

US public diplomacy and Indo-American relations

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The growing interest of the US in India is rooted in a number of economic and political reasons. Despite India's long colonial past, in the second half of the 20th century this country with vast population and huge resource base forced leading states of Asia-Pacific and other regions, including the USA to consider it a powerful actor. Active development after a long political and economic decline was punctuated by wars and crises. Under such conditions, the USA, in its turn, effectively used India's development of industrial, technological and social institutes to employ public diplomacy instruments in order to establish a beneficial relations with India.

US public diplomacy is a useful strategy to draw the attention of the Indian people and it has been used for a very long period of time. Following India's independence from Great Britain in 1947, at the onset of the confrontation between the two economic blocs, India co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, attempted to shield the country from the negative effects of the Cold War; consequently, the US government began adopting a wide range of soft-power measures to prevent the USSR from winning over the favor of the Indian intelligentsia.

During the Cold War, the following actions were taken by the Americans: the enactment of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act (P.L. 480), through which India received humanitarian aid. The 1960s were marked by severe crop failures in India, so the above-mentioned American agricultural aid had a major impact on the public consciousness. Another measure was the foundation of the Fulbright Program, which allowed Indian students to study at universities in the United States. In 1959 nine American universities and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) helped establish one of the first Indian Institutes of Technology. The USSR, in contrast, focused on helping India with its industrial infrastructure.

However, the foreign policy of USA and India in the middle of the 20th century had conjunctural nature: in 1962, when Sino-Indian war broke out, the United States supported the Indian side to resist the strengthening of China, but in 1971 the US sided with Islamabad in Indo-Pakistan conflict because of the Indian improvement of relationships with the USSR.

After the USSR's withdrawal from the political arena in the Asian region in the 1990s, India's desire to establish a full-scale partnership with the USA became evident. Economic reforms of Manmohan Singh, including the abolition of License Raj, gave the local businesses the opportunity to enlarge by setting partnerships with foreign companies and liberalized the market in general. It made the Indian market seem very attractive for American investors, which led to the new wave of soft-power and public diplomacy usage. After these reforms public diplomacy of the US started to focus on business and technology instead of agriculture. In the 1990s the base for the connection of Silicon Valley and Indian IT-hubs was built as the US public diplomacy's main goal was to create the image of the United States being the technology leader.

Vajpayee's new government carried out nuclear tests near the Indo-Pakistan border in 1998, which caused the concerns of the UN Security Council. USA imposed economy sanctions against India. The sanctions were terminated in 2001 by G. Bush and in 2008 the US de-facto recognized the nuclear status of India.

In 2011 Barack Obama declared the political course called "Asia pivot". In the same year Hillary Clinton used this definition in her article "America's Pacific Century" which drew attention to 6 strategic points, including, in addition to forming bilateral alliances and expanding trade, deepening relations with emerging powers, creating regional multilateral institutions, promoting democracy and human rights.

By 2026, several agreements have been made and the spheres of cooperation have been defined. Nevertheless, the official US government website's information remains limited to mere generalized statements about the collaboration facts: investment in space research, participation in international climate and space programs, plans for the co-development and co-production of important military capabilities, the declaration of mutual support at various summits and conferences (G20, UUN, IMF, WBG, WTO). Regarding the newest American "soft power" instruments, United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, or iCET, established in May 2022, plays an important role. This initiative creates cooperation mechanisms for mutual development of artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing.

Considering the aforementioned facts, it can be suggested that although the USA regards India as a major political player with increasing ambitions for leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, the relations between two states cannot be definitely described as a strong partnership, deeply elaborated and covering the wide range of urgent global challenges and the ways to solve them.

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