

Received: 17 July 2024, Accepted: 28 August 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9i2.141>

## **Strategic Public Diplomacy through Multilateral engagement: A Case study of Pakistan role in International Organizations**

<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Siraj ulH Khan, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Sapna Mumtaz, <sup>3</sup>Bano Qudisia, <sup>4</sup>Sarwat Siraj

1. Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia. [mkhan2@pmu.edu.sa](mailto:mkhan2@pmu.edu.sa)
2. Senior Research Fellow@ Lahore Institute for Research & Analysis (LIRA)-The University of Lahore, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. [sapna104@hotmail.com](mailto:sapna104@hotmail.com)
3. PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. [banoqudsia07@gmail.com](mailto:banoqudsia07@gmail.com)
4. International Culinary Arts Professional and IR Researcher, Saudi Arabia. [sohn.siraj@gmail.com](mailto:sohn.siraj@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This study delves into the strategic public diplomacy employed by Pakistan through its active engagement in various international organizations, analysing how such involvement shapes its global image and furthers its national interests. By examining Pakistan's participation in forums like the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, while using qualitative case study approach, the proposed research highlights how these platforms serve not only as avenues for expressing its diplomatic positions but also as mechanisms for enhancing bilateral and multilateral relationships. The case study reveals that Pakistan's proactive stance in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, and regional stability, effectively positions it as a key player in the international arena. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of public diplomacy in fostering favourable perceptions among foreign publics, enhancing soft power, and ultimately contributing to Pakistan's strategic objectives in a complex geopolitical landscape. Through rigorous analysis of diplomatic initiatives and outreach efforts, this research emphasizes the value of multilateral engagement as an essential component of Pakistan's broader foreign policy strategy. Therefore, this study recommends that Pakistan must prioritize and strengthen its participation in multilateral forums to foster regional cooperation and ensure its influence on global platforms.

**Keywords:** *Public Diplomacy, Multilateral Engagement, Pakistan Foreign Policy, International Organizations, Soft Power, Strategic Objectives*

## **Introduction**

Public diplomacy is emerging as a critical tool for nations seeking to influence global opinions and advance national interests in today's interconnected world. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which focuses on government-to-government relations, public diplomacy aims at engaging foreign publics, shaping their perceptions, and fostering international goodwill (Melissen, 2005). Pakistan, situated in a complex geopolitical environment, increasingly turns to public diplomacy to enhance its global image, project its values, and safeguard its strategic interests (Khan, 2015). This study explores how Pakistan employs strategic public diplomacy through multilateral engagement to strengthen its presence on the international stage, particularly within organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The research addresses the challenge of Pakistan navigating a challenging geopolitical landscape while enhancing its influence globally. Despite its proactive efforts, Pakistan faces significant obstacles, including regional tensions, security concerns, and economic challenges that complicate its ability to project soft power (Abbasi, 2020). Through multilateral engagement, Pakistan has opportunities to not only address these domestic and regional issues but also contribute meaningfully to global discourse (Jadoon et al., 2024). Multilateral organizations offer platforms for countries to advance diplomatic positions, engage in dialogue, and build alliances, making this study's focus highly relevant for Pakistan.

The significance of this research lies in understanding how Pakistan's strategic use of multilateral diplomacy contributes to its foreign policy objectives and overall standing in international relations. By examining its participation in key international organizations, the study highlights Pakistan's potential to leverage these platforms to address global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and economic development. Pakistan's ability to build and maintain favourable relationships through these organizations is critical for promoting regional stability, securing foreign investments, and reinforcing its role as a responsible global actor.

This case study demonstrates how public diplomacy enhances Pakistan's soft power, an essential aspect of its broader foreign policy strategy. Public diplomacy, when strategically utilized, serves as a tool for improving Pakistan's reputation, fostering goodwill, and

strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships. Ultimately, the research recommends that Pakistan prioritize and deepen its engagement in multilateral forums, underscoring the value of these platforms in shaping its global image and achieving its strategic goals.

## **Review of Literature**

Public diplomacy is recognized as an essential aspect of modern international relations, aimed at fostering goodwill and enhancing a nation's global image. As Melissen (2005) argues, public diplomacy enables countries to influence international public opinion and promote their strategic interests abroad. For Pakistan, public diplomacy, coupled with multilateral engagement, has become crucial for enhancing its international presence. This is particularly relevant as the country navigates complex regional dynamics while seeking to project its soft power globally (Jadoon et al., 2024). Public diplomacy through multilateral forums like the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) provides Pakistan with strategic opportunities to further its diplomatic agenda.

Multilateral organizations have long been recognized as platforms where nations can engage in diplomacy while advancing national interests. Pakistan's participation in multilateral organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) demonstrates its commitment to regional cooperation (Bishwakarma & Hu, 2022). Hughes (2007) highlights the importance of such forums for enhancing public diplomacy, as they allow countries like Pakistan to build alliances, promote their positions on regional and global issues, and foster cooperation. Pakistan's role in SAARC is particularly notable as it seeks to address regional security and economic development concerns while advancing its strategic objectives (Ahmed, 2016).

The United Nations remains a central platform for Pakistan's multilateral diplomacy. According to Keohane and Nye (1987), international organizations like the UN provide countries with an avenue to engage in multilateral diplomacy and participate in global governance. Pakistan's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions and its proactive stance on global challenges such as climate change and terrorism further enhance its international image (Krishnasamy, 2002). Pakistan's engagement in these global issues showcases its role as a responsible member of the international community and contributes to its foreign policy objectives.

Similarly, Pakistan's involvement in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) allows it to advocate for the rights of Muslim-majority countries and address pressing issues such as Islamophobia and regional conflicts, particularly in Kashmir (Ahmad, 2023). The OIC serves as a valuable platform for Pakistan to engage with like-minded nations and amplify its diplomatic positions. Mitzen (2005) emphasizes that such multilateral forums enhance the effectiveness of public diplomacy by providing countries with the means to connect through shared cultural, religious, and political values.

Pakistan's strategic use of multilateral engagement is further evidenced by its participation in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Despite challenges posed by regional tensions, particularly with India, Pakistan continues to use SAARC as a platform to address issues such as regional stability, trade, and economic cooperation (Waggy & Hassan, 2023). This demonstrates Pakistan's commitment to using multilateral diplomacy to navigate regional dynamics while advancing its national interests (Awan & Pervez, 2024). Tarannum and Khan (n.d.) further highlights that SAARC enables Pakistan to address both regional and global challenges, which aligns with its broader foreign policy goals.

Furthermore, Pakistan's participation in other multilateral forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), underscores its efforts to enhance its influence in the region and beyond (Rauf & Tariq, 2024). According to Romaniuk (2010), multilateral diplomacy provides countries with the opportunity to shape international norms and build coalitions, which is evident in Pakistan's use of these forums to address issues such as terrorism and economic development. Such platforms allow Pakistan to reinforce its role as an influential player in the international arena.

This review of literature demonstrates that public diplomacy, when integrated with multilateral engagement, is a powerful tool for countries like Pakistan to enhance their global image and advance strategic interests. By actively participating in international organizations, Pakistan strengthens its bilateral and multilateral relationships, addresses global challenges, and promotes its foreign policy goals. The study highlights the significance of multilateral diplomacy in shaping Pakistan's global role and providing recommendations for its continued engagement in international forums.

### **Research Questions:**

RQ1: How can Pakistan leverage multilateral engagement in international organizations to enhance its strategic public diplomacy efforts?

RQ2: What role do international organizations play in shaping Pakistan's global image and fostering its diplomatic relationships?

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To analyse the effectiveness of Pakistan's engagement in international organizations as a tool for advancing its strategic public diplomacy.
2. To explore the impact of multilateral platforms on the formulation and projection of Pakistan's foreign policy and global image.

### **Material and Methods**

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach to examine Pakistan's strategic public diplomacy through multilateral engagement. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of Pakistan's diplomatic practices within international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Data was collected from multiple sources, including official documents, speeches, media reports, and interviews with diplomats and foreign policy experts. The case study design allowed for a detailed exploration of Pakistan's role in these organizations, focusing on how it projected its diplomatic positions and fostered bilateral and multilateral relationships.

The analysis employed a thematic approach to identify key themes and patterns related to Pakistan's public diplomacy efforts. This included examining its engagement in global issues like climate change, terrorism, and regional stability, as well as its use of soft power to influence international perceptions. The case study methodology enabled the research to capture the complexity of Pakistan's strategies and their outcomes in a real-world context. By triangulating data from various sources, the study provided a comprehensive view of Pakistan's multilateral diplomacy and its impact on both its global image and national interests.

## **An Analysis on Strategic Public Diplomacy through Multilateral engagement: A Case study of Pakistan role in International Organizations**

### **Understanding Strategic Public Diplomacy**

Strategic public diplomacy extends beyond mere communication; it is a deliberate effort to influence global opinion, foster goodwill, and project national interests. This approach allows states to connect with foreign audiences, providing an avenue for long-term relationship building (Taylor, 2008). For Pakistan, public diplomacy can be a way to correct misconceptions, project a positive image, and demonstrate its contributions to global peace and stability (Deos & Pigman, 2010).

Through cultural exchanges, educational programs, and international media outreach, strategic public diplomacy offers a platform to engage not just with governments but with the global public. In the digital age, social media and international broadcasting are vital tools for Pakistan to shape narratives, offering a real-time glimpse into its culture, values, and policies. These channels allow Pakistan to humanize its diplomacy efforts and reach populations that traditional diplomatic means cannot, enabling more dynamic and personal engagement with global audiences, enhancing soft power, and fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. (Rashid, 2019).

By focusing on the power of persuasion and attraction, Pakistan's strategic public diplomacy can work alongside traditional diplomatic channels to influence international opinion, align foreign policies with national interests, and reinforce alliances. This dual approach ensures that Pakistan's voice is heard not just in elite political circles, but among global citizens, opinion leaders, and activists, whose views can shape international relations in the long term.

### **The Role of Multilateral Organizations**

Multilateral organizations serve as critical forums where countries like Pakistan can articulate their policies, contribute to global governance, and align their national priorities with international objectives. These platforms offer a way to engage multiple stakeholders, including governments, non-state actors, and civil society (Alexandroff & Cooper, 2010). Pakistan's involvement in these organizations enables it to take part in setting international norms, particularly on issues such as peacekeeping, development, and environmental sustainability (Islam, Mehmood, & Khan, 2022).

By engaging in multilateral organizations, Pakistan can not only build coalitions around issues of mutual interest but also safeguard its national interests. Through its participation in global discussions on human rights, counter-terrorism, and economic development, Pakistan can influence decisions that affect its regional and global standing. These engagements provide opportunities for diplomatic negotiations, consensus-building, and soft power diplomacy, thereby positioning Pakistan as a proactive global actor (Cohen, 2011).

Furthermore, multilateral forums allow for collective problem-solving, where Pakistan can pool resources and knowledge with other countries to address shared challenges. By aligning its policies with global trends—such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or climate agreements—Pakistan can bolster its image as a responsible global partner. Multilateral engagement, therefore, is not just about presence; it's about active participation, leadership, and contributing to the collective good (Waheed & Responsible Business Initiative, 2019).

## **Pakistan's Engagement in International Organizations**

### **1. Championing Humanitarian Initiatives**

Pakistan's active involvement in global humanitarian efforts through the United Nations has been a key component of its public diplomacy strategy. With one of the largest troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, Pakistan has built a reputation as a responsible global actor. This participation allows Pakistan to showcase its commitment to international peace, security, and human rights, projecting a soft power image as a peacebuilder in conflict zones around the world (Epstein & Kronstadt, 2011).

Additionally, Pakistan has taken an active role in addressing global refugee crises. With decades of experience in hosting millions of Afghan refugees, Pakistan brings invaluable insights to the international stage. By participating in high-level UN meetings and contributing to global refugee policies, Pakistan underscores its commitment to humanitarian causes and enhances its profile in international organizations that prioritize human welfare (Mogiani et al., 2024).

Moreover, Pakistan's contributions to humanitarian efforts extend beyond peacekeeping and refugees. Through organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN agencies, Pakistan has supported global health initiatives, including vaccination campaigns and pandemic response efforts. These initiatives not only underscore Pakistan's commitment to

global health but also provide it with a platform to collaborate with other nations, positioning itself as a key player in international humanitarian diplomacy (Lassi et al., 2021).

## **2. Promoting Regional Cooperation**

Through its participation in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Pakistan has promoted regional collaboration on socio-economic issues like poverty alleviation, trade, and public health. The shared goals of regional stability and economic prosperity have allowed Pakistan to use SAARC as a vehicle to address collective concerns, particularly with India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. These platforms help demonstrate Pakistan's commitment to regional peace, even in challenging bilateral relationships (Canton, 2021).

In the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Pakistan has furthered its role as a bridge between South and Central Asia. This platform allows Pakistan to foster economic and security ties with neighbouring countries and to collaborate on counter-terrorism, anti-drug trafficking, and regional infrastructure development projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). By positioning itself as a central player in regional security and economic initiatives, Pakistan enhances its geopolitical standing (Khan, 2021).

Moreover, Pakistan's emphasis on regional cooperation through organizations like ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) has furthered its economic agenda. Through shared projects on transportation and energy cooperation, Pakistan is working to develop a regional infrastructure network that facilitates trade and energy flow. This strengthens its ties with Central Asian Republics and positions it as an economic hub in a growing market, aligning public diplomacy with long-term national interests (Khan, n.d.).

## **3. Advocating for Muslim Unity**

As a founding member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Pakistan has consistently advocated for the rights of Muslim communities worldwide. This advocacy extends to issues like the Palestinian cause, the Rohingya crisis, and other challenges facing Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries. Pakistan's voice in these forums positions it as a leader in the Islamic world, enhancing its influence among OIC member states and bolstering its image as a protector of Muslim interests (Bukhari et al., 2024).



Pakistan has also used the OIC platform to advance discussions on counter-terrorism strategies that do not stigmatize Islam or Muslim communities. By leading initiatives to distinguish between violent extremism and peaceful Islamic teachings, Pakistan seeks to reshape the global narrative on Islam and terrorism. This approach helps mitigate Islamophobic sentiments, while also aligning Pakistan with the broader global fight against terrorism, thereby enhancing its credibility on the world stage (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Additionally, Pakistan has actively promoted economic and cultural cooperation within the OIC framework. By pushing for stronger trade ties among OIC members and supporting joint initiatives like educational exchanges, Pakistan underscores its commitment to Islamic solidarity. These efforts not only project Pakistan as a leader in the Muslim world but also help cultivate closer ties with countries that share religious and cultural affinities, furthering its strategic interests in the global Islamic community.

#### **4. Addressing Climate Change**

Pakistan's growing role in climate diplomacy is gaining international attention, particularly in light of its vulnerability to climate-related disasters. By emphasizing climate change at international platforms, Pakistan underscores the urgency of global cooperation on environmental sustainability. In 2021, Pakistan hosted the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), bringing the spotlight to its environmental challenges and actions, such as its "Billion Tree Tsunami" reforestation project. This initiative is part of Pakistan's larger vision to align with global climate goals and demonstrates its leadership in the fight against climate change (ESCAP, 2022).

At platforms like the UN Forum on Forests and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Pakistan has consistently advocated for stronger financial support to developing countries to combat climate change. These efforts help Pakistan secure international funding and technical support for its environmental projects, while also positioning the country as a thought leader on sustainable development. By championing the cause of climate-vulnerable nations, Pakistan strengthens its ties with other developing countries facing similar challenges (Hassan et al., 2022).

Moreover, Pakistan's participation in international climate discussions serves its public diplomacy objectives by highlighting its commitment to global environmental goals. By aligning itself with the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, Pakistan enhances its reputation as a

responsible global citizen, committed to sustainable development. These efforts not only improve Pakistan's image abroad but also attract investment and partnerships for green projects, contributing to the country's economic and environmental resilience (Khanum, 2019).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

One of the major challenges Pakistan faces in its public diplomacy efforts is the persistent security concerns and political instability that often tarnish its international image. These issues create significant obstacles in projecting a stable and progressive narrative, which is essential for engaging effectively on the international stage. The perception of instability can lead to hesitance among foreign investors and partners, impacting economic growth and international collaborations. To overcome this challenge, Pakistan needs to strategically highlight its successes in various sectors to reshape narratives around its image (Hussain et al., 2023).

### **Highlighting Economic Reform**

Economic reform is a key area where Pakistan has made strides that can be effectively showcased. Initiatives aimed at improving fiscal management, attracting foreign investment, and enhancing trade relations provide concrete evidence of progress. By promoting stories of successful reforms and economic growth, Pakistan can counteract negative perceptions rooted in security concerns. This narrative can be further strengthened by sharing statistics and case studies that illustrate the positive impacts of these reforms on ordinary citizens' lives (Rasool et al., 2024).

### **Managing Global Narratives**

Another significant challenge arises from the growing competition in global narratives, particularly within Western media, which often portrays Pakistan negatively due to its complex geopolitical circumstances. The narrative surrounding terrorism, regional conflicts, and governance issues frequently overshadows positive developments in the country. To manage these perceptions, it is essential for Pakistan to actively counter negative portrayals through targeted communication strategies. Engaging with international media and utilizing digital platforms can help Pakistan present a more balanced and nuanced perspective (Bano, 2023).

### **Leveraging Digital Diplomacy**

Digital diplomacy has emerged as a vital tool for nations looking to influence public perception on a global scale. Pakistan can leverage social media and other online platforms to reach

international audiences directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. By sharing success stories, cultural achievements, and positive contributions to global issues, Pakistan can reshape its image. Additionally, collaborating with influencers and international advocates can amplify these narratives and create a more favourable perception of the country (Sheikha, Mirc, & Akhtard, n.d.).

### **Promoting Cultural Exchange**

Cultural exchange programs offer another avenue for enhancing Pakistan's public diplomacy. By promoting its rich cultural heritage, art, and cuisine, Pakistan can foster goodwill and understanding among diverse audiences. These initiatives can serve to humanize the country and create connections that transcend political narratives. Engaging in educational exchanges and joint cultural initiatives can further strengthen bilateral relationships and promote a positive image of Pakistan as a culturally rich and diverse nation (Cabauatan, 2024).

### **Capitalizing on Strategic Partnerships**

Despite the challenges, there are significant opportunities for Pakistan to capitalize on its strategic partnerships and multilateral engagements. By focusing on critical global issues such as climate change, counter-terrorism, and regional development, Pakistan can position itself as a leader in these domains. Collaborative efforts in addressing climate change, for instance, can highlight Pakistan's commitment to sustainable development and global cooperation. This approach not only enhances its international standing but also helps build trust with other nations (Abbasi, 2023).

### **Enhancing Regional Cooperation**

Pakistan has the opportunity to play a pivotal role in fostering regional cooperation through initiatives like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). By advocating for economic integration and connectivity projects, Pakistan can position itself as a key player in regional stability and development. Strengthening ties with neighbouring countries through trade agreements and joint infrastructure projects can enhance its influence and portray Pakistan as a cooperative partner (Wolf, 2020).

### **Engaging with Global Organizations**

Another avenue for public diplomacy is engaging more actively with global organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and various economic forums. By taking leadership roles in discussions on pressing global issues—such as health, education, and development—Pakistan can demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism and collective action. Active participation in these platforms can help reshape perceptions and establish Pakistan as a responsible global player (Bano, 2012).

### **Utilizing Soft Power**

Pakistan can also leverage soft power through its diaspora and cultural heritage. Engaging the Pakistani diaspora in promoting the country's achievements and culture can amplify positive narratives. Programs that encourage diaspora involvement in business, education, and cultural initiatives can foster goodwill and enhance Pakistan's image abroad. Additionally, showcasing sports, music, and literature can create a more relatable and positive image of the country (Shah, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

This study has illuminated the critical role of strategic public diplomacy through multilateral engagement in shaping Pakistan's international presence and influence. By actively participating in key international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Pakistan has effectively utilized these platforms to advance its national interests and project its diplomatic positions. The findings demonstrate that multilateral engagement not only allows Pakistan to address pressing global issues but also enables it to foster bilateral relationships and enhance its soft power on the international stage.

The analysis revealed that Pakistan's participation in multilateral forums has been instrumental in addressing significant global challenges, including climate change and terrorism. By taking a proactive stance on these issues, Pakistan positions itself as a responsible member of the international community, thus improving its global image. The case study highlighted how Pakistan leveraged its membership in the OIC to advocate for the rights of Muslim-majority countries and address regional conflicts, showcasing its commitment to solidarity and cooperation among Islamic nations.

Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of public diplomacy in cultivating favorable perceptions among foreign audiences. Through strategic communication and engagement in multilateral settings, Pakistan has been able to enhance its soft power, which is crucial for influencing global public opinion. The ability to shape narratives around its policies and actions through multilateral diplomacy has contributed significantly to Pakistan's efforts to improve its standing in the international arena.

However, the research also identified challenges that Pakistan faces in its multilateral engagements. Regional tensions, particularly with India, and domestic political issues often complicate its diplomatic efforts. The need for a coherent and consistent public diplomacy strategy is evident, as Pakistan must navigate these complexities while remaining committed to its multilateral responsibilities. Strengthening its diplomatic narratives and engagement tactics will be essential for Pakistan to maximize the benefits of its participation in international organizations.

In brief, this study underscores the significance of strategic public diplomacy through multilateral engagement for Pakistan's foreign policy objectives. By actively participating in international organizations, Pakistan not only enhances its global image but also works towards addressing critical global challenges and promoting regional stability. Moving forward, it is imperative for Pakistan to continue prioritizing its multilateral engagements and refining its public diplomacy strategies to effectively advance its interests and contribute positively to the international community.

### **A Way Forward**

To enhance Pakistan's role and effectiveness on the global stage, a multifaceted approach to public diplomacy and multilateral engagement is essential. In this context, the following strategies are recommended:

- Enhance Public Diplomacy Framework: Develop a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy that aligns with Pakistan's foreign policy objectives, focusing on communication, outreach, and relationship-building.
- Strengthen Multilateral Participation: Increase active engagement in key international organizations, ensuring consistent representation and involvement in discussions that align with Pakistan's strategic interests.

- Focus on Capacity Building: Invest in training diplomats and officials in public diplomacy skills, including negotiation, communication, and cultural sensitivity, to enhance Pakistan's effectiveness in multilateral forums.
- Leverage Digital Platforms: Utilize social media and digital communication tools to reach broader audiences, promote Pakistan's achievements, and counter misinformation while engaging with foreign publics.
- Collaborate with Civil Society: Foster partnerships with NGOs, think tanks, and academic institutions to create a collective voice that supports Pakistan's public diplomacy efforts and enhances its credibility.
- Promote Cultural Diplomacy: Highlight Pakistan's cultural heritage and contributions to global discourse through cultural exchange programs, arts initiatives, and educational partnerships to build goodwill and enhance soft power.
- Address Regional Challenges: Use multilateral forums to address regional issues, such as security and economic cooperation, demonstrating Pakistan's commitment to peace and stability in South Asia.
- Monitor and Evaluate Impact: Implement mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of public diplomacy initiatives and multilateral engagement, allowing for adjustments and improvements in strategy as needed.
- Engage with Global Challenges: Actively participate in discussions on global issues like climate change and health security, positioning Pakistan as a proactive contributor to international solutions.
- Build Strategic Alliances: Identify and strengthen relationships with key partner countries and organizations that share common interests, enhancing Pakistan's influence in multilateral diplomacy.

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