

Techno-Diplomacy

What is the issue?

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Countries have started integrating techno-diplomacy as a major piece in their broader international diplomacy.

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How far does India use this diplomacy?

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- Techno-diplomacy is not an entirely new phenomenon, and has been used especially with nuclear technologies and military hardware and weapon systems.

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- Technological capabilities can serve both hard power (in military and economic terms), and soft power.

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- **Due to technological and diplomatic constraints**, India has generally been unable to wield its technology as an effective tool of diplomacy.

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- This is set to change with the launch of the **South Asia satellite by ISRO on May 5 2017**.

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What is the origin of the South Asia satellite?

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- The origins of the South Asia satellite date back to the **18th SAARC Summit, in 2014 in Nepal**, when Prime Minister Modi put forward the idea of a common satellite serving the needs of all SAARC members.

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- There were numerous delays, primarily as negotiations among the various countries of the South Asia region stalled over ownership and data access

issues.

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- With **Pakistan officially opting out** of the project by March 2016, the decks were cleared for an expedited launch.
- The satellite has been designed and built by ISRO, with the full cost of the mission being borne by India.
- The satellite will carry **12 ku-band transponders** allotted to the participating countries.
- Each country can use a dedicated transponder for its own use, which would primarily be communication and disaster management support.
- **The satellite is similar to previous communication satellites** designed and launched by ISRO, and technologically does not constitute a major breakthrough.

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What is the diplomatic significance of the South Asia satellite?

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- Along with previous missions such as Chandrayaan and the Mars Orbiter Mission, the South Asia satellite **underscores the strength of Indian indigenous technological development.**
- India has begun realising that domestic technologies have now reached a level of maturity that allows India to **confidently brandish its capabilities** to other countries.
- It also serves as a marketing tool for future launches at a time when ISRO is building a strong niche for itself in the international satellite launch market.
- It reveals both India's ambition and capability to create what can be termed "technological commons".
- By "gifting" this satellite to its neighbours, India has created an **open access resource** that can be leveraged by the latter to address some of their critical domestic concerns.
- Building such commons is essential not only to address immediate problems but also spur research, innovation and economic growth in the region.

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What is the way ahead?

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- India must make a concerted effort to expand the range of technologies it can use as part of its diplomatic arsenal.

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- India could also look at including **biotechnology and green energy**.

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- Unfortunately, there has been a critical lag in the evolution of robust scientific and research institutions in these areas, particularly from a funding standpoint.

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Source: Indian Express

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