in Nepal's policies towards India. Therefore, for India, maintaining harmony and cooperation enhancements are key to a secured north-eastern border.

India has also beefed-up bilateral cooperation with Sri Lanka and Maldives through Trilateral Maritime Security Dialogue. Both Sri Lanka and Maldives have strategic significance for India. The countries' location in the Indian Ocean have gained them prominence in the international arena, especially among the stakeholders who are striving for an all-inclusive Indo-Pacific region. China, in its 'string of pearls' strategy has managed to penetrate into both Sri Lanka and Maldives, which has been a

serious concern for India. Beijing's growing influence in India's backyards has driven New Delhi to re-design its relationship with countries in IOR.

Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval paid a visit to Colombo, to attend the 4th NSA Level Meeting on Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation on November 27-28, 2020. He was joined by the defence minister of Maldives and other high-ranking officials from Sri Lanka ministry of defence Sri Lanka, Maldives and Seychelles are indispensable for the Quad that comprises India, USA, Japan and Australia, mainly for geographical location in the India Ocean [34]. Furthermore, revival of the tri-nation maritime talks was possible after it received approval from the Maldivian Prime Minister Mariya Didi [35]. Maldives' previous leader Abdullah Yamin's unappalling move to discontinue from the maritime talk distanced Male from India, a scope which China plunged into in a heartbeat. However, Mariya Didi's revival of the maritime talk renewed India's relations with Maldives, creating scope for further deepening of bilateral cooperation.

India, Sri Lanka and Maldives are committed towards working together on collective action on maritime security, create more maritime domain awareness and intelligence sharing. All these components together are not only expected to keep these tri-nations closer to one another for better maritime cooperation but would also provide India with the leverage of countering China's ascendancy in the IOR. As far as Sri Lanka's direct equation with India is concerned, both countries are dedicated to strengthening their value cooperation and promote peace and security in the IOR, reiterated in their "India first" approach [36]. It is rather undeniable that Colombo has also heightened its diplomatic engagements with Beijing, which eventually has provided China with a greater sense of presence in the IOR. To counter the growing Chinese presence in the region, India is stepping up to reinforce bilateral relation with Sri Lanka by offering investment in key projects in Colombo and Mattala international airport. Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean waters, especially on Sri Lankan ports, have bothered India for a long time. Furthermore, Colombo's intentions of revisiting the security aspects of the Chinese lease of Hambantota port and assurance that its soil will never be used for any hostile activity against India, speaks highly of optimism that New Delhi is vying [37].

India's Diplomatic Advantages

Starting with one of the most anticipated victories for India, that is, securing a seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member for a two-year tenure, can be considered as a diplomatic advantage for India [38]. India's seat, in the Asia-Pacific category of UNSC, is presenting New Delhi with a rare opportunity to showcase leadership, especially at the time of virus-crippled world. India secured votes from 184 countries out of 192 total votes casted in the secret ballot voting system. Gaining non-permanent seat, for the eighth time, gives India a sizable advantage for a greater role to India in the decision-making processes in international organisations. India is committed to work on pressing issues that has challenged global peace and security. Indian leadership has also emphasized on the need of reforming UNSC and its responses and processes, which have impacted effective decision-making in needful circumstances, both local and global. A successful tenure is expected to drive India a step closer to her bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC, which is time and again blocked by China, despite getting full support from other 4 permanent members [39].

Indian prime minister's gaining popularity has been in the news in recent times. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has earned a fan base,

both at home and outside, despite the occupational challenges that every leader faces. Securing second term as the prime minister on May 30, 2019, proved his followership in the country. At the global level, Prime Minister Modi has gained popularity amongst world leaders which on many occasions have worked in favour of Indian foreign policy. According to a recent study, Prime Minister Modi has been awarded as the most popular world leader, determined on the scale of leadership in times of crisis [40]. The year 2020 will be remembered as a historic year, that had shut the world down with a pandemic of a lifetime. During this worldwide crisis, Indian prime minister and his timely decisions to tackle the coronavirus crisis have not only earned his support within the country, but also across borders. His direction of leadership and popularity have paved way for diplomatic advantages, something that New Delhi constantly striving to achieve even at the times of global lockdown.

Lastly, another non-political advantage that is celebrated, especially at the grimly hour of pandemic, is the global acknowledgement of India as world's largest vaccine supplier. In response to the global impact of covid-19, India exported hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and paracetamol to its South Asian neighbours and across continents [41]. India is the first country to use its existing capabilities in the pharmaceutical industry by exporting vaccine, to fight the covid-19, to more than ninety countries, beating U.S.A, E.U. or China. India has accorded special priority to its neighbouring countries with her 'neighbourhood first' policy and have met their requests of generic drug supply to fight the virus. This is a golden opportunity for India to gain influence in the region as it continues to be the knight in the shining armour, helping many countries to fight the murkiness that covid had brought along. India's vaccine export to neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives have provided India with the prospect of nurturing its diplomatic relationships within the region. This measure is considered exceptionally priced at the time when New Delhi is seeking as much diplomatic support as possible to counter growing Chinese influence in the region and beyond. India's vaccine diplomacy is not only expected to construct enhanced bilateral ties with its South Asian neighbour but also is a promising step towards New Delhi's leadership in the global community [42]. In such circumstances, India's election to the Chair of World Health Organisation's Executive Board is not only providing New Delhi the role to determine the post-pandemic relations with other nations but has also accredited India with the much-desired prominence at the global level [43].

The 2022 economic crisis in Sri Lanka became another vantage point for India to consolidate its comprehensive bilateral relations with its neighbouring country. India has been a consistent partner for Sri Lanka, both during its civil war against Tamil separatists as well as during the recent economic meltdown, which resulted out of the China's "debt-trap diplomacy". India extended 4-billion-dollar aid to crisis-hit Colombo, in addition to medicine and other humanitarian aid, as well as vocally supported Colombo's demand for International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package. This assistance will not only garner goodwill for India but also holds potential in boosting Indo-Lankan bilateral cooperation in areas that are imperative for India, such as Indian Ocean and maritime connectivity and security, an arena where growing Chinese influence has been a subject of concern for New Delhi [44].

Lastly, India's G20 Presidency from December 2022 to November 2023 is an opportunity for India to both steer the group's agenda as well as a showcase its diplomatic advances and portrayal of itself as a global reliable partner. Some pointed out that G20 Presidency provides an opportunity for India to transition from

being a 'rule-taker to being a rule maker' [45]. The G20 presents New Delhi with a timely opportunity to strengthen the global architecture, at the time when the world is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, facing global consequences of the war in Ukraine in terms of security as well as food and energy shortages and lastly coping with the fragilities of the global economy.

India's repeated assertion of the resolution of the February 2022 Ukraine conflict through dialogue and negotiation gives weightage to India's predilection towards diplomacy over conventional deterrence. India's diplomatic ties with Russia have often been used in the course of the war to bring an isolated Moscow to discussion, strategize peace and reconciliation, which is reflected through India's continuous assertion on a principal that says that today's era must not be the era of war. Time and again, New Delhi echoed the independence of its foreign policy and the decision of remaining unaligned during the course of the Ukraine-Russia war. Even though loathed and questioned by many in the global political arena, however the decision has been duly acknowledged by major powers as India's autonomous foreign policy stand. Therefore, the ability to use its diplomatic clout in global engagements has put New Delhi in a position to prioritize diplomacy as a new tool for deterrence.

Conclusion

India's diplomatic journeys in the recent times has projected a greater Indian influence. The country's growing influence is not only set out to bag more fellowship for New Delhi, but also its closeness with global powers sometimes become a subject of strategic concern for Indian neighbours. India's border clashes with her western neighbour, Pakistan, has been an ongoing phenomenon for decades. Pakistan's attempts to disrupt security through proxy wars, using non-state actors and state-sponsored terrorists, have met with disastrous consequences. On the other hand, to address the elephant in the room, India's tensions with China, on the eastern front, comes from various sources. Some of the most prominent are Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Chinese territorial expansion in Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh) and the recent military standoff in Ladakh. India is seemingly standing to the test of time as for the first time in history the country is fighting both China and Pakistan simultaneously. Skirmishes on either side has apparently unleashed India's diplomatic, military and political energies in the region and globally.

Under such conditions, India is cautious to be choosing the diplomatic way to deter China from its assertive advances. In this context, it is certainly not right to believe that India is less on might to take on China, rather is well aware of the costs that conventional warfare brings along. Therefore, India is striving to prove a point that diplomacy is a better tool for deterring adversaries rather than traditional practices of confrontations. New Delhi's diplomatic advances are not only rewarded with positive returns but have earned more friends than ever. Even during the global lockdown in 2020, policymakers in New Delhi refused to sit back, rather they worked their ways up to bag as much diplomatic support as possible to boost India's influence both within the region as well as globally. Revamping bilateral and trilateral cooperation after years of stalemate, implying quad understanding to areas that have immense geo-strategic significance and extending alliances with countries far from its region are some of India's measures to boost its diplomatic capabilities. Moreover, crowned with certain diplomatic advances, India is gradually gaining momentum in becoming an influential Asian player, contending China. As a matter of fact, according to the Lowy Institute's Asia Power

Index Report of 2023, India is the fourth most powerful country in Asia, with India's diplomatic influence being responsible for such a progression [46].

India's non-permanent membership at the UNSC was widely applauded. India too played a key role in shaping a consensus on Myanmar in the UNSC, working with other permanent and non-permanent members. The consensus aimed for a dialogue and reconciliation in the context of military coup in Myanmar, that took place on the morning of February 1, 2021 [47].

India is apparently gaining might through its diplomacies, whereas on the other hand, China is still grappling on containing the coronavirus. In addition to that, countries are distancing themselves from Beijing as a retaliation to the Chinese response to the 2020 crisis. At the multilateral level, China experienced a drawback while being elected in the United Nations Human Rights Council in October 2020. Upon electing, Beijing suffered a loss of support by 20 per cent, compared to its 2016 election to the council. It has been also stated that had there been additional candidates for vacancy, China would have lost the seat [48]. India's growing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries could also be viewed as a counterweight to China's expansionist approach in the region. In November 2022, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the 19th ASEAN-India Summit reinstated India's diplomacy in the region, focusing on the common interest of maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific amidst the evolving regional architecture and promoting peace, prosperity and cooperation amongst the regional members. More importantly, comprehensive strategic partnership includes transfer of information and technology, import and export of defence equipment and people to people connection [49]. India's support to the idea of 'ASEAN centrality' and East Asian countries' positive inclination towards Indian engagement in the region has a high probability of creating strategic concerns for Beijing, as the growing relations will allow India to intervene on issues surrounding the South China Sea, a major area of contention between China and six other East Asian countries [50].

Also, Pakistan Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif's calls for diplomatic talks with India, on resolving the burning issue of Kashmir could well be interpreted as the former's aversion towards further violence and timely realization of diplomatic advantages, especially at the time Pakistan is struggling to keep its economy afloat [51]. Kashmir being a constant matter of concern between India and Pakistan, and Turkey in the year 2021 attempted to create a stir with New Delhi by making statements on Kashmir on a multilateral platform, and Indian government's handling with the Muslim population in the region, despite India considers the matter as its internal matter [52]. Turkey has reportedly always supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir conflict, given Turkey's past relations with the latter. Having said that, in response to the recent devastating earthquake that shook Turkey in February in 2023, India was one of the first responders to send relief aid (operation known as Operation Dost), with Turkish envoy to India consider this generous act as a steppingstone in Turkey-India bilateral relationship, with some hailing it as a perfect example of proactive diplomacy. With that being said, it could be a little difficult for Pakistan to use its Turkey card in the future to raise the Kashmir issue on another multilateral forum for international attention.

Continuing the discussion on India's proactive diplomacy, New Delhi's readiness in assisting Sri Lanka amidst the worst economic crisis that the island country faced in history could also be perceived as another perfect example of proactive diplomacy.

Apart from India's unprecedented support of over US\$ 3.8 billion for ameliorating the serious economic situation in Sri Lanka, India has also extended financial assurance to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to clear the way for Sri Lanka in the economic bailout in response to the country's economic crisis. Therefore, with New Delhi's swift economic assistance, friendly gestures and priority to its 'neighbourhood first' policy, India is consolidating its diplomatic clout, both in the region as well as in the international space. Having said that, according to the author's opinion, India's diplomatic clout has experienced a significant boost since 2020, as it is seen as a game changing year in the way foreign policy was practiced and how diplomacy was conducted. India soon became a source of solution for many countries in respect to the pharmaceutical needs of many to fight the pandemic. Hence, India's diplomatic successes so far can be rightfully considered as an appropriate example in the study of diplomacy as an alternate tool for deterring adversaries.

Even though the international arena is subjected to ever-changing global political and social system, diplomacy remains as an indispensable tool in international relations. This study attempts to uphold the significance of diplomacy and how states can use this tool to shape perceptions and tackle adversaries. However, limitations to such studies are the diplomatic behavioural changes under continuous transformation of the international system and the unpredictable state behaviours. States are constantly realigning their foreign policies according to the changing world order, and this makes it difficult for one to assess the outcome. For example, today Turkey is embracing Indian gesture of humanitarian assistance and calls the Indian proactive diplomacy as 'a friend in need is a friend indeed', but what guarantee does it provide that in the future it will not go back to raise India's internal matter on another world platform. Likewise, India's financial assistance to Sri Lanka, during the country's dire need of economic assistance, does not guarantee Colombo's aversion towards Chinese influence in the region, what India calls its backyard. Therefore, these limitations leave a scope to examine diplomacy through the lenses of such restrictions, thereby not making the practice full-proof and leaving room for incorporating new mechanisms.

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