

India's Humanitarian Diplomacy in South Asia: Navigating Determinants, Prospects, and Challenges

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Abstract

India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia has been a crucial aspect of its foreign policy in the region. With its growing economic power, size along with strategic location, India is playing a significant role in providing aid and support to its neighbouring countries in times of crises, natural disasters, and conflicts. India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia is based on the principle of 'neighbourhood first' which highlights the country's commitment to building strong ties with its neighbouring countries. India has provided aid and support to countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, among others, in various forms such as medical assistance, food aid, infrastructure development, and education. This paper explores and analysis India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia, focusing on its determinants, prospects, and challenges. The study examines how India's humanitarian diplomacy has evolved and compares its efforts with China. The research also explores the prospects for India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia, the challenges it faces, and how it can overcome them. It investigates the contribution of India's humanitarian diplomacy to regional stability and security and how it aligns with India's broader foreign policy Interests.

Keywords: Humanitarian Diplomacy, South Asia, Foreign Aid, Geopolitics, Regional Security

Introduction

Humanitarian crises are widespread in various parts of the world, and South Asia is no exception. South Asia comprises eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This region is home to around 1.8 billion people, making it one of the most populous regions globally, with significant ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. The South Asian region is facing a multitude of humanitarian crises that have far-reaching consequences for the well-being and development of its people. These crises include poverty, hunger, displacement, conflict, natural disasters, and human rights abuses. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these crises, leading to further economic and social distress, particularly what we have seen in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

In the past, Western states and organisations were the key players who largely contributed to the management of the humanitarian crisis. But with the emergence of regional actors, particularly in regions that have undergone lengthy hostilities and humanitarian crises, regional actors are increasingly replacing Western actors in humanitarianism. Regional actors

Published/ publié in *Res Militaris* (resmilitaris.net), vol.13, n°2, January Issue 2023

are frequently more trusted by impacted populations because they are more familiar with the regional context and cultural norms. India is a wonderful illustration of how regional players are becoming more important in humanitarian diplomacy. Particularly in South Asia and the Indian Ocean area, India has emerged as a regional leader in humanitarian intervention. India has a long history of helping nations in need after natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and wars. Given its large size, growing economy and population India is emerging as a crucial player in South Asia that can play its cards in South Asia through humanitarian diplomacy with a prime aim of pursuing national interests to influence its geopolitical position in the region.

We discuss the humanitarian geopolitics of India's humanitarian diplomacy from a realist perspective. The realist perspective on international relations is based on the conception that states act in their self-interest and seek to maximize their power in the international system. From this perspective, India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia can be analysed in terms of its impact on India's power and influence in the region. As a prominent realist, Morgenthau argues that states are primarily motivated by power, and their foreign policy decisions are based on a calculation of power and interest. While India's humanitarian assistance is motivated by genuine concern for the well-being of the people in the region, it also serves India's national interest and promotes its strategic goals. However, the effectiveness of India's humanitarian diplomacy in promoting its power and influence in the region will depend on its ability to navigate complex regional dynamics and balance the interests of different actors.

India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia can be seen as a way to enhance its soft power and improve its relations with other countries in the region. By providing humanitarian assistance, India can gain the goodwill and support of other countries, which can help strengthen its influence in the region. India's humanitarian assistance can be seen as a way to increase its influence in the region and promote its strategic goals. For example, by providing aid to other countries, India can strengthen its economic ties and promote its political agenda in the region. Further, India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia can be seen as a way to counter the influence of other regional powers, such as China and Pakistan. By providing aid and support to other countries, India can enhance its power and influence in the region and balance the influence of other countries. Thus, in this paper, we will analyse India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia along with its different prospects and challenges.

Revisiting Humanitarian Diplomacy: A Realistic View

Humanitarian diplomacy is an essential facet of international relations, particularly when it comes to dealing with humanitarian emergencies and advocating adherence to international humanitarian law. According to Lauri, "humanitarian diplomacy is a growing discipline within the larger field of international diplomacy that aims to address humanitarian concerns and enhance the protection and support of persons impacted by armed conflict, violence, and catastrophe" (Lauri, 2018). The United Nations (UN) also acknowledges the value of humanitarian diplomacy in addressing humanitarian issues, noting that "humanitarian diplomacy is an integral aspect of the United Nations' efforts to react to humanitarian crises and promote the protection and aid of persons impacted by armed conflict, natural disasters, and other emergencies" (UN, 2021).

Traditionally, humanitarian diplomacy is primarily focused on providing humanitarian assistance and relief to those in need, regardless of political considerations. This approach is based on the belief that providing humanitarian assistance is a moral obligation and a fundamental expression of human solidarity. Humanitarian diplomacy traditionally involves

cooperation between states, international organizations, and civil society actors to address humanitarian crises and promote humanitarian values and principles (Lamb, 2021). This can involve providing humanitarian assistance, promoting human rights and international humanitarian law, and advocating for the protection of vulnerable populations. The traditional definition of humanitarian diplomacy emphasizes the importance of providing impartial and neutral humanitarian assistance, free from political considerations or biases (Minear & Smith, 2007). Humanitarian neutrality has always been questioned by scholars and (more rarely) practitioners. This is due to the relevance of hidden political interests, the politics of humanitarian negotiation, and the broader sphere of humanitarian diplomacy in providing access to humanitarian aid.

In recent years humanitarian diplomacy has undergone a shift from a more humanistic to a more political one. As mentioned above humanitarian diplomacy traditionally focused on providing humanitarian assistance and relief to those in need, regardless of political considerations. However, the changing geopolitical landscape and the increasing politicization of humanitarian crises have led to a more political approach to humanitarian diplomacy. The changing nature of humanitarian diplomacy can be attributed to several factors, including the growing complexity and politicization of humanitarian crises, the involvement of non-state actors in humanitarian affairs, and the increasing role of politics in shaping humanitarian responses (Clements, 2018). With the growing politics of the humanitarian crisis, States have started to use humanitarian diplomacy as a tool, for advancing their strategic interests and pursuing their foreign policy goals. This new trend of humanitarian diplomacy of states can be best revisited from a 'realist perspective' which contends it as a foreign policy strategy aimed at achieving a state's national interests by promoting its soft power and improving its international reputation through humanitarian assistance and support to other countries.

Realists argue that states act in their self-interest, and their foreign policy decisions are based on a calculation of power and interest. Humanitarian diplomacy can be seen as a tool for promoting a state's power and influence in the international system. According to Robert D. Kaplan, a prominent realist scholar, humanitarian diplomacy can help states "build soft power by being seen as a force for good in the world and as a counter to the darker impulses of nationalism and self-interest" (Kaplan, 2014). From a realist perspective, states engage in humanitarian diplomacy not only out of altruism but also to advance their strategic interests. Humanitarian assistance can be used as a means to gain goodwill and support from other countries, which can be leveraged to achieve other strategic goals. As Kaplan notes, "Humanitarian assistance is a valuable coin in a world where non-state actors, as well as rival powers, can be turned against the United States and its allies" (Kaplan, 2014).

Moreover, humanitarian diplomacy can be seen as a way to counter the influence of other regional and global powers. States can use humanitarian assistance to build alliances with other countries and strengthen their position vis-à-vis other powers. As realist scholar Hans Morgenthau notes, "The balance of power is the central concept of the realist theory of international relations. It determines the policies that states adopt towards one another" (Pham, 2008). Thus, humanitarian diplomacy can be seen from a realist perspective as a foreign policy strategy aimed at advancing a state's strategic interests by promoting its soft power, improving its international reputation, and building alliances with other countries.

In this paper, we will comprehensively discuss such humanitarian diplomacy of India in South Asia and how it has helped India to manage its political and economic interests. India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia can be seen as serving both realistic interests and a commitment to humanitarian values. From a realistic perspective, India has a long-standing

interest in promoting stability and security in its neighbourhood. By providing assistance and aid to countries in the region, India can help to address some of the root causes of instability, such as poverty and underdevelopment. Moreover, India's humanitarian diplomacy can also help to build goodwill and stronger relationships with its neighbours. By providing aid and support during times of crisis, India can demonstrate its commitment to being a responsible regional actor and can help to build trust and cooperation with its neighbours. This can help to promote trade and economic ties, which can benefit India in the long run. At the same time, India's humanitarian diplomacy can also be seen as reflecting a commitment to humanitarian values. India has a long history of providing assistance and aid to countries in need, including through its development assistance programs. By continuing to prioritize humanitarian concerns in its foreign policy, India can help to promote global solidarity and cooperation in addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Determinants of India's Humanitarian Diplomacy

In the past, the West has been the main source of humanitarian help in South Asia, with nations that are prone to natural disasters often depending on their financial and military might to give immediate assistance. Recently, South Asian countries' need for humanitarian help from the West has decreased due to their growing economies, notably India. India has mostly focused its humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts on its immediate neighbourhood. With the moniker of "first responder," India's humanitarian help has been given to nations in need for several reasons. The four core humanitarian values of the UN—humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence—are recognised as important by the administration.¹ The four Geneva Conventions are all signed by India, and the country took part in the 2016 Global Humanitarian Conference.² India's humanitarian efforts are also guided and motivated by the SSC's foreign policy stance, with India frequently attempting to respond following the demands that have been made explicit by the governments of the receiving countries.

In recent years, the present administration has repeatedly used some Buddhist and Hindu ideals as justification for its humanitarian aid efforts. One of these ideals is dharma - which essentially translates as "righteousness", meaning that offering humanitarian relief is "good behaviour". The current government's method of "connecting with Hinduism in diplomatic representation" is influenced by this tradition of employing phrases from faiths that originated in or close to modern-day India (Huju, 2022). The naming of this government's humanitarian missions has likewise been passionate. For instance, Operation Samudra Maitri assisted Indonesians during the earthquake and tsunami in October 2018; Operation Insaniyat covered India's assistance to Rohingya populations during the refugee influx in Bangladesh in September 2017; Operation Sahayata covered assistance provided to Mozambique in 2019 following Cyclone Idai; Operation Vanilla was carried out in Madagascar in 2020 following the floods; and Operation Devi Shakti covered the evacuation of Indian and Afghan citizens (Shanbog & Kevlihan, 2022). The government's employment of religious notions and promotion of the primacy of the Hindi language in foreign policy, as well as its emphasis on the visibility of these international responses with crucial domestic audiences and constituencies, are both reflected in the language used for operational names, which is overwhelmingly Hindi.

With more conventional foreign policy goals, domestic factors are taken into account.

¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief, para. 20, (November, 2007),

² See, for example, Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 or Article 70(1) of

Officials also cite the need to preserve historical and cordial connections with recipient nations and, in some situations, to fulfil obligations as additional justifications for aid (Shanbog, 2022). For instance, the GoI notes that it supports Fiji because the two nations have good historical links and since it is a component of the GoI's 2019 Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. The provision of wheat and rice by India has been referred to as "grain diplomacy" in a report by a Parliamentary Committee.³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has institutionalised this type of diplomacy for execution, according to GoI. This aid from India emphasises the need of ensuring food security in the area during times of crisis (The Indian Express, 2021). Even while there is some substance to claims of purely humanitarian solutions, the geopolitical interests of India should also be taken into account. While rivalry with China is always a factor in India's ODA programme, including its humanitarian relief efforts, the country tends to focus on its near neighbourhood since it can respond rapidly there. This is true not just because of India's regional position as a "big brother" to certain neighbouring States, but also because of its adversarial ties with Pakistan (Shanbog, 2022).

To respect the sovereignty of other countries, India tries to offer help based on what the affected government says it needs. Indian policymakers call this "demand-driven" aid. Western donors interpret demand-driven aid differently since they concentrate on the needs of the affected population. India criticises Western organisations and donors for being "supply-driven" and claims they give aid carelessly. India's experience as a recipient of international assistance may have an impact on this viewpoint. In the wake of the Gujarat earthquake in India in 2001, several organisations mobilised their resources to give beef meals to the Hindu population (Meier & Murthy, 2011). Like in the case of the 2008 cyclone in Myanmar, when calls for regime change and humanitarian relief were hard to discern, current and former government officials believe that humanitarian aid from Western donors is political (Katoch, 2008). India no longer sees itself as a "giver," but rather as a "partner," aiming to support its fellow developing nations that are struggling.

Some analysts claim that India's emphasis on respecting the sovereignty of the affected state is a key characteristic of its strategy. Officials from India wish to emphasise that their assistance to their neighbours is based on "their priorities" rather than "requests made to the Indian administration."⁴ Nonetheless, there have been instances where India has assisted in violating a neighbouring country's sovereignty. As an illustration, India defended its humanitarian motives for intervening militarily in the East Pakistan civil war in 1971 and providing relief to refugees, while Pakistan perceived these actions as an infringement on its sovereignty. The Sri Lankan government referred to India's sending its Coast Guard and Air Force to drop many tonnes of humanitarian aid to the besieged Tamil minority as "a brazen violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity". India's expanding involvement in the field of humanitarian aid corresponds to the country's emergence as an economic power in recent decades, as well as its desire to take regional and global leadership is apparent in the country's desire to take regional and global leadership.

India's Aid in South Asia Since 2000

India's humanitarian aid in South Asia has been critical in providing assistance and

³ Lok Sabha Secretariat, India, *Ministry of External Affairs Demands for grants (2022-23)*, Twelfth report, March 2022.

⁴ "India first responder in case of disaster in sub-continent, leading initiatives in disaster management: Amit Shah," Business Standard, November 8, 2019, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/india-first-responder-in-case-of-disaster-in-sub-continent-leadinginitiatives-in-disaster-management-amit-shah-119110800620_1.html.

relief to countries in the region during times of crisis. From earthquakes and floods to refugee crises and pandemics, India has consistently provided support to its neighbours in need. One notable example of India's humanitarian aid in South Asia is the response to the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015. Within hours of the earthquake, India sent a team of doctors, nurses, and paramedics to Nepal, along with essential medical supplies and equipment. India also sent military aircraft carrying relief material and personnel and transported over 3,000 Indian nationals and other foreign nationals from Nepal to India. This quick and effective response helped provide much-needed assistance to those affected by the earthquake (MEA, 2015)

India has also provided humanitarian aid to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. India has pledged \$25 million in aid to support the refugees and has provided food, shelter, and medical assistance to those in need. Additionally, India has sent relief materials and personnel to Bangladesh to help manage the crisis. Another example of India's humanitarian aid in South Asia is the response to the floods that struck Sri Lanka in 2017. India provided emergency relief supplies, including food, shelter, and medical assistance, to help those affected by the floods. India also sent a naval ship carrying relief material and personnel to Sri Lanka to assist in relief and recovery efforts.

India's efforts to provide humanitarian aid to its neighbours in South Asia have been critical in providing assistance and relief during times of crisis. India has shown that it is willing to step up and provide assistance when needed, and this has helped strengthen ties between India and its neighbours in the region.

Nepal

India's humanitarian diplomacy towards Nepal is guided by the principles of promoting regional stability, promoting economic cooperation, and addressing the humanitarian needs of the Nepalese people. India has provided significant humanitarian assistance to Nepal, particularly in response to natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. India has also assisted in the areas of health, education, and infrastructure development. For Instance, In 2008, India provided Nepal with food worth INR 20 Crore (US\$4.6m). Also in the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, India provided 10,000 blankets, 1,000 tents and 1,000 tarpaulin sheets, food, medical supplies, water, and other relief material along with 13 military aircraft including C-17, IL-76, and C-130, 18 medical teams, 5 Army Engineer Task Forces (ETF), 5 Advanced Light Helicopters, a total of 1636 Indian Air Force sorties, amounting to a total flying effort of 863 hours, 546 Army aviation sorties (*Chakradeo, 2020*)

India's humanitarian diplomacy towards Nepal is driven by several interests. First, India has a strategic interest in maintaining stability and peace in Nepal, which shares a long and porous border with India. Nepal's stability is seen as crucial for India's security and regional stability. Second, India has an economic interest in Nepal, as it is a major trading partner and investor in the country. By providing humanitarian assistance, India can help support the Nepalese economy and promote economic cooperation between the two countries. India's humanitarian diplomacy towards Nepal has also been focused on promoting people-to-people ties and cultural exchanges between the two countries. India has a long-standing cultural and historical relationship with Nepal, and promoting cultural exchanges can help strengthen these ties.

Sri Lanka

India has provided significant humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka on several occasions, particularly during times of crisis such as natural disasters and conflicts. For example, After

the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, India provided significant aid to Sri Lanka. India provided a total of \$23 million in aid to Sri Lanka, which included relief supplies such as food, water, and medical assistance. India also sent teams of doctors and rescue workers to Sri Lanka to assist with relief efforts. In 2014, India provided aid to Sri Lanka following severe floods and landslides. India provided a total of \$2 million in aid, which included relief supplies such as food, water, and shelter (*Chakradeo, 2020*). In 2020, India provided a \$400 million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka to help address its foreign exchange crisis. This facility was aimed at stabilizing the Sri Lankan rupee and supporting the country's external financial position. (The Economic Times)

India's humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka is driven by several interests. First, India has a strategic interest in promoting stability and peace in the region, and providing aid to Sri Lanka can help achieve this goal. Second, India has a significant Tamil population, and the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka has faced discrimination and violence in the past. By providing aid to Sri Lanka, India can help address the needs of the Tamil community and promote their rights and interests. Additionally, India has an economic interest in Sri Lanka, as it is a major trading partner and investor in the country. By providing humanitarian aid, India can help support the Sri Lankan economy and promote economic cooperation between the two countries. However, India's humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka has also been subject to criticism and controversy. Some critics have accused India of not doing enough to address the human rights abuses committed during the Sri Lankan civil war and of supporting the Sri Lankan government despite these abuses. Others have criticized India for not doing enough to address the needs of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

Bhutan

India has a long-standing tradition of providing humanitarian aid to its neighbours, including Bhutan. In 2020, India provided 20,000 COVID-19 testing kits, 15,000 N95 masks, and other medical supplies to Bhutan to help fight the pandemic. India also provided financial assistance to Bhutan to support its efforts to address the economic impact of the pandemic. (The Hindu, 2020).⁵ India has provided significant development assistance to Bhutan over the years, including funding for infrastructure projects and support for Bhutan's health and education sectors. This assistance is driven by India's strategic interest in maintaining close ties with Bhutan and promoting stability in the region. India sees Bhutan as a key partner in its efforts to counter China's influence in South Asia. (MEA)⁶ India's humanitarian aid to Bhutan is driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and humanitarian interests. By providing aid, India can help support the development and stability of Bhutan, which is seen as crucial for regional peace and security. Additionally, strong ties with Bhutan are important for India's geopolitical interests, as Bhutan is located in a strategically important part of South Asia.

Afghanistan

India has provided significant humanitarian aid to Afghanistan over the years, particularly in the areas of healthcare, education, and infrastructure. In 2021, India provided 75,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan to help address the country's food insecurity. This aid was part of India's commitment to providing 1.1 million metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan over five years.⁷ India has also provided significant development assistance to

⁵ The Hindu. (2020, April 8). India delivers medical supplies to Bhutan to fight COVID-19. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-delivers-medical-supplies-to-bhutan-to-fight-covid-19/article31298684.ece>

⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India-Bhutan Relations," accessed on March 8, 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bhutan2016-03-23.pdf>.

Afghanistan, including funding for infrastructure projects and support for Afghanistan's healthcare and education sectors. For example, India has built several hospitals and clinics in Afghanistan, including the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul.⁸

In 2021, India provided 200,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to Afghanistan to help the country fight the pandemic. India had previously provided medical supplies and other equipment to Afghanistan to help it address the pandemic.⁹ India's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan is driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and humanitarian interests. By providing aid, India can help support the development and stability of Afghanistan, which is seen as crucial for regional peace and security. Additionally, strong ties with Afghanistan are important for India's geopolitical interests, as Afghanistan is located in a strategically important part of South Asia and shares a border with Pakistan, which has been a source of tension between India and Pakistan.

India's Interest in Humanitarian diplomacy

India's interest in humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia is driven by many factors, including its commitment to promoting regional stability and its desire to be seen as a responsible and influential global actor. By engaging in humanitarian diplomacy, India seeks to enhance its soft power and influence in the region, while also promoting human rights and alleviating suffering in times of crisis. One of the key drivers of India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia is its commitment to promoting regional stability. As a major regional power, India recognizes the importance of maintaining peace and stability in its immediate neighbourhood. By providing humanitarian aid and support to countries in the region, India can help prevent or mitigate the impact of crises and conflicts that could threaten regional stability.

India's humanitarian diplomacy efforts are also driven by its desire to be seen as a responsible and influential global actor. By engaging in humanitarian diplomacy, India can showcase its commitment to promoting human rights and alleviating suffering, while also enhancing its reputation as a reliable partner in times of crisis. This can help India build stronger ties with its neighbours and enhance its soft power in the region. In Addition, India's humanitarian diplomacy can help to check China's influence and enhance regional security: India sees China as a strategic rival in the region, and its humanitarian diplomacy efforts can be seen as an attempt to counter China's influence. By providing aid and assistance to its neighbours, India aims to strengthen its relationships with these countries and reduce their dependence on China. Also, India's political interests in the region include promoting regional security and stability. By providing humanitarian aid and assistance, India can help to address the root causes of instability and conflict in the region, such as poverty, natural disasters, and food insecurity.

India's humanitarian diplomacy efforts have been particularly evident in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, India launched the COVID-19 Emergency Fund for SAARC countries, providing \$10 million in aid to support countries in the region in their efforts to combat the pandemic. India has also provided medical supplies and equipment to neighbouring countries, including Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, as part of its broader efforts

⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India-Afghanistan Relations," accessed on March 8, 2022, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Afghanistan_20-02-2020.pdf.

⁹ The Economic Times. (2021, February 28). India delivers 200,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Afghanistan. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-delivers-200000-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine-to-afghanistan/articleshow/81257060.cms>

to support regional health systems and prevent the spread of the virus.¹⁰

India's interest in humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia is driven by a desire to promote regional stability, enhance its global influence, promote human rights and alleviate suffering. Through its humanitarian diplomacy efforts, India has demonstrated its commitment to being a responsible and influential global actor and has helped build stronger ties with its neighbours in the region. As India continues to play a prominent role in South Asia, its humanitarian diplomacy efforts will undoubtedly remain an important aspect of its foreign policy.

Challenges and Prospects of India's Humanitarian Diplomacy

While India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia has been effective in many ways, it is important to have a realistic view of its limitations and challenges. Firstly, providing humanitarian aid and support can be a complex and challenging task, particularly in conflict-affected areas where there are security concerns and logistical difficulties. Moreover, there can be political sensitivities and complexities that can make it challenging to provide aid and support in certain situations. Despite India's efforts towards humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia, there are several challenges that it faces. Some of these challenges include:

Limited resources: India's ability to provide humanitarian aid is limited by its resource constraints. Despite being a rapidly growing economy, India still has a large population of people living in poverty, and it is difficult for the country to allocate resources towards humanitarian aid while addressing its development challenges.

Geopolitical tensions: India's relationships with some of its neighbours such as Pakistan and China are strained, and this can make it challenging to provide humanitarian assistance in the region. Geopolitical tensions can lead to suspicion and distrust between countries, making it difficult to coordinate and collaborate on humanitarian efforts.

Natural disasters: South Asia is a region prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and cyclones. These disasters can cause significant damage and loss of life, and responding to them requires quick and effective action. However, India's ability to respond to natural disasters can also be limited by its capacity and resources.

Cultural and linguistic barriers: South Asia is a diverse region with many different languages and cultures. This can create communication and coordination challenges when it comes to providing humanitarian aid. Understanding the cultural context of the region and being able to communicate effectively with local populations is essential to the success of humanitarian efforts.

Political instability: Some countries in South Asia are affected by political instability, which can make it difficult to deliver humanitarian aid effectively. Political unrest, violence, and conflicts can create security risks and make it challenging to access affected populations.

Prospects

Despite the challenges, India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia has significant prospects for success. Some of these prospects include:

Strong regional ties: India's efforts to build strong ties with its neighbours through

¹⁰ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, (November 11, 2011), p. 2, <http://saarc-sdmc.org/sites/default/files/SARRND.pdf>

humanitarian diplomacy can lead to greater cooperation and collaboration in other areas such as trade, investment, and security. This can ultimately contribute to greater regional stability and economic growth.

Strategic partnerships: Through its humanitarian diplomacy efforts, India has the opportunity to form strategic partnerships with countries in the region. These partnerships can provide mutual benefits in terms of economic development, security, and political influence.

Soft power: India's efforts to provide humanitarian aid and assistance can help to increase its soft power in the region. By demonstrating its commitment to helping its neighbours in times of need, India can build goodwill and positive perceptions of the country in the eyes of its neighbours and the international community.

Capacity building: India's humanitarian diplomacy efforts can help to build the capacity of its neighbours to respond to crises and disasters on their own. This can ultimately lead to greater self-sufficiency and resilience in the region.

International recognition: India's efforts towards humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia have earned it recognition and respect from the international community. This can help to boost India's profile on the global stage and increase its influence in international affairs.

Conclusion

India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia has also been instrumental in building stronger ties with its neighbours, particularly through its efforts to provide aid and support during times of crisis. For example, India's response to the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, where it provided financial and material assistance, helped to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. Similarly, India's assistance to Sri Lanka during the 2020 economic crisis helped to improve bilateral ties and enhance regional cooperation. In addition to its efforts to provide humanitarian aid, India has also been involved in diplomatic efforts to promote peace and stability in the region. For example, India has been working with other regional and global actors to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. India has also been engaged in efforts to promote dialogue between India and Pakistan, with a focus on resolving long-standing disputes and improving bilateral relations. Overall, India's humanitarian diplomacy in South Asia reflects its commitment to promoting regional stability, enhancing its global influence, promoting human rights and alleviating suffering. Through its efforts to provide aid and support during times of crisis, India has helped to build stronger ties with its neighbours and enhance its soft power in the region. As India continues to play a prominent role in South Asia, its humanitarian diplomacy efforts will remain an important aspect of its foreign policy.

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