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Status-Seeking Through Disaster Relief: India and China's Response to Turkey–Syria Earthquakes

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Abstract

Disaster relief cooperation has emerged as an active area of status-seeking by major powers. In recent decades, India and China have increasingly leveraged their disaster management capabilities to project their power globally. Disaster relief cooperation can be viewed through the lenses of the logics of both appropriateness and consequences. As "non-Western" powers, they have conventionally been known to contest disaster relief norms perceived by them as Western. Simultaneously, they have varied status-seeking approaches, guided by distinct geopolitical equations and involving different actors. Against this background, the article analyses the patterns and drivers of India and China's status-seeking behaviour through disaster relief cooperation using the frameworks of the logics of appropriateness and consequences, in the case of the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes. It delineates the actors and capabilities involved in their overseas disaster relief activities as well as their implications. It also investigates the strategic and normative imperatives, and geopolitical considerations of their disaster relief cooperation. The article argues that the status-seeking behaviour of India and China through disaster relief cooperation with Turkey and Syria is guided by an interplay between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences, based on their motivations, capacities, and distinct contexts of the recipient countries.

Keywords

China; disaster relief cooperation; India; logic of appropriateness; logic of consequences; status-seeking; Turkey–Syria earthquakes

1. Introduction

The rise of India and China as major providers of disaster relief globally has implications for their status aspirations. The two countries enhanced their disaster relief capabilities domestically in response to their growing disaster vulnerabilities. They are also increasingly leveraging them externally. Whether it is the multistakeholder, global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure launched by India in 2019 or China's 2021 initiative of the Belt and Road International Cooperation Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, the focus on providing assistance to disaster-prone and affected countries, especially in the Global South, has assumed significance in the current geopolitical environment (Belt and Road Initiative Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, 2023; Upadhyay, 2021). For emerging, non-Western powers, status-seeking through disaster relief cooperation provides an opportunity to be recognized as providers of global goods as well as reliable and responsible contributors to their governance. Herein, besides their adherence to international principles of disaster relief and participation in governance frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, they also engage in other minilateral and bilateral efforts targeted at disaster relief, risk reduction, and preparedness.

For emerging non-Western powers such as India and China, status-seeking is consistent with their aspiration to change the status quo in the international order. For instance, Mukherjee (2022) argues that emerging powers such as India and China aspire for not only the benefits of cooperation, but also demand recognition, ownership, and equality of status in the international order. Hence, even though they may initially agree with the existing rules/norms of cooperation despite material constraints and compromises, they challenge them later if these rules/norms are contrarian to their status-seeking aspirations and domestic sensitivities. For example, for India, demand for UN reforms and permanent membership in the UN Security Council are part of its status-seeking strategies (Kaura & Singh, 2021). Instead of depending solely on material power, they use ideological, historical, and social aspects to influence international politics, like in the case of India's foreign policy (Basrur & de Estrada, 2017).

In this context, the article investigates India and China's status-seeking behaviours as non-Western powers. It contextualizes them within the framework of the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences to decipher the motivations of state behaviour as influenced by either rules/norms or interests/means–ends calculations, respectively, in international relations (Checkel, 1998). This article questions this traditional dichotomous approach and instead argues that it is an interplay between the two logics that guides state behaviour, which can be seen in the case of India and China's status-seeking behaviour through disaster relief cooperation. It applies the two logics to analyze the two countries' response after the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes.

Emerging powers in the context of this article imply countries that have a growing influence in international affairs and global governance, and challenge Western dominance (Stephen, 2017). Besides being non-Western, India and China continue to be categorized as countries of the Global South based on economic and development indicators, which influences their power projection and status in the international order. According to the World Bank classification, China is an upper-middle-income country, and India is a lower-middle-income country. This differentiates them from countries of the Global North and/or West that are high-income countries with higher per capita GDP. In terms of membership in multilateral/minilateral groupings too, the two countries are part of G77, BRICS, and others, that are

considered non-Western (Stephen, 2017). While both countries have large militaries, in terms of military strength and global military presence, they are still well behind other powers such as the US. Similarly, while they are increasingly building global alliances and partnerships based on trade, technology, and other such issues, their global reach is still limited in security domains such as in the case of military alliances (Bekkevold, 2023). Hence, despite the contention that a country like China has already emerged as a great power, one could argue that it is still an emerging "global" power.

The 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes are worthy of investigation for two reasons. First, it was one of the deadliest disasters of all time. On 6 February 2023, at 04:17 local time, an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 occurred in southern Turkey, followed by another one of magnitude 7.5 at 13:30 in the Kahramanmaras region—both of which affected central and southern parts of Turkey and northern and western parts of Syria. It resulted in over 59,000 deaths and affected approximately 18 million people, with economic loss reaching $34.2 billion in Turkey and $5.1 billion in Syria (Wilks, 2024). The international community mobilized a massive humanitarian response, with over 100 countries and international organizations providing assistance in different forms, including India and China. Second, this case provides two distinct contexts of international disaster response, namely peaceful and conflict situations. Turkey has fairly strong disaster relief capacity and plays an important role in regional politics and security. In addition to humanitarian consideration, providing relief to Turkey can be viewed through a strategic lens. On the contrary, the context in Syria is much more complex from operational and normative perspectives. The local disaster response system has been severely debilitated by years of conflict, and international aid has faced difficulties arising from the sanctions and security concerns. An examination of how India and China responded in the two contexts adds to our understanding of the two countries' approaches to disaster relief and strategies to seek and enact the desired status.

Specifically, this article addresses two questions. First, how did India and China enhance their global status through the international disaster response after the Turkey–Syria earthquakes? Second, how do we explain the two countries' relief efforts through the logics of consequences and appropriateness? The remainder of this article first unpacks various dimensions of status, and how and why states leverage disaster relief cooperation for status. Thereafter, the article provides an overview of non-Western powers' status-seeking behaviour in terms of disaster relief cooperation, by exploring their adoption of internationally agreed principles of disaster relief on some occasions and interest-driven contestation of perceived Western norms on the other. The article then illustrates the case of India and China's response to the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes to argue that non-Western powers adopt a combined approach based on appropriateness and consequences to establish their status as major or great powers in the international order.

2. Status-Seeking and Disaster Relief: An Interplay Between the Logics of Appropriateness and Consequences

Status in international politics refers to the collective belief of other states about a given state's standing in the international hierarchy or membership of a social group (such as great power group), which is based on assessments of the country's possession of valued attributes, such as wealth, military capabilities, diplomatic clout, and cultural attractiveness (Krickovic & Zhang, 2020, p. 223; Larson et al., 2014, p. 7; Renshon, 2017, p. 4). States are believed to always aspire to enhance their status as high status brings instrumental gains (such as autonomy in decision-making and greater or even decisive influence on international security,

economic, and political issues) as well as social and psychological benefits (such as international respect and national pride; Duque, 2018, p. 577; Götz, 2021, p. 230; Larson et al., 2014, pp. 18–19). War-fighting used to be a principal means of status-seeking, but its usefulness has declined in the post-World War II era since the use or threat of use of violence in international politics has become increasingly unpopular and illegitimate. A case in point is the perception that Russia's international status has slipped notably after launching its war against Ukraine in 2022 (Šćepanović, 2024). By contrast, deploying military for peaceful purposes such as peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) has gained more weight in status generation (Duque, 2018).

Status-seeking through disaster relief can be explained from two perspectives, namely a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriateness (as described in Table 1). The logic of consequences means that actors make choices based on cost–benefit calculations (March & Olsen, 1998, p. 949). In disaster relief, this logic is particularly relevant in decisions on the scale of assistance and extent of cooperation. In contemporary international politics, moral authority is an essential basis of status; and humanitarian action provides a useful avenue to generate moral authority and status (Wohlforth et al., 2018, p. 532). Therefore, it is a common practice for countries to offer emergency aid to those affected by disasters, but the associated costs and benefits are an important factor in shaping the decision on how much aid is offered, in addition to the actual humanitarian needs. For instance, commercial considerations weigh considerably in aid allocation (Macdonald & Hoddinott, 2004). The Korean government favoured close economic partners and traditional recipients of Korean aid in delivering emergency aid during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kim et al., 2023).

Strategic interests provide a strong motive for aid provision and disaster-related cooperation. The Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the US), which is perceived as a grouping fostered to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, formalized its HADR guidelines in 2022, with potential strategic benefits of cooperation and coordination in the region (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2022). Similarly, as Kelman et al. (2018) observe, while assessing the effectiveness of disaster diplomacy between two or more countries that may share adversarial relations, disaster diplomacy succeeds in catalysing, aiding, and sustaining (over a longer period) diplomatic initiatives (and not in creating them) only if there are pre-existing conditions like cultural or trade relations, which has implications for status-seeking. Hence, one may question the effectiveness of disaster diplomacy between two or more countries that may share adversarial relations. For example, in the case of the 2005 earthquake in India and Pakistan, a short-term thaw in relations associated with disaster relief did not lead to long-term normalization of bilateral relations (Kelman et al., 2018). In addition, gaining practical knowledge and experience is another driving factor for HADR operations (Yates & Bergin, 2011). Intangible benefits and costs also matter, such as benign image and reputational damage. A failure to provide humanitarian aid in a meaningful and effective way can cause backlash, particularly for major powers, as seen in the case of China's response to 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (Gong, 2021a). Similarly, the US was criticised by humanitarian groups for not providing aid efficiently in the Gaza Strip ("US airdrops food," 2024).

The logic of appropriateness maintains that actions should be rule-based. Applying this logic to the discussion, we argue status-seekers should follow the "appropriate behavioural norms" and rules to gain the recognition of "the relevant others" in the humanitarian system (Murray, 2019, p. 42). From the lens of appropriateness, there are two strategies for states to enhance their status. First, the appropriateness of action is mainly defined

by three dimensions—international norms, humanitarian law and principles, and commonly accepted practices. For instance, underpinned by the norms of sovereignty and non-interference, provision of aid should be invited by the government of the disaster-affected country. Any assistance without consent is viewed as illegitimate, regardless of the humanitarian motivations. This position is particularly emphasized by many Asian countries in their disaster relief cooperation (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010). In addition to compliance with norms, humanitarian practices that are appropriate to the international, regional, and national contexts are considered conducive to generating status. For instance, military involvement in disaster relief is sensitive in some contexts, particularly fragile and conflict-ridden ones, but it is a common practice in the Asia-Pacific region (Simm, 2019).

In the existing humanitarian system, a conventional approach to enhance status is to behave appropriately according to the existing norms and as per the expectations of the international humanitarian community. Modern humanitarianism practised by most donors and humanitarian organizations now, which is based on "the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm" (Barnett, 2005, p. 724), has its roots in Christianity and the Enlightenment. It took shape in the 19th century and was driven by the industrial revolution and modern science (Parmelee, 1915). The three largest donors in 2022 were the US, Germany, and the EU, which together accounted for 64 percent of the total international humanitarian donations from the public sector (Development Initiatives, 2023, p. 14). In addition, international humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Médecins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors Without Borders) are leading actors in the humanitarian system. Together, they have a strong influence on the definition of appropriateness in the humanitarian space and recognition of others' humanitarian role.

The second way for states to enhance their status is to challenge the existing understanding of appropriateness and redefine it. Humanitarian challenges are evolving, and so are the principles and practices of humanitarianism. For instance, the classical, Dunantist humanitarianism emphasizes the short-term nature of humanitarian aid, which is to alleviate immediate suffering. The approach underpinned by this version of humanitarianism is led by the UN agencies and international NGOs. However, as many humanitarian situations have become protracted, the view of humanitarian aid as short-cycle has been problematized (Hilhorst, 2018). Moreover, a localization of humanitarian action in recent years places greater emphasis on the roles of the country and communities, in contrast to the previous paradigm in which donor countries and international humanitarian organizations have greater influence in humanitarian action. These new trends provide opportunities for status-seekers to contest existing rules, articulate alternatives, and eventually redefine appropriateness in the humanitarian space. Take the evolution of the responsibility to protect (R2P) as an example, which premises sovereignty on the state's fulfilment of protection for citizens. Despite some reservations, instead of complete rejection, China actively participated in the UN debates on R2P to ensure that the norm will evolve in a way that "respects traditional sovereignty," which resonates with the normative preference of many developing countries (Fung, 2022, pp. 7–8). Similarly, India has also adopted a cautious approach towards the Western conceptualization of R2P by embracing a position that is less supportive of intervention, and more accepting of state sovereignty and non-interference (Choedon, 2017). As such, China and India may present themselves as representing voices of the Global South on this issue.

Table 1. A comparison between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences.

Logics	Logic of Appropriateness	Logic of Consequences
Key elements	"Political action is 'obligatory action' and as being rule- and identity-based" (Sending, 2002, p. 447). The key elements are "(1) situation, (2) identity or role, and (3) rules" (Sending, 2002, p. 447).	"'Analysis-based' action, which normally comprises deliberate consideration of alternatives, assessment of their outcomes and preference-driven choices." (Schulz, 2018, p. 914)
Key questions	"What kind of situation is this? Who am I? How appropriate are different actions for me in this situation? Do what is most appropriate" (Goldmann, 2004, p. 40).	"What are the decision options? What are my preferences? What are the consequences of the alternatives for my preferences? Choose the decision option that has the best consequences" (Dewulf et al., 2020, p. 2).
Basis of decision-making	"The political community is based on a shared history, a valued way of life, a shared definition of the common good, and a shared interpretation and common understanding embodied in rules for appropriate behaviour. The rules provide criteria for what is worth striving for, and for what is accounted as good reasons for action" (Sending, 2002, p. 448).	"Decisions are taken based on the anticipation of the future effects of current actions, and that alternative decision options are evaluated in terms of their expected consequences" (Dewulf et al., 2020, p. 2).
Focus of action	"Behaviors (beliefs as well as actions) are intentional but not willful. They involve fulfilling the obligations of a role in a situation, and so of trying to determine the imperatives of holding a position. Actions stem from a conception of necessity, rather than preference…a sane person is one who is 'in touch with identity' in the sense of maintaining consistency between behavior and a conception of self in a social role" (Sending, 2002, p. 447).	"Conceives of action as instrumental: What motivates action is the desire to achieve a goal, typically defined based on the actor's self-interest. According to an instrumental logic, actors make decisions based on means–end calculations in pursuit of a goal. To select among the alternatives for action, actors apply a decision rule, such as goal maximization or satisficing" (Duque, 2024, p. 3).
Disaster relief context	A state participates in disaster relief to uphold international humanitarian norms and to be perceived as responsible.	Sometimes referred to as "disaster diplomacy" (Gong, 2021a)—A state provides disaster aid to enhance national interests, i.e., strengthening alliances, enhancing influence in a region, improving international standing, or boosting economic ties.
Key actors in disaster relief	International organizations, NGOs, and multilateral agreements/mechanisms.	Guided by government and strategic interests, often involving military or state institutions.

Sources: Capie (2015); Dewulf et al. (2020); Mamuji (2014); March and Olsen (1998).

3. Status-Seeking and Emerging (Non-Western) Powers on Disaster Relief Cooperation

Emerging (non-Western) powers such as India and China are conscious of the hierarchy within the international system that is shaped by material, normative, and social factors. India and China aim to ascend the hierarchy through their contributions to global governance, including HADR efforts. Intergovernmental

forums such as the G20 help cement these hierarchies by recognizing the leadership roles of non-Western states such as India and China in solving global crises such as climate change, pandemics, and other types of disasters (Zarakol, 2017). G20 resolutions depict how the involvement of major powers such as the US, EU, China, and India enhances the legitimacy of international organizations in dealing with humanitarian issues through consensus-driven decision-making, inclusivity, and responsiveness to crises (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). However, through contestation guided by India, China, and other countries of the Global South, diverse experiences are brought into dialogue on issues relating to global governance, helping to address the legitimacy gaps that arise from one-size-fits-all governance models (Wiener, 2014). India and China specifically advocate for attention to developmental concerns, equity, and sovereignty in humanitarian and disaster relief governance (Weiss & Thakur, 2010, pp. 308–340). Recent G20 declarations and meetings (especially under India's 2023 presidency) emphasize sustainable development, needs-based support to developing countries, and diplomacy and dialogue in the context of humanitarian assistance, with references to heightened food and energy insecurity caused by the war in Ukraine, the Covid-19 crisis, and even the Turkey–Syria earthquakes, among other developments (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2023a, 2023b).

On disaster relief cooperation, Salmons (2019) contends that "recognizable patterns of status-seeking behaviour" can be observed in the HADR operations carried out by non-Western powers such as China in the Asia-Pacific region—that are also linked with order-building in the region. In India's case, its response in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to provide assistance to other tsunami-affected countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is seen as a demonstration of its competency in HADR capabilities, activities, and projection/acceptance as a regional and/or global power, and even a security provider in the IOR (Dany, 2020; Gong & Jayaram, 2023). Additionally, India's HADR activities boost its quest for permanent membership in the UN Security Council (Upadhyay, 2018).

Furthermore, even while converging on many disaster management principles, India and China have had certain divergences with Western donors and institutions over the implicit political nature of foreign aid in some cases (Meier & Murthy, 2011). For example, in the case of 2008 Cyclone Nargis, the Myanmar military government rejected international aid from Western donors amidst calls for the invocation of R2P (and potential intervention) by some key Western actors, while China and India were provided access, and they became the largest contributors to disaster relief (Junk, 2016). This example offers an apt demonstration of how India and China have positioned themselves on key concerns of the Global South with respect to the West's policies on issues of global governance.

Similarly, China and India reluctantly endorsed the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (this includes disaster aid/relief). They have not engaged meaningfully with other frameworks on aid effectiveness such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (Brown, 2020). They have considered them as dominated by the principles endorsed by Western donors (mainly the OECD) while under-recognizing the efforts of emerging donors such as themselves. They also found them misaligned with patterns and expectations of South–South cooperation. Emerging powers such as India, China, and Brazil have been in favour of transforming donor–recipient relationships into development cooperation models (Abdel-Malek, 2015; Brown, 2020). More importantly, they have traditionally viewed international organizations such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as supply-driven, West-dominated, disregardful of the needs and sensitivities of the recipient countries, and largely exclusive of emerging disaster relief providers such as India and China (Singh, 2023).

4. India's Response Towards Its "Extended Neighbourhood" as a *Vishwamitra*

India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been guided by the ideals of *Vishwamitra* (a friend of the world) and a leader of the Global South. India has consistently emphasized its emergence as a first responder in HADR "in keeping with its cultural beliefs of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the whole world is one family*" ("The emergence of Vishwa Mitra Bharat," 2024), consistent with the logic of appropriateness. India's fundamental motivations are linked with its positioning as a bridging power striving for a "common ground" by remaining "relatively objective and unbiased," in the words of India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar (Peri, 2024).

In the case of the Turkey–Syria earthquakes, India's appropriate response can be perceived as an attempt to build bridges (especially with Turkey) at a time of crisis. Within hours of the earthquake, the Government of India launched Operation *Dost* (friend), rendering it a first responder. This also reflects India's identification of West Asia as its "extended neighbourhood," under its "Think West" policy (Chinoy & Kumar Pradhan, 2024), with the region being critical for India's status-seeking strategy, guided by both norms and strategic interests (Alhasan, 2022).

Turkey's anti-India stance on the Kashmir issue, alleged funding of "anti-India activities" by "Turkish outfits backed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government" (Gupta, 2020), and explicitly pro-Pakistan statements, especially in the UN sessions, have antagonized India (Taneja, 2023). However, soft power tools such as disaster relief and aid have wider consequentialist implications for status (Kumar, 2020). In fact, Turkey also sent assistance to India during the Covid-19 crisis (Erdoğan & Boztepe, 2021). Hence, one could argue that India's disaster relief support to Turkey was conditioned more by the logic of appropriateness, and less by the costs and benefits of action.

India's external HADR efforts have been largely guided by state agencies and the military forces, which fits the logic of consequences. India has consolidated its disaster management policies and institutions over time. It established the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in 2005 and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) in 2006, a specialized disaster response force constituted under the 2005 Disaster Management Act (NDRF, n.d.). Similarly, the Integrated Defence Staff constituted officially in 2001 has also been pivotal in "disaster and crisis management...as a part of the National Crisis Management Group, and coordination of efforts of the three services as required" as well as organizing multi-national HADR exercises (Dua, 2019, pp. 61–62).

India's display of its material (especially military) capabilities falls well within the logic of consequences (Haidar, 2023a). The first phase of India's Operation *Dost* involved the rapid deployment of two search and rescue teams of the NDRF, consisting of 101 personnel, on February 7. This was one of the few times that the NDRF units were deployed abroad, with some of the other prominent ones being in the 2011 triple disaster in Japan and the 2015 earthquake in Nepal (NDRF, 2023). The Indian Air Force (IAF) dispatched four C-17s (C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft) with "relief material, rescue and medical personnel to Turkey" (Peri & Pandey, 2023). The C-17s also transported "a 30-bed field hospital along with a 99-member specialist medical team" of the Indian Army (Peri & Pandey, 2023). At the same time, India sent IAF C-130 transport aircraft with emergency relief supplies and medicines to Damascus, but did not deploy NDRF units (Peri & Pandey, 2023).

India largely adhered to the international norms of disaster relief to engage with Turkey, a country that is not seen as friendly towards it, signifying the logic of appropriateness even while being conscious of the strategic benefits of its action in terms of reputation and image. India delivered emergency relief materials and medical assistance worth INR 7 crores (~$836,000) to Turkey and Syria in the first week after the earthquakes hit (Sharma, 2023). Despite the relatively lesser amount of aid (in terms of financial value) provided by India in comparison to other major powers, including China, India's capacity to be a first responder through the deployment of its human and technical resources beyond the IOR was recognized (Bhattacharyya, 2023). The timeliness, accuracy, and swiftness of their response were acknowledged by some Turkish officials and locals ("Erdogan Govt lauds India," 2023). The Turkish ambassador to India lauded India's efforts: "India was among the first countries to respond when we asked for medical assistance" (Chitre, 2023).

On the other hand, in Syria's case, while international norms mattered, India chose a different path in comparison to the Western donors, contesting what is considered appropriate in this context. There was general criticism of the West's sanctions that impeded aid access and operations. The Bashar al-Assad regime was also accused of weaponizing aid and not distributing it among the disaster-affected victims (Jabbour et al., 2023). With India maintaining diplomatic channels with the al-Assad regime despite Western sanctions, the assistance provided by India to Syria was a reinforcement of its respect for "sovereignty" and "non-interference," implying tacit support to al-Assad. As an acknowledgement of India's aspiration to be recognized as a leader of the Global South, the Syrian ambassador to India commented: "We really appreciate people, Government of India for support, this is the voice of the south we want to see in the future" (Chandok, 2023).

While the logic of appropriateness calls for the integration of non-state stakeholders in disaster relief cooperation, the Indian government traditionally coordinates directly with the recipient country's state authorities. It does not necessarily involve Indian NGOs in its external operations; nor does the government formally engage with NGOs of the affected country (Shanbog & Kevlihan, 2022). However, the HADR guidelines released by the NDMA in October 2024 highlight the need for coordination among various stakeholders, including international non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations as well (NDMA, 2024). It relies upon government entities such as the NDMA, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of Home Affairs to plan/coordinate the HADR operations and primarily its military/paramilitary forces to undertake them (Chakradeo, 2020; Nainar, 2024). Operation *Dost* was also no different, fitting the logic of consequences and invoking a model of disaster diplomacy. Yet, some NGOs independently sent relief teams and emergency materials to Turkey and Syria with government approval (Rana, 2023). Importantly, due to the political uncertainties in Syria, the Indian government coordinated with UN agencies to send aid to Syria besides directly sending a part of it to the al-Assad regime. India, based on its normative disposition of appropriateness, followed internationally agreed principles of "humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence" (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2023a), and adopted a neutral stance when coordinating and cooperating with local and international organizations to ensure effective resource utilization.

However, much of disaster diplomacy efforts are often leveraged as a part of an interest-based, consequentialist narrative-building exercise, which could even counteract the goodwill created by them. This was seen in the case of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, wherein the Indian operation was criticized by some

sections of Nepal due to its poor coordination with the local actors (Chakradeo, 2020), Indian media's insensitive coverage, and the government agencies' unnecessary focus on the repetitive relaying of information on India's efforts (perceived as trumpeting) rather than monitoring the operation itself (Haidar, 2023b). Having learnt lessons from this experience, the Indian government adopted a more measured approach in the case of the Turkey–Syria earthquakes, tilting towards the logic of appropriateness. This is further reinforced by the 2024 HADR protocol that provides guidelines for media engagement.

5. China's Response Under Major Country Diplomacy

Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, China pursues "major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics," which features "taking more responsibilities, exercising more influence and providing more public goods" (Wang, 2019, p. 27). Policy shifts to enact this status include taking more responsibilities and providing more public goods globally, among others (Wang, 2019). This approach conforms to the theory that international status can be achieved through contributing material resources to global governance and/or creating new norms and institutions (Basrur & de Estrada, 2017, pp. 10–12; Larson & Shevchenko, 2014, p. 57). In the Turkey–Syria earthquakes, Beijing adopted different approaches to seek and enact the "major country" status in the two affected countries. In Turkey, China's response reflected the intention to behave appropriately, in terms of the speed, scale, and actors involved. After the earthquakes on February 6, the Ministry of Emergency Management sent a search and rescue team (China Search and Rescue) of 82 members to assist the relief work in Turkey. The team arrived at the disaster zone on February 8, within the first 72 hours after the disaster. In addition, one team from the Hong Kong SAR and 17 non-governmental teams from the Chinese mainland joined the earthquake response (Fan, 2023). Meanwhile, the China International Development Cooperation Agency announced ¥40 million ($5.9 million) worth of relief aid to Turkey and the Red Cross Society of China offered $200,000 in cash aid ("China rushes rescue teams," 2023; "Chinese rescue teams," 2023). In comparison, Australia sent a team of 72 rescue workers and offered $6.9 million to support the aid effort ("Live updates | Aid," 2023). The Japanese government sent 75 rescue workers and provided $6 million through international organizations and $2.5 million through Japanese NGOs ("Live updates | Turkey," 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023). China's relief efforts were generally comparable to those of other major donors.

The involvement of Chinese NGOs in the relief work in Turkey was more visible than previously. Hours after the first earthquake, a few organizations turned to standby status. These include the China Foundation for Rural Development, the Amity Foundation, Blue Sky, and the Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation. The Gongyang Rescue Team from Hangzhou was the first one to arrive in Turkey on February 8 (China NGO Center for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023a). On February 11, the China Social Initiative for International Humanitarian Aid—Turkey and Syria Earthquake 2023 was activated to share information and coordinate action among the NGOs and with the other stakeholders, with headquarters in both Turkey and China (China NGO Center for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023b). On the same day, the China Association for Disaster Prevention issued a statement suggesting NGOs in the disaster zones to follow the arrangements and instructions of the relevant authorities and not to add burden to the host government and local communities (China Association for Disaster Prevention, 2023).

This was an improvement compared with previous overseas disaster responses. For instance, after the Palu earthquake in Indonesia in 2018, some Chinese NGOs entered the disaster zone without reporting to the

authorities and were eventually deported (Gong, 2021a, p. 96). For a long time, there was a gap between China's overseas humanitarian response and the international humanitarian community. China has relied on the governmental channel to deliver overseas humanitarian aid, but this approach has attracted criticism for a lack of engagement with civil society (Hirono, 2013, p. 203). As per the logic of appropriateness, the increasing involvement of Chinese NGOs in international disaster response points to the trend of China's overseas disaster relief aligning more with international humanitarian practices. It can advance Beijing's interest to be recognized by the international humanitarian community for its assistance.

Interestingly, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was absent, while countries such as India, South Korea, the US, and the UK deployed military assets to assist the relief work in Turkey. This stood in contrast with China's disaster response after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, when the PLA deployed over 1,000 personnel, 10 aircraft, and 190 engineering machines, making it its largest overseas disaster relief operation ever ("PLA's response to Nepal earthquake," 2015). As per the logic of consequences, the decision not to deploy the PLA can be explained by the lukewarm China–Turkey relations, a lack of strong economic incentives, and unfavourable geopolitical dynamics. China and Turkey are not each other's key trading partners (Öniş & Yalikun, 2021, p. 524). Despite improvement in bilateral relations in the past decade, there are limits to rapprochement, such as Turkey's close economic relations with the EU and a lack of common values between the two countries. From a strategic perspective, mutual trust and friendly defence relations with the host country are preconditions for PLA involvement in disaster relief (Gong, 2021a, 2021b). Turkey is a NATO member and NATO's increasing concern over China's growing military power casts a shadow on China–Turkey military cooperation.

Regarding Syria, China's disaster response needs to be analyzed against the background of its overall approach to the decade-long crisis. Beijing has been perceived in the West as Moscow's partner to counter the West in the Syrian conflict and thus criticized for neglecting the humanitarian suffering, although some analyses point out that Beijing's stance is more nuanced than simply opposing the West (Gegout & Suzuki, 2020, p. 390). Hence, countering this critical narrative is an important goal of China's diplomacy towards Syria, including the earthquake response. From a humanitarian perspective, the China International Development Cooperation Agency offered ¥30 million ($4.38 million) to Syria and the Red Cross Society offered $200,000 in cash aid ("China rushes rescue teams," 2023; "Chinese rescue teams," 2023). In addition, the Chinese government expedited food delivery through ongoing aid projects with the UN. In terms of monetary value, there was no significant difference in China's relief aid to Turkey and Syria after the earthquakes, given the fact that Turkey was more severely affected, but Syria's response capacity had been weakened by years of fragility. In terms of personnel, the Red Cross Society of China and NGOs such as Peaceland and Blue Leopard Rescue sent small relief teams to the country.

The case of Syria reveals two interesting points related to aid delivery. First, China's official aid was delivered through governmental channels and the UN, and this stood in contrast to Western donors that refused to engage the Syrian government and partnered with the UN and humanitarian NGOs only. This was a continuation of China's division with the West, with China emphasizing respect for the "sovereignty" and "independence" of Syria and the West delegitimating the Syrian government (Fung, 2018, p. 700). Second, the Chinese government did not send the national search and rescue team. This decision may be attributed to a calculation of political and security costs and benefits, as the perception of China as a partner of the Syrian government might increase the risk of negative perceptions of the Chinese national team.

In addition, China delegitimated some Western actions in Syria in the UN Security Council debates. China referred to the sanctions imposed by the West as "illegal" (UN Security Council, 2023). While some of the sanctions were lifted to assist humanitarian access, China further argued that the temporary easing of the sanctions had a limited impact and called for complete removal (UN Security Council, 2023). Leveraging its role as a permanent member, China lent political support to the Syrian government and continued its opposition to the Western approach to the Syrian situation by questioning its legitimacy and appropriateness.

6. Discussion

India and China's engagement with Turkey and Syria after the earthquakes suggests an interplay between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. India's Operation *Dost* focused on showcasing its role as a responsible global player by following internationally "appropriate" (accepted) principles of disaster relief. Naming the operation "*Dost*" itself is aligned with the Narendra Modi-led government's vision of presenting India as a *Vishwamitra*, with both *dost* and *mitra* meaning "friend." Where India diverged from Western powers and had a similar position with that of the non-Western powers such as China was on disaster aid to Syria, clearly reinforcing sovereignty as a bedrock of its engagement with other countries. Moreover, India's growing disaster relief capabilities have aided its outreach beyond the immediate (South Asia and IOR) to the extended neighbourhood (West and East Asia). India's military-led HADR has been lauded in the past, such as in the cases of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2018 earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, thereby complementing its self-depiction as a net security provider not just in the IOR but the broader Indo-Pacific (Gong & Jayaram, 2023). Its similar response in Turkey is a continuation of the benign, but consequence-focussed, use of military power for status-seeking purposes. This is irrespective of the geopolitical context of strained relations with Turkey.

China's disaster response to Turkey and Syria demonstrated both an adoption of international practices and a resistance to trends and developments that it perceives could potentially diminish sovereignty—the underpinning principle of Chinese foreign policy. At an operational level, there were changes in China's disaster response that suggest the intention to behave more appropriately, such as improvement in the scale and speed of relief work and expansion of NGO involvement. However, military involvement is a sensitive issue for Beijing given the current geostrategic dynamics. The decision on military deployment is primarily shaped by strategic calculations. In terms of norms, when there is disagreement or division between China and the West, China tends to delegitimate Western-led initiatives and highlight its solidarity with other developing countries.

For both India and China, the peaceful context in Turkey (yet constrained bilateral relations) and the conflictual dynamics in Syria presented distinct challenges to their disaster relief cooperation with the two countries. India continued to engage with the al-Assad regime, delivering aid directly to it, amid Western sanctions, albeit without any ground presence of the armed or disaster response forces. While contesting the Western approach of not engaging with the Syrian government, it still refrained from deploying the NDRF units in Syria, especially owing to the challenge of coordinating with local actors in politically contested zones, at times controlled by anti-government actors too (Taneja, 2023). With Turkey, a mix of humanitarianism, G20 leadership, projection of India's military and other capabilities in its "extended neighbourhood," and an opportunity to improve bilateral relations in the wake of hostilities over a range of issues, guided India's behaviour. In China's case, contrasting to Western donors that have long viewed the

al-Assad regime as illegitimate, Beijing stuck to the governmental channel for aid delivery and questioned the legitimacy of the Western sanctions on Syria. Similarly, the fairly swift and active aid to Turkey reflected the positive momentum in the bilateral relations as Beijing has been expanding its international reach, including in the Middle East and Eurasia, where Turkey is a major actor. Table 2 provides a comparative overview of key elements of India and China's disaster aid after the Turkey–Syria earthquakes.

Table 2. A comparative overview of India and China's disaster aid after the Turkey–Syria earthquakes of 2023.

	India	China
State and non-state actors	Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, NDRF, Integrated Defence Staff, Indian Armed Forces. Sent armed forces and NDRF to Turkey, but not to Syria. Worked with the governments of Turkey and Syria; UN aid channels (especially in Syria).	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Emergency Management, China International Development Cooperation Agency, China Association for Disaster Prevention, Red Cross Society of China, China Foundation for Rural Development, Amity Foundation, Blue Sky, Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation, Gongyang Rescue Team. Sent national search and rescue team to Turkey, but not to Syria. Worked with the governments of Turkey and Syria; UN aid channels (especially in Syria).
Geopolitical considerations and implications	India's strained relations with Turkey. Contest Western approach towards Syria and tacit support to the government. Projection of soft power. Rapprochement with Turkey. Leadership in the Global South. Recognition of capacities.	Outreach in the Middle East and Eurasia. Rapprochement with Turkey and limitations in bilateral relations. Political and practical support for the Syrian government.
Strategic/"consequential" imperatives	*Vishwamitra*. Influence in the "extended neighbourhood" (West Asia). Solidarity with the Global South through South–South cooperation. Display of military capabilities. State-led, demand-driven, context-specific disaster relief.	Major country diplomacy. Global image as a responsible power. Belt and Road Initiative goals. Solidarity with the Global South through South–South cooperation.
Normative/"appropriate" imperatives	*Vishwamitra*. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. South–South cooperation. Principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Emphasis on the state's primary role in relief provision.	Principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Emphasis on the state's primary role in relief provision. Resistance to developments that could diminish the state's role. Alignment with international humanitarian principles through greater NGO involvement.

India and China's status-seeking behaviours indicate a blurring of the line between the logics of appropriateness and consequences. More importantly, "appropriateness" is leveraged as a tool by these powers to strengthen their status as responsible global powers and as consequential to the international order. While the involvement of and with different types of actors (state or non-state) may imply logics based on certain normative assumptions, they also indicate a consequentialist logic in terms of why some actors are involved (and others are not) as well as the expected outcomes.

7. Conclusion

India and China's disaster relief activities in the aftermath of the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes portray an interplay between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. Both powers support UN General Assembly Resolutions 46/182 and 58/114 (UN, 1991, 2004) which reaffirmed the underpinning principles of coordination in international humanitarian assistance such as respect for sovereignty and humanitarian principles and institutionalized the UN-led international humanitarian system. However, they also contest the existing international norms, where needed. Both powers proclaimed humanitarianism in their response to the earthquakes that fits the logic of appropriateness, yet both had an interest-based agenda of narrative building through their distinct diplomatic initiatives in peace and conflict contexts, exemplified by Turkey and Syria respectively. From the desire to be recognized as responsible and influential powers to friends of all countries and leaders of the Global South, India and China's motivations can be seen through the lens of the logic of consequences.

While India and China's approaches towards disaster relief in the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes were similar on some fronts, they varied when it came to involving their NGOs and militaries in disaster relief activities. The formal exclusion of Indian NGOs based on fears of subversion of the government's agenda is reflective of the logic of consequences, albeit the 2004 HADR Protocol for India's external HADR indicates a shift in policy. Similarly, a display of India's military and specialized disaster response forces was crucial for status-seeking, considering its contribution to India's image as a reliable power with capabilities. In China's case, the logic of consequences provides a perspective to explain the absence of the PLA in this disaster response. The government has begun to recognize the usefulness of NGOs participating in its international disaster response, as state-centricity has long been a source of concern in China's international humanitarian action; and NGO involvement enhances the appropriateness of its response from the perspective of the humanitarian community.

While the question of whether India and China's disaster relief efforts have had a durable impact on their diplomatic relations with Turkey and Syria and contributed to their global status requires further analysis, it is clear that non-Western emerging powers perceive and deploy this tool as a part of their status-seeking strategy. What is also evident is that they have largely set themselves apart from Western donors in their status-seeking behaviour by emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference. Increasingly through multilateral frameworks and bilateral engagements, including forums such as the G20, these powers contest the dominant Western norms and create space for non-Western approaches to disaster relief, focussing more on a needs-based, development-oriented approach to disaster relief and risk reduction.

More broadly, this article provides an analytical framework to explain contestation of orders and norms in terms of issues of global governance, as a part of countries' status-seeking strategies and behaviours. While

the logics of appropriateness and consequences have been used traditionally to unpack choices and actions of actors and institutions in international relations, they could be utilized to explain shifts in perceptions (for instance, of what is considered appropriate) and implications contingent on the nature of the actors being studied (for example, militaries or NGOs). Understanding these dynamics is pivotal to analysing how emerging, non-Western powers perceive their interests and status in the present international order. As much as they are conscious of how others perceive them in relation to their adherence to the dominant norms, they also resort to an interplay between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences (even by reformulating them based on the contextual conditions), which has wide-ranging implications for future international disaster relief cooperation.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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