**Using soft power in Afghanistan**

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The Afghan Taliban have announced turning ex-military bases into economic zones. The development exhibits a change of mind among the Afghan Taliban to bring economic growth and stability to Afghanistan. Such a change also foreshadows an inclusive political ambiance in the war-ravaged country in the future. As after relative stability and American troops withdrawal, Chinese investment has also begun to pour into Afghanistan—both countries signed an oil drilling agreement in January. The opportunity opens up an avenue for Pakistan to ‘win’ Afghanistan through stringent soft power efforts. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been complex and historically strained, primarily due to border disputes and differing views on regional security and terrorism. Both countries have accused each other of harbouring militants and have suffered from cross-border terrorism.

In recent years, there have been attempts to improve relations through diplomatic efforts, but challenges remain. Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has not undergone any significant changes. The situation in Afghanistan remained fragile, and the future of the country was uncertain. The conflict and instability continued to impact the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and both countries continue to face significant challenges in terms of security and terrorism. Despite this, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have a shared interest in promoting stability in the region and working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Soft power is a concept in international relations and refers to a country’s ability to attract and co-opt others through the appeal of its culture, political ideals, and institutions, rather than relying solely on coercion or payment.

[Death toll from Russian missile strike in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia rises to 13](https://www.nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2023/death-toll-from-russian-missile-strike-in-ukraine-s-zaporizhzhia-rises-to-13)

Soft power can take various forms, such as a country’s cultural exports, the reputation of its political system, its ability to attract foreign students and tourists, and the popularity of its brand. The use of soft power can complement a country’s hard power, which refers to its military and economic capabilities, to achieve its foreign policy goals. In today’s interconnected and globalised world, soft power has become an increasingly important tool for countries to project their influence and shape the international system to their advantage. States can utilise soft power to build healthy relationships with other countries in the following ways including cultural diplomacy—promoting the country’s cultural heritage, values, and customs can help build a positive image and attract other countries to its way of life.

Education: Offering educational opportunities to students from other countries can create a favourable perception of the state and foster future leaders who are familiar with its culture and values. International institutions: Participating in international organisations and promoting the values and principles they represent can enhance a state’s reputation and attract other countries to its side. Media and communication: Utilising media and communication to project a positive image and promote the state’s policies and achievements can help build support and attract other countries to its point of view. Attracting investment and tourism: A state can use its business and tourism potential to create positive relationships and show the world its economic strength and stability. By using soft power, states can build relationships based on mutual interest and respect, reducing the need for coercion and promoting stability and cooperation in the international system.

[PTI approaches SC for Imran's appearance in courts through video link](https://www.nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2023/pti-approaches-sc-for-imran-s-appearance-in-courts-through-video-link)

Soft power can be used to strengthen the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan through cultural exchange programmes, such as student and artist exchanges, to help build understanding and appreciation for each other’s cultures and traditions. Collaborating on joint initiatives, such as development projects, cultural events, and sports programs, can help create a positive atmosphere and build trust between the two countries. Offering educational opportunities in both countries, such as scholarships and language programs, can help build future leaders who are familiar with each other’s cultures and perspectives. Using media and communication to portray a positive image and achievements of both countries can help build a positive image and reduce negative stereotypes. Encouraging tourism between the two countries can create economic benefits and promote cultural exchange, helping to build stronger ties between the people of both nations.

People-to-people contact where normal common citizens of two countries interact with one another at various levels without any official interference and guidance is also important. Taking active countermeasures against TTP, ISKP, and other terrorist organisations involved in terrorist activities and destabilising regional peace will also be central. Promoting trade and investment between the two countries can create economic benefits and help build mutual dependence, improving the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both states have to take concrete steps to address security concerns and promote cooperation and mutual understanding. With soft power, Pakistan and Afghanistan can build a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding, reducing tensions and promoting cooperation and stability in the region.