

# JOURNAL OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, MARCH 2022



INSTITUTE OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS



ISSN 2773-7942

# JOURNAL OF **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, MARCH 2022



**INSTITUTE OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

# Journal of Foreign Affairs

March, 2022

## **Advisory**

1. Hon. Pabitra Niroula Kharel, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
2. Bharat Raj Paudyal, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs(MoFA), Nepal
3. Madhu Kumar Marasini, Secretary, Ministry of Finance(MoF), Nepal
4. Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
5. Prof. Dr. Kushum Shakya, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
6. Balananda Sharma, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
7. Shekhar Golchha, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
8. Pragya Ghimire, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee
9. Prem Prasad Limbu, Member, Institute of Foreign Affairs Development Committee

## **Published By:**

Institute of Foreign Affairs

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: +977-1-4266954 , 4266955

Email: [info@ifa.org.np](mailto:info@ifa.org.np)

Website: [www.ifa.org.np](http://www.ifa.org.np)

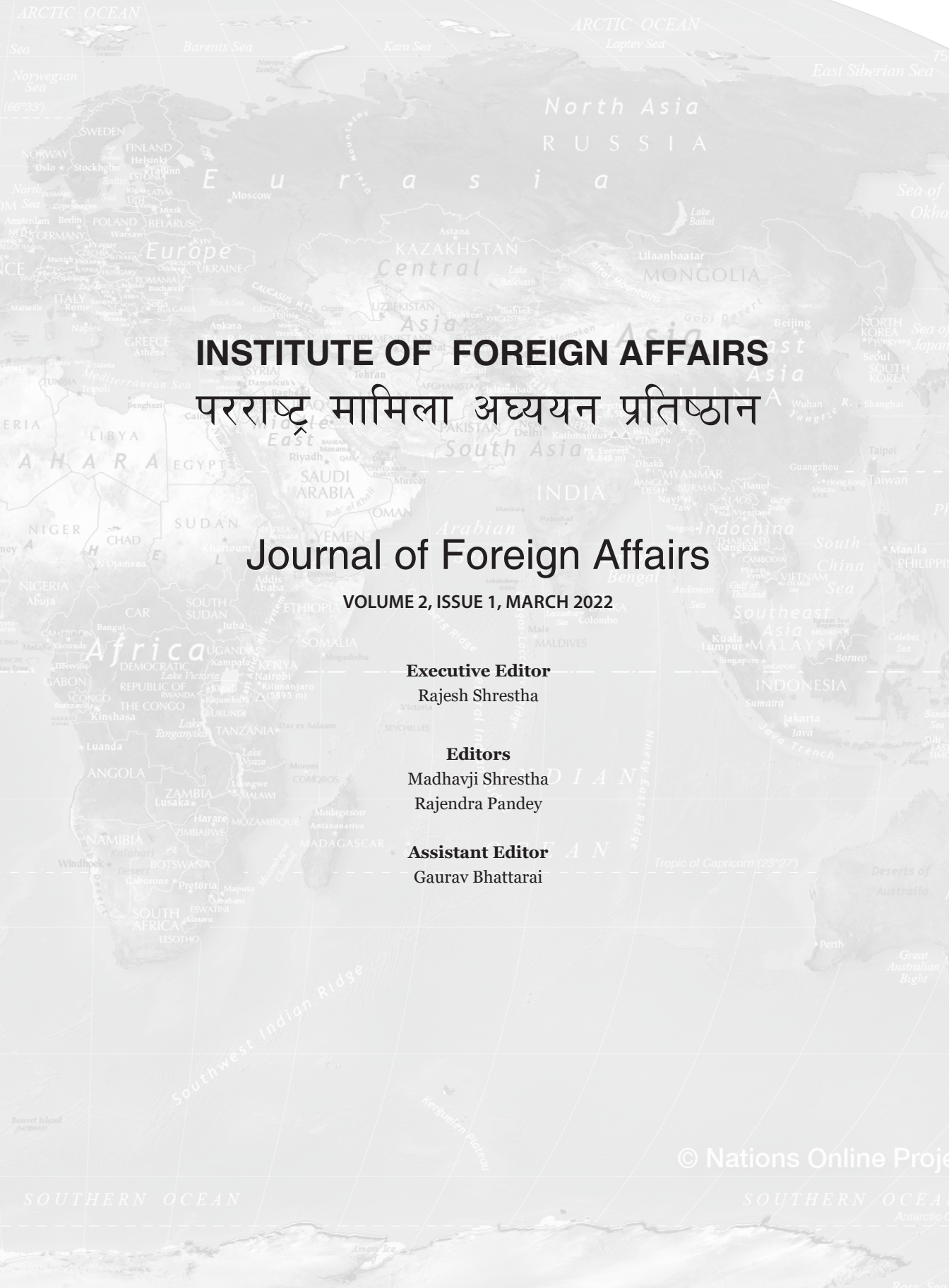
Copyright: © Institute of Foreign Affairs

Opinions expressed in the articles are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors and the publishers.

No reproduction of any article in any form, is allowed without the permission of the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA). However, the Journal may be referred in citations.

Publication Copies: 500

Design and Layout: Spandan Design Communication, 5435884, Lalitpur



**INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
**परराष्ट्र मामिला अध्ययन प्रतिष्ठान**

**Journal of Foreign Affairs**

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, MARCH 2022

**Executive Editor**

Rajesh Shrestha

**Editors**

Madhavji Shrestha

Rajendra Pandey

**Assistant Editor**

Gaurav Bhattarai



## Foreword

Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) is committed to the institutional objective of knowledge production on several areas of Nepal's foreign policy. In implementation of the above, Volume 2 Issue 1 is the present publication. On June 25, 2021, the previous publication was launched by the Prime Minister of Nepal. Foreign policy issues, agendas, priorities, and behaviors is wrought with environmental issues, matters of concerned to LDC graduation, geopolitical undertones, policy of non-alignment and digital diplomacy. The previous volume of the journal concentrated on the actors and factors influencing Nepal's foreign affairs during the first and second waves of COVID-19 pandemic. The present volume continues to provide a place to the studies on different aspects shaping Nepal's external relations.

IFA considered the publication of the journal as a contribution to policy recommendations and knowledge production. Despite the deficit in required human and financial resources, the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* is a piece of evidence to the fact regarding how IFA has continued to build a staunch network of foreign policy experts and practitioners, academics, and experts by encouraging the review, revision, and publication of the studies on various facades of Nepal's foreign relations. Although the COVID-19 pandemic left its effect on the production process of the journal, digital communication with the authors, reviewers, and editors provided a way out. IFA extends support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding research, publication, and training, the second Volume of the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* that includes policy guidelines on the issues of environmental protection, LDC graduation, geopolitical challenges, digital diplomacy, and relevancy of the non-alignment foreign policy.

IFA extends sincere gratitude to the Honorable Foreign Minister Dr. Narayan Khadka and the officials within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Nepal in facilitating researches on the matters of Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy.

**Rajesh Shrestha**  
**Executive Director**  
**Institute of Foreign Affairs**  
**Tripureswor, Kathmandu**





## Editorial

On August 19, 2021, the Institute of Foreign Affairs organized a Journal Symposium by bringing together experts, authors, and editors, who have been familiar with the process of producing journals from Nepal and beyond. The objective was not only to understand the trend and practice regarding the content and style of the *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, whose maiden volume came out in June of 2021. The aim of the Symposium was also to identify the areas required to be covered in the Journal. Soon after, a public call for the submission of abstracts to the *Journal of Foreign Affairs, Vol 2, Issue 1* was made, to encourage diversity and inclusion in the selected areas related to Nepal's foreign affairs. Abstracts received by the stipulated deadline were examined by the prominent reviewers and from the dozens of abstracts, and only those abstracts with sound argument, methodological clarity, and offering a sense of policy recommendation on different dimensions of Nepal's external affairs were selected.

Journal of Foreign Affairs followed a double-blind peer-review process. The editorial board also took the help of professional copy editors to polish the language of the contents. But the editorial board remained meticulous in maintaining the original tone of the article while polishing the language. The Editorial Board tried its best to maintain the coherency, consistency, and uniformity throughout the production process of the articles in the *Journal of Foreign Affairs*.

Directed by the mandate of the Institute of Foreign Affairs to publish scholarly and policy studies on the issue of Nepal's foreign affairs, diplomacy, strategic studies, this issue focuses on the importance of science diplomacy for Nepal, indicators of environmental vulnerabilities for Nepal's graduation process, the intersection of politics with geopolitics, the role of geography in Nepal's worldview, the relevance of Nepal's non-alignment, climate diplomacy gains, and digital diplomacy. This issue also includes a biography of the late diplomat Rishikesh Shah and more than a usual book review.

The Institute of Foreign Affairs has always been interested in conducting research and encouraging studies on those areas of Nepal's foreign affairs, where very little knowledge has been produced and, hence, a policy gap is realized. Thus, this publication should also be understood in the context of IFA's long-standing desire to fulfill the existing knowledge and policy gaps on the issues of science diplomacy, climate change, environmental vulnerabilities, geopolitics, non-alignment, digital diplomacy. Against the same backdrop, each article in this Journal attempts to offer new knowledge and provide policy guidelines accordingly.

The second volume of the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* is the upshot of the persistent and indefatigable efforts of the authors, reviewers, and editors. While the authors whose articles have been included in this volume kindly managed time and energy to address the numerous

recommendations from the side of reviewers and commentators, the team of reviewers (comprising of foreign policy experts, diplomats, academicians, security experts, and senior researchers) too paid heed to the continued consultation of the editors over the revisions and reviews of the manuscripts. While acting as a bridge between authors and reviewers, the Editorial Board maintained its professional integrity. With the Journal in our hands today, IFA is thankful to all the contributors, peer reviewers, and copy editors. The Editorial Board would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Prof. Dr. Mohan Lohani, Prof. Dr. Jayaraj Acharya, Prof. Dr. Khadga KC, Prof. Dr. Meena Vaidya Malla, Mr. Surya Nath Upadhyaya, Mr. Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, Dr. Dwarika Nath Dhungel, Dr. Purna Silwal, Dr. Ram Thapaliya, Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey, Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Dr. Dinesh Raj Bhuju, Dr. Naresh Nath Rimal, Dr. Min Bahadur Shrestha, Mr. Sushil K. Lamsal, Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari, Mr. Rambabu Dhakal, Dr. Satis Devkota, Dr. Rajiv Subba, Mr. Hari Kumar Shrestha, Dr. Keshav Bhattarai, Mr. Manjeet Dhakal, Mr. Binod Bhattarai. Also, we are thankful for the dedication and commitment of IFA officials including Mr. Matrika Poudyal, Mr. Mahendra Prasad Joshi, Ms. Binita Shrestha, Mr. Sanuraja Puri, Mr. Dron Lamichhane, and other supporting staff.

## **Editors**

**Journal of Foreign Affairs**

**Institute of Foreign Affairs**

# Contents

Foreword	v
Editorial	vii
Understanding the Primacy of Geography in the Conduct of Foreign Policy <b><i>Dinesh Bhattarai</i></b>	1
A Review of Environmental Vulnerabilities Related to Nepal's Graduation Process from Least Developed to a Developing Country Status <b><i>Ambika P. Adhikari, Keshav Bhattarai and Basu Sharma</i></b>	19
Science Diplomacy: An Overview in the Global and National Context <b><i>Sunil Babu Shrestha, Laxmi Kumar Parajuli and Marina Vaidya Shrestha</i></b>	41
Sphere pressure: When Politics Contends with Geopolitics <b><i>Sanjay Upadhya</i></b>	53
Rethinking Climate Diplomacy Gains: Strategic Benefits to Nepal <b><i>Chandra Lal Pandey and Ngamindra Dahal</i></b>	69
Understanding Nepal's Geopolitical Dynamics: Connected History Disconnected Future <b><i>Chandra Dev Bhatta</i></b>	89
Geopolitical Trends and Need for Coherent Foreign and Security Policy for Nepal <b><i>Suresh Sharma</i></b>	107
Blending Foreign Policy with Nepal's Geostrategic Location <b><i>Gopal Khanal</i></b>	121
Digital Diplomacy and its Prospect for Nepal <b><i>Madhavji Shrestha</i></b>	133
<b><i>Madhyama Pratipad</i></b> : Nepal's Middle Path Ambition through Non-alignment <b><i>Gaurav Bhattarai and Manish Jung Pulami</i></b>	153
Rishikesh Shaha: A Historical Perspective <b><i>Jayaraj Acharya</i></b>	175
Why is Nepal Politically So Unstable? Review of Purna Silwal's <i>Nepal's instability conundrum</i> , Followed by Exhaustive Analysis <b><i>Anand Aditya</i></b>	183



# Understanding the Primacy of Geography in the Conduct of Foreign Policy

---

Dinesh Bhattarai<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Geopolitics has returned to reassert and manifest itself in various ways. The management of the geopolitics has emerged as the central challenge of the day. The rise of China and emergence of India as great economic powers containing 40 percent of the world's population, and a huge market is one of the most important geopolitical developments of contemporary human history. This has caused monumental shift with a few parallels in the world history. While exposing the vulnerabilities of the world, Covid19 and climate change have accelerated these trends.*

*The advent of globalization intensified the process of massive social awakening, radicalizing the politics. Market forces would determine the free flow of goods, services, capital, and technology. The latest developments indicate geopolitical considerations driving trade policy and economic integration to reflect geographic, cultural, and strategic direction. The hard lessons from emerging geopolitics include the ongoing rivalry between the US and China, newly assertive Russia and its invasion of Ukraine, Sino-Indian border clashes pushing for deeper US-India partnership. The elevation of the Indo-Pacific as the center piece of US regional strategy has raised the contours of competition and rivalry in the region. Nepal's geographical location between India and China has gained greater prominence and higher sensitivity in the changed context with the geopolitical challenges and economic dynamism of its neighbours at its doorsteps, Nepal's friendship with both of these neighbors' and United States remains of paramount importance in the conduct of its foreign policy. A stable, democratic, and prosperous Nepal stands as the anchor of regional stability and security. Upon the same realization, this qualitative study is an attempt to explain how the primacy of geopolitics has come back and how it is being played.*

**Key words:** *Geopolitics, Geography, Globalization, Democracy, Indo-Pacific,*

## **Background**

In November 1989, the Berlin Wall -the symbol of division of Europe came down. The Iron Curtain that was erected following the end of the World War II (WW II) was demolished. The fall of the Berlin Wall not only ended the 45-year-old Cold War and subordinated the primacy of geopolitics to geo-economics, it also unleashed forces of freedom, innovation and human energy. Nations started looking for markets for their products. More focus was on economic diplomacy than on the hard power. The end of the Cold War made America the most powerful country, with no peer competitor.

---

<sup>1</sup> Former Permanent Representative/Ambassador to the United Nations, and Former Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister of Nepal.

Realizing that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 proved to be a “costly disaster,” Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev chose not to use force to support the communist governments in Eastern Europe. He launched the idea of ‘perestroika’ – or restructuring and glasnost- open discussion and democratization with an intention to reform communism, ‘not replace it.’ That did not work. There was a coup in August 1991 staged by hardliners against Gorbachev. Soviet Republics started declaring independence and suspending communist parties. On December 26, 1991, the Supreme Soviet voted to dissolve itself. Boris Yeltsin and his colleagues seized Gorbachev’s office in Kremlin. On December 31, Soviet flag on Kremlin was replaced by Russian tri-coloured flag, thus formalizing the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russian President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet empire as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” and a “genuine tragedy for Russian people.”

With these two earthshaking geopolitical changes, democracy stood unassailable. Prosperity was then with democracies and understood to have delivered dignity to individual. American political scientist Francis Fukuyama in his book *“The End of History and Last Man,”* in 1992 used the word dignity 118 times more than peace and prosperity combined and described the triumph of liberal democracy as a model of governance. Democracy emerged as the rising tide and held clear advantages over ideological rivals as the Cold War had just ended and the one pole of the bipolar power the Soviet Union had disappeared.

The ‘end of history’ pushed the geopolitics to a secondary position. The advent of globalization coincided with the dispersal of power. “Power, after the end of the Cold War, transferred to “entities with no borders, such as ethnic groups, non-government and international organizations or corporation, etc.” (Matthews,1997). The advent of globalization was expected to create wealth and be inclusive. The world focused on new world order and global governance through trade liberalization, nuclear nonproliferation, human rights, the rule of law, and environmental sustainability. Globalization represented as “sophisticated euthanasia of state and national identities and entities,” a negation of state territorial sovereignty” (Tunjic, 2000). Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, the most important objective of “US and EU foreign policy has been to shift international relations away from zero-sum issues toward win-win ones”... and the thinking prevailed that “the collapse of the Soviet Union did not just mean that humanity’s ideological struggle was over for good; they thought geopolitics itself had also come to a permanent end.” (Mead, 2014).

With the history of communism ‘over’, there was the end of geopolitics, paving way to shrink defense spending, lower appropriations on diplomacy, focus less on foreign hotspots in the belief that the world would just go on becoming free and more prosperous through the process of globalization. Countries would focus more on development economics, human rights and nuclear nonproliferation. US also saw it as international system becoming conducive to US interests, and the world on a stronger plane to accruing benefits from the open global economic system. The Clinton administration thought it proper to prioritize promoting liberal world order and “not playing classical geopolitics.” His administration articulated an extremely ambitious agenda in support of that order.

Thirty years after the publication of the book, *“The End of History and Last Man,”* there is “a definitive refutation of the thesis of liberal democracy and return of geopolitics.” (Mead, 2014). Since the beginning of “opening up and reforms process”, China registered remarkable success in raising the material conditions of its population. China has been able to reduce poverty and raise the life expectancy of its people. David Runciman writes in China’s challenge to democracy that “sweet spot” which Fukuyama identified as the end of history, “looks increasingly remote.” (Runciman, 2018).

When we look around today, we find the revolution of rising expectations of people expressed through democratic means remain unaddressed. Populism has risen both on the left and right, and middle space has shrunk considerably leading to the erosion of democratic norms, values, and practices. Leaders for momentary political benefits or gains have practiced immense amount of populist nationalism. The strongman theory is doing the rounds in several countries. Strongmen equate their own well-being with that of the nation and opposition with treason (Albright, 2022). This has pushed liberalism in crisis and democracy in retreat, causing a significant erosion of trust in public institutions. Democracy became weaker and the rise of populism at its cost slowed performance for the welfare of the people. Populist leaders use democratic means to come to power and assault the same process that brought them to office. Examples are plenty how populist leaders have encouraged the ethnicization of politics and politicization of ethnicity for vote banks, and also the criminalization of politics and politicization of criminal activities. Identity politics has poisoned the mainstream politics and generated a feelings of US vs THEM. These has resulted in the presence of large number of elected representatives with criminal backgrounds in parliament which represents the acme of people’s aspirations. Their direct target has been national democratic institutions and their performance.

## **Geography, Geopolitics and Balance of Power**

Geography may conceptually appear distinct from economics, politics, and strategy, yet studies of geo-economics, geopolitics, and geostrategic are taken within it. Geopolitics refers to “the relations of international political power to the geographical setting” (Cohen, 1964). It is taken as “the maneuverings and counter maneuverings of the world’s big powers, the question of who does what to whom around the globe, and why. It is a subject you might think that you ignore at your peril.” (The Economist, 1998).

After the World War II, the center of geopolitical power has been the United States, whose influence, has “radiated to the Maritime edges of the large Eurasian supercontinent.” Political geography remains a critical consideration in the study of international relations. The conduct of foreign policy of any country must be sensitive to political geography of that country. Napoleon once said that to know a nation’s geography was to know its foreign policy. In a similar way, so do maps. “Maps help to understand geopolitical realities, which help understand states’ capabilities and their options. The right map can stimulate foresight by providing a spatial view of critical trends in world politics.” (Kaplan, 2009). If

“understanding the map of Europe was essential to understanding the twentieth century,” closely understanding the Asian map is essential to understanding the dynamics of the twenty first century.

Our understanding of the importance of political geography, the late US national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote, “however, must adapt to the new realities of power.” He wrote, “economic prowess, and its translation into technological innovation, can also be a key criterion of power. Japan provides the supreme example. Nonetheless, geographic location still tends to determine the immediate priorities of a state – and the greater its military, economic and political power, greater the radius beyond its immediate neighbours, of that state’s vital geopolitical interests, influence and involvement.” (Brzezinski,1997).

Based on their geographical locations, nations have pursued a wide variety of policies and adopted a wide range of strategies. World geopolitical analyst Robert Kaplan says geography plays a crucial role in world politics, in this century as in any earlier centuries. Geography determines policy, players, and strategy. Politics is still at the mercy of geography (Kaplan, 2009) that shapes the stakes the players contend. Contemporary global realities confirm the return of geopolitics as the most vital factor influencing the foreign policy. As Europe was at the center of the world history in the twentieth century, Cold War, and bipolar struggle between the two poles mostly remained focused on Europe than anywhere else.

British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder wrote “each century has its own geographical perspectives” (Mackinder, 1919). The geographical perspective of the 21st century is just now being formed and at its heart is a rivalry between China and the United States to succeed Europe’s 500-year centrality in the international system, which will be framed by a shift in global economic activity and trade, new energy resource competition, a weakening Europe and Russia and a technological battle to control information.

The American historian and strategic theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan argued in a 1902 essay that a state with a land as well as maritime frontier was at an enduring and usually fatal geostrategic disadvantage when in naval competition with a wholly insular opponent. He focused upon the growing Anglo-German rivalry, against the backdrop of the historical experiences of Britain in her past competitions with the Dutch and the French. Reasoning geopolitically, Mahan wrote that an insular state, if attentive to the conditions should be able to dictate its policy and maintain its superiority in that particular kind of force (sea power), the mobility of which enables it most readily to project its power to the more distant quarters of the earth. (Mahan,1902).

Technology and geography, communications, and culture, have entered the arena of geopolitics and geo-economics. New weapons technologies can offset distance, terrain, and even climate to an important degree, but their strategic value is limited by at least three major considerations. Communications technologies undoubtedly have produced some features key to the growth of a global community. In fact, scholars of geopolitics consider strategic culture to be shaped importantly by the geographical settings. (Jacobsen, 1990)



The role of technology has come to influence balancing behaviour of state and appears to have surpassed geography as a determinant of state's power, yet "geography continues to be relevant for balance of power politics in Asia in at least three respects: the relative size of potential adversaries, the difference between maritime and continental interstate rivalry, and the distinctive position of the region's most powerful state" (Goldstein, 2003, 179). Geography along with modern military technology continue to condition balance of power in Asia and across the world.

In Asia, geography matters more for balance of power. Due to its location, South Asia is becoming an epicenter of 21st century geopolitics. Indo-centric South Asia is the world's most complex and closely watched region. It has all essential elements that make up geopolitics. South Asians face widespread hunger and extreme poverty amid an abundance of natural endowments and 'unending possibilities.' The region is made up of only 3.27% of Earth's total land area but is home to one fifth of the world's population—a population possessing less than 2% of world income. As ethnic linkages travel across the border, South Asia remains a theater for ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions and rivalries. In the midst of rising ultranationalism and elected authoritarianism, the region has records of repeated interstate wars and myriad intrastate conflicts. Nuclear armed neighbors—India and Pakistan—are at loggerheads. The region is projected to be facing a series of internal and external shocks during the next 15-20 years in which low growth, rising food prices and energy shortages will pose stiff challenges to governance.

South Asia is beset with unsettled territorial disputes, and trans-border criminal and subversive activities. Cross-border terrorism has made the region, as former US President Bill Clinton once deemed it, "the world's most dangerous place." Even more dangerous is as has been noted by leading geopolitical writer Walter Russell Mead, Pakistan "the world's only nuclear state with deep ties to terror groups. And its national security elite believes it is locked in an existential competition with India, its much larger, richer, and more technologically advanced southern neighbor. Yet Pakistan simply does not have the economic capacity to keep up this security competition." In addition, Asia has the world's longest disputed China-India border. Japan has territorial disputes with China. Also, it was in Afghanistan that the United States fought "the longest war" and had to make a "chaotic withdrawal" in 2021 as geographic factors came to be determinative in the final outcome of the global war on terror (GWOT). With trends of democracy in decline and triumph for authoritarian regimes in recent years, each of these serve as fertile nurseries for fueling destabilizing trends, which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that can be said to be seismic in scale and significance impacting every sphere of national life.

The unprecedented growth of China and its transformation from agrarian backwater as Graham Allison writes, has made it the "the biggest player in the history of the world." Within the space of a few decades, writes Ashley Tellis, China has transformed itself from a predominantly agricultural economy into a manufacturing powerhouse, whose southern provinces were once described by the Economist as "the contemporary equivalent of 19th century Manchester—a workshop of the world." (The Economist, 2002). China today feeds

22% of the world's population with merely 7% of the arable land (Carter, 2011). It has been able to lift living standards of the vast majority of the people 100 folds "within a single human life," and eliminated the absolute poverty.

Today, China is the largest trading nation, greatest source of global lending, military global center of innovation and has largest population. The rise has numerous ramifications for the global system. China wishes to showcase that its "pragmatic authoritarianism" has shown itself more capable of planning for the long term. Today, China has risen not only as a regional power but the global one. With the rise of China, the West thinks a new world is in the making, quite unsure of what it would be like. While China talks of collective dignity, the West stands for the dignity of individuals.

Former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd says, "preserving peace will be critical not only for the three billion people who call Asia home but the future of global order. Much of the history of the twenty first century, for good or for ill, will be written in Asia, and this in turn will be shaped by whether China's rise can be managed peacefully and without any fundamental disruption to the order" (Rudd, 2013). Kishore Mahbubani writes as "China's weight in global affairs grows, it will have to take on greater responsibility...China's led order could turn out to be more "democratic" order. China does not want to export its model. It can live with a diverse multipolar world. The coming Asian century need not be uncomfortable for the West and the rest of the world" (Mahbubani, 2022).

In 2017 at the 19th Party Congress, President Xi Jinping announced that China has arrived at the center stage. Analysts see China becoming "more aggressively assertive abroad and more authoritarian at home." Under Donald Trump and now Joe Biden, "American policy towards China has shifted from hubristic faith that it could be integrated into the existing American led world order to something closer to paranoid containment, marked by suspicion of China's intentions and a fearful bipartisan consensus that America's global pre-eminence is at risk" (The Economist, 2021).

At the peak of unipolar power, terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001 (9/11 terrorist attacks). It was a transformative moment to the post-Cold War. Terrorist attacks, US President George Bush said, "can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America." (Bush, 2001, 351). He believed that American "energy and freedom" is unparalleled" and announced a "forward strategy of freedom." Perceptions were that a bipartisan consensus in the United States that no political regimes other than liberal democracy provided enough freedom and dignity for a contemporary society to remain stable and democracy could be implanted to favour the United States. President Bush in his address to a Joint Session of Congress and American People on September 20, 2001, said, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." He said, "Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time-now depends on us... We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail." (Bush, 2001).

Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, and two decades of the terrorist attacks, the dynamics of international politics has changed contrary to expectations. Contest has been renewed and spread to nook and corner of the world. The present attempts by China, Russia and Iran portray a scenario to overturn the Westerners' view of a world order and balance of power. Russia fears the rise of China in the long run, Tehran and Moscow are sources of oil and would like oil prices to go up, China as a net consumer wants them to be low. Political instability in Middle East may favor Russia and Iran but not to China. Russia seems intending to reassemble as much of the Soviet Union as it can as is reflected in the recognition of two separatist states of Ukraine and unprovoked attacks on it. Geopolitical settings are further complicated with the latest geopolitical developments surrounding Ukraine making the "task of promoting and maintaining world order" daunting. China has not hidden its intentions to be number one superpower. Iran has its own agenda of replacing the order led by Saudi Arabia in the region. A very complex geo-strategic scenario appears to be in the making.

The United States enjoys geographic advantages in full. As the only great power not surrounded by other great powers, "the country has appeared less threatening to other states and was able to rise dramatically over the course of the last century without triggering a war. After the Cold War, when the United States was the world's sole superpower, other global powers, oceans away, did not even attempt to balance against it" (Ikenberry, 2014). Russia's geography stretches from the Baltic Sea to the Sea of Japan with vast area having 11 time zones. Russia has immense natural resources and supplies natural gas. Though a formidable military power, with nuclear weapons, army, air force and navy Moscow's strength is in natural gas and oil and uses them as geopolitical resources to gain influence and enhance power.

China's geostrategic location has both geographic advantages and disadvantages as it pursues to become the 21st century superpower. It has the world's largest population. Its massive army- People's Liberation Army- is being modernized. China's land border extends to 14 countries. Major countries in China's periphery have reacted to the rise of China by modernizing their militaries and reinforcing their alliances. As India lives in a "tough" geopolitical neighbourhood, it showed its interests in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in mid-2017 because of the gradual deterioration of the China-India relationship. Quad is a group consisting of Australia, India, Japan, the United States, as members that come together and work quadrilaterally in support of a resilient, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. This reflects the growing convergence of their interests across the spectrum, including on strategic and economic cooperation.

Several reports forecast that Asia will have surpassed North America and Europe combined in terms of global power by 2030 with China, India and Brazil becoming especially important to the global economy. South Asia has significant economic prospects, with India projected as one of the world's fastest growing major economy and key driver of continued global economic growth to become the world's third largest economy by 2030.

The Sino-Indian border clashes in 2020 in the Galwan valley, Tibet issue, and China's patronage of Pakistan remain as sources of friction. It is said that that the new source of

tension is the substantial growth of China's military strength, economic footprint, and political influence in both South Asia and the Indian Ocean- emerging as a contested space, which combines "the centrality of Islam with global energy politics and the rise of India and China to reveal a multilayered, multipolar world." (Kaplan, 2009) Indian Ocean remain at the center of global and international politics with China fast becoming the most critical and political power of our time. Countries in the region and the world's superpowers support the one China policy because "they want to avoid what they fear is a costly and unnecessary conflict... A humiliated, bitter, and xenophobic China will...poison relations in the whole region. We will have an ugly, nasty Asia-Pacific." (Yew, 2000)

There has been "a major change in the balance of international forces," as Chinese President Hu Jintao observed in a reference to the financial crisis 2008. The "prospects for multipolarity were now more obvious" (Jintao, 2016). With the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, growing Chinese assertiveness and aggressiveness, United States is upscaling its efforts to contain China, latest of them include hosting QUAD summit (2021) in Washington, and forming an Australia, United Kingdom and United States (AUKUS) among others reflect the Cold War mindsets of the last century. Indeed, a new Cold War in old-fashioned power plays appear to have staged a comeback.

President Putin took advantages of Western weakness and extended a "long overdue recognition" of the two separatist states of Donetsk and Lugansk (part of Ukraine) as independent countries. He sent troops to Ukraine what called them "peacekeepers." In an address just before launching attack on Ukraine, Putin addressed "Ukrainian brothers and sisters," and said, "this is not a war against Ukraine. We are at war with America, NATO, and proxies" (The Economist, 2022). Now the entire world attention remains focused on Russia. "Asia first" is missing. Ukrainian crisis sets the stage for a new superpower struggle. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has triggered a set of geopolitical shifts and challenges the world order at a precarious moment. This challenge has brought the West together. Germany has increased its defence spending. Switzerland has also joined the EU to enforce sanctions. Former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright argued that Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to revive Russia's imperial or Soviet past, adding that Moscow does not "have a right to chop the globe into spheres of influence as colonial empires did centuries ago" (New York Times, 2022).

Moscow and Beijing forged a partnership with "no limits," on February 4, 2022. President Putin wants the West to rewrite the post-Cold War security arrangements for Europe and Moscow in partnership with Beijing. Afghan lessons are not old, Moscow had gone to Afghanistan in 1979 to quote former US President Jimmy Carter to reach the "warm waters" of the Persian Gulf. Peter the Great's advice to his descendants was "urging Russia to pursue an aggressive approach to access warm waters" (Marshall, 2015). Moscow found itself mired in a long, grinding struggle against a Washington backed insurgency that forced to retreat a decade later. Afghanistan weakened the USSR and contributed to its withdrawal leading to its dismemberment.

Geographical location for power projection matters the most. Powerful countries seek to control geostrategic locations such as transit gates, seaways, mountain passes, hill sides, plateaus, lakes, water resources and oil rich locations and cities. They establish military bases

on foreign land or important geopolitical theaters, or close to their locations. They expect to gain strategic benefits from such bases. During the Cold War, if the West had North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the so-called socialist block had Warsaw Pact. Warsaw Pact was dissolved after the end of the Cold War. America insists on importance of developing a vast network of bases to confront counterterrorism and other regional threats, and also gain leverage from these bases “to press them to liberalize and grant the US the use of network of air bases, naval stations, pipelines and communication facilities in return they get economic assistance” (Cooley, 2005, 79-92). China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. The intensified high-profile engagements with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal, are taken as challenging Indian influence in South Asia. The 73-day standoff along the Bhutan-China-India tri-border region in 2017 was taken as a part of the Chinese plan among others to strategically encircle India through increasing engagements with its neighbours. The trijunction lies close to the Siliguri Corridor near the Nepal-India border known as “Chicken Neck” and described as a “terrifyingly vulnerable artery in India’s geography” (Panda, 2013). This corridor links India’s northeast to the rest of the country.

As “geostrategic shift has been marked by the Asianization of world politics” (Dahal, 2022) and the center of economic gravity moving from the Europe and North America to Asia, countries in the region have been displaying all their capacities and potentials to shape the twenty first century- as Asian Century. This shift is based on the remarkable progress of China followed by India. Chinese premier Li Keqiang after taking office chose to make his first foreign visit to India in 2013. Writing in the Hindu of May 20, 2013, he said “we live in an age of change but there are always certain things that are enduring forever refreshing and attractive. India is such a nation, at once old and young” (The Hindu, 2013). Premier Li wrote, “the world looks to Asia to be the engine driving the global economy. This would be impossible without the two powerhouses of China and India. Our two countries need to work hand in hand if Asia is to become the anchor of world peace. An Asian century that people expect would not come if China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, failed to live in harmony and achieve common development. Asia’s future hinges on China and India. If China and India live in harmony and prosper together, and if our two markets converge, it will be a true blessing for Asia and the world at large. China’s development promises opportunities for India, and India’s development promises opportunities for China. Our common development will benefit people of the two countries and offer the world more and better opportunities” (The Hindu, 2013).

The euphoria created by the visit soon evaporated. There was a border clash in Galwan valley for the first time in 45 years in June 2020. Since then, India-China relations are not only slowing, but they also remain at a conflictual mode. India considers China as the greatest challenge to its security. China’s growing diplomatic, military, economic and political footprints are viewed with grave concerns in India. India fears that its congenital foe, Pakistan- nuclear power state, is in deep relationship with China, which is characterized as “all-weather friendship, higher than Himalayas, stronger than steel, deeper than oceans and sweeter than honey.” Relations are being widened and deepened between them with a \$60 flagship project known as China-Pakistan Economic Partnership (CPEC) as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative(BRI).

Unfolding crises in countries and regions that are geostrategically sensitive establish that geopolitics never gives its way. The rise of new geopolitics is so significant that it has produced profound geopolitical consequences for region's security, stability, development, achievements and also conflicts, and troubles.

## **The Nepal Context**

Nepal's permanent home is between India and China, forming "the geopolitical heartland of Asia" (Dahal, 2022). The location of Nepal explains its contemporary challenges. Nepal has a landlocked geography and is exposed to myriads of vulnerabilities-geographical difficulties being among the prominent. Acutely aware of geography, the unifier of Nepal, king Prithvi Narayan Shah, laid down the basic tenets of Nepal's foreign policy in eighteenth century. He said, "This Kingdom (Nepal) is like a tarul (a root vegetable) between two stones. Great friendship should be maintained with the Chinese emperor. Friendship should also be maintained with the emperor of the southern seas (the British), but he is very clever. He has kept India suppressed. He is entrenching himself in the plains.... Do not engage in an offensive attack, fighting should be done on a defensive basis.... If it is found difficult to resist in the fight, then even means of persuasion, tact and deceit should be employed" (Yogi and Acharya, 1953). "Yam between two boulders" is the geostrategy Nepal has followed all through.

Understanding the geographical constraints of Nepal is helpful to understand and assess the nation's geographical strength and weaknesses. In the past, high Himalayas in the north stood as natural barrier from immemorial times, what Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru called "a magnificent frontier." Nehru told the Indian Parliament in 1950, "it is not quite so difficult as it used to be, still it is difficult... we cannot risk our own security by anything going wrong in Nepal which permits either that barrier to be crossed or otherwise weakens our frontier." During his visit to Nepal in June 1959, he said, "The Himalayas are a great force which none can affect. The Himalayas are the old friends of Nepal and India and guard us both" (Bhasin,1970).

Nepal shares borders (1880 kms) with India on the south, east, and west and with China (1415 kms) on the north. While border with India is open, mighty Himalayas constitute the frontier with China. Nepal is 23 and 68 times smaller than India and China respectively. Nepal's population of 29 million is almost 46 times smaller than India and 49 times smaller than China. Nepal is among the landlocked and least developed countries. The nearest seaport is 1,127 kilometers away in India. Kathmandu is 3,000 kilometers away from Beijing, 900 km away from New Delhi. This makes access to sea through China difficult, and exorbitantly expensive.

Nepal's foreign policy priority begins with neighbouring countries (Koirala, 2014). Relations with India and China are bound by religious, cultural, and ethnic linkages. Four of India's politically sensitive states and the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China which constitutes its "core concern" border Nepal. It is equally important to study mutually reinforcing ethnic linkages underlining critical geo-strategic location for peace, stability, and development in the entire region as ethnic linkages travel across the borders on both sides-north and south. Nepal's location is of extreme strategic and economic importance to both



of them. Once considered an obstacle, Nepal's location can be turned as opportunity. Nepal can serve as a gate way to South Asia for China and can work to widen prospect for improving the quality of lives of its people.

Nepal's land mass ranges from 62 meters in the south to 8,848.86 meters (The Kathmandu Post, 2020) elevations of Mount Everest in the north. Abundant water resources with a potential of producing 83,000 Megawatt, stand eternally waiting to be converted into hydropower. Rich deposits of minerals and precious plants in the diverse landscape are yet to be surveyed systemically. Nepal lives in scarcity amidst such an abundance. Scarcity of job opportunities has pushed over 6 million Nepali youth out of the country-majority of them being in the Gulf countries to look for work opportunities.

Nepal is uniquely rich in diversity with over 125 ethnic communities and equal number of languages. Nepal is a melting pot of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural, and multilingual groups. Cultural pluralism remains a unifying factor. Nepal's culture of tolerance, harmony, and respect for all remains firmly woven into the social fabric of its national life. But lately, under different pretexts in this strategically sensitive country, attempts are on for social engineering to weaken, break apart this social cohesion of lasting unity, draw divisions and create fault lines. The most and major challenging task is how such a diversity be firmly tied to unity in universal values of democracy, and rule of law.

In a pluralistic society like Nepal, democracy acts as glue to bind all these ethnic groups in one. It is absolutely essential that we make democracy meaningful to make it powerful. If democracy becomes disgraceful and goes the sectarian way, Nepal's geographical vulnerabilities will compound, and external forces will step in to exploit them to grind their axes. B.P. Koirala said in an interview, "If Nepal has to exist as a nation or develop as a nation, it must also develop democratic institutions." He argued, "unless we develop economically, unless the people are motivated, unless there are democratic institutions, our state cannot exist as an independent state sandwiched between two powers of Asia, both developing at a very fast rate. We cannot just stagnate, vegetate, tucked away on the slopes of the Himalayas" (Koirala,1977).

Following the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, unipolar moment was with the United States. Security became indivisible. Poor countries were considered sources of security problems. The emerging global order appears to be visibly and vastly different from the international order and global balance of power that preceded it. The ongoing rivalry and competition between the United States and China seen in other parts of the world appeared to have arrived at Nepal's doorsteps-thanks to Nepal's location between two emerging global powers China and India.

Nepal's geo-strategic location seems to be turning into a confluence of contest, competition, cooperation, and collaboration. In the ongoing geopolitical game and competition at various levels between China and the United States, China would try to push American power as far away from its borders as it could and reduce America's weight in international diplomacy. As China vigorously pursues peripheral diplomacy with 'security, diplomacy and economics' as its components, the U.S. would try to influence China's neighbors to contain and provide

counterweight to Chinese dominance. They would adopt whatever means they find it convenient in pursuit of their geopolitical goals. Geopolitics has no values and norms, it has only interests. The strong powers, as Greek historian Thucydides wrote, “do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

It was quite unusual for two global powers to do arms twisting over a development grant extended to a country that is nonaligned and trying to develop by mobilizing the goodwill, support and cooperation from its friends and well-wishers in the international community. The exchange of sharp words between the United States and China regarding the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s (MCC)- Nepal Compact that was granted to Nepal by the former reflects the growing sensitivity and fragility of Nepal’s geographic location and big powers’ ongoing rivalry and competition in Nepal.

Donald Lu, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in a reported phone call on February 10 had urged to endorse the MCC pact by February 28, or Washington would “review its ties with Nepal.” February 28 was the timeframe proposed by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and coalition partner Maoist Chair Prachanda in their September 2021 letter to MCC to “fulfill their commitments to MCC.” US State Department Spokesperson expressed concerns that the propaganda against MCC in Nepal had been “actively fomented or funded or encouraged or facilitated, or all the above, by China.” (Lu, 2022), and also some imaginative conspiracy theories “to place American troops on Nepalese soil” were in circulation, and “aided by Chinese-orchestrated disinformation campaigns” (The Economist, 2022). Such imaginative theories were utterly preposterous. Sharply reacting to the American official’s saying, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, China opposes “coercive diplomacy and actions that “pursue selfish agenda at the expense of Nepal’s sovereignty and interests.” China viewed that “such cooperation should be based on full respect for the will of the Nepalese people and come with no political strings attached.” (Wenbin, 2022) Beijing questioned “does a gift come with the package of an ultimatum? How can anyone accept such a “gift”? Is it a “gift” or Pandora’s box?” (Chunying, 2022). These expressions amply reflect the attempts of ‘geopolitical maneuverings and counter maneuverings’ which can hardly be ignored.

Amidst this exchange of sharp words between its two traditional friends, Nepal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, “Nepal has always been pursuing an independent, balanced and non-aligned foreign policy,” and as a sovereign country, it “accepts and utilizes development assistance... in terms of national interest, as per its national requirement and priority.” The Ministry clarified, “the sovereign parliament of Nepal alone decides what development assistance is needed in the best interest of Nepal and Nepali people ” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

It is time to accept the heightened sensitivity of Nepal’s geographic location, realize the gravity of these harsh realities, and ongoing geopolitical rivalry and competition between established superpower USA and emerging superpower China. The elevation of the Indo-Pacific as the center piece of US regional strategy, and Xi’s taking China to the center stage of global politics have seen an upsurge in US-China competition. The Sino-Indian border



clashes and their stable ties taking downward trend in almost half a century, have pushed toward deeper US-India partnership. This puts Nepal in a tight spot.

Nepal should develop a strategic culture and have a geostrategy for the skillful management of geostrategic sensitivity for the preservation of its sovereignty and protection of territorial integrity. An institutionalized global cooperation based on rule of law is what the world needs at the moment. We must not ignore the dynamic transformation that is generating a new set of strategic uncertainties and ambiguities in the neighbourhood and beyond.

The world has become more interdependent and interconnected. Nations' destinies have come to be intertwined. No nation, no matter how powerful, will be able to shape all the rules in its own image. It will need to be cooperative and confident. Important issues such as climate change, pandemic, nuclear proliferation, and other transnational issues that threatening the existence of the entire humanity need close cooperation and coordination of all-big or small nations alike. They should be fully conscious of shared responsibilities and shoulder responsibilities to address these pressing issues.

India and China along with the USA are key and dynamic geostrategic players. They are guided by their own interests. While Nepal stands ready to address their legitimate interests and concerns, it expects that its sensitivities and legitimate interests be respected by them also. Living for centuries with very big neighbours, both north and south, Nepal has been able to protect its sovereignty, and maintain a prestigious international profile. "In the past there have been the British, there have been the Mughals, there have been the Chinese and others. But basically, our neighbours have always been large. But we have always been able to live in this situation and this because we believe in having relations with our neighbours independent of one another" (Shah, 1974). Neighbours and friends in international community are expected in this strategically sensitive location to understand Nepal's geopolitical compulsions, and not to cross any redlines that destabilizes the country or deprive Nepal of its legitimate aspirations. Nepal pursues democratic pluralism at home and multipolarity in international relations. It wants the world to be governed by the rule of law and responsibility. Nepal pursues an independent foreign policy and judges every issue on its merits without fear or favour. There is no question of Nepal taking any sides. It has been an independent country throughout its history. This should be respected by our neighbours, friends and well-wishers in the international community.

## **Conclusion**

Geography matters more than anything else. States are products of geography which shapes human actions, behaviour and discourses. The influence of the geographical setting upon international power relations is so pervasive that there is no escape from geography. The size, character of territory population, social habits, and location are important in the study of international relations. Recognition of the relevance and importance of geopolitical thinking, appreciation of the meaning of the geographical settings for international political power shapes thoughts and actions. This demonstrates the importance of geopolitical insight and understanding.

The strategic importance of location is back at the center of geopolitics. The emergence of India and China as great economic powers is one of the most important geopolitical developments of contemporary human history. With China and India as the engines of growth, emergence as leading global players through their perseverance and performance, containing 40 percent of the world's population with them, and a huge market, they are at the center of the global attention. Today, reports indicate that out of every three persons on earth is of Chinese or Indian descent and the countries of the Indo-Pacific already account for 60% of the world's population. Their rise as world-class economies represent a monumental shift with a few parallels in world history. Given their growing role, power and influence, no sustainable world order can be created unless India and China come together, work together, and rise together.

Nepal's location between them, which was once considered an obstacle for development, can prove to be a boon in the changed context. We must seize the opportunities to benefit from both of these rising economies. Nepal maintains friendly relations with both India and China than they have with each other. Our friendship with both of these neighbors' remains of the paramount importance in the conduct of our foreign policy. Nepal should, therefore, work towards sharing their prosperity and further spreading it.

The hard lessons from emerging geopolitics include the ongoing rivalry between the US and China, resurgence of Russia and its 'intend to reassemble' the Soviet Union, India leaning towards the US, and the outbreak of the covid 19 pandemic and variants exposing the strength of all nations. Added to this phenomenon are discontents in globalization, and issues that continue to plague the world including widening inequality, rampant corruption, erosion of public trust in public institutions, high unemployment prevalent among the young people who finding no jobs turn to extremism. Nepal with a host of geographic challenges, burgeoning social and economic problems will become stable, democratic, and prosperous only if people are made strong and foundation of national power is cemented. Strengthening the national cohesion while enhancing capacity of democratic institutions to confront the emerging challenges will make Nepal the anchor of regional stability and security.

## References

- Albright, Madeleine .(2022). Putin's way is not path to greatness. *The New York Times*.
- Bhasin, A.S. (1970). *Documents on Nepal's Relations with India and China 1949-66*, New Delhi: Academic Books Ltd.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew.(1997). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York: BasicBooks, p.37.
- Carter, Colin A.(2011). China's Agriculture: Achievements and Challenge; University of California, cited in Ashley J. Tellis, (ed.), *Pursuing global reach: China's not so long march toward prominence*, in *Strategic Asia, 2019*, Washington D.C.: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2019.

- Chunying, Hua .(2022). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson at a regular press briefing on February 23, 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202202/t20220223\\_10644886.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202202/t20220223_10644886.html)
- Cohen, Saul B. (1964). *Geography and Politics in a Divided World*, London: Methuen, 1964.
- Cooley, Alexander. (2005). *Base Politics, Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, Vol. 84, No.6, pp.79-92.
- Dahal, Dev Raj. (2022). *Small States in a Globalized World*, Kathmandu: Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, 2022.
- Goldstein, Avery. (2002). Balance of Power Politics: Consequences for Asian Security Order, in Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*. California, Standford University Press, 2003, p.179.
- Gray, Colin S. (1996). A Debate on Geopolitics, The Continued Primacy of Geography in *Strategic Digest*, Volume XXVI, Number 7, July 1996, Editor: Jasjit Singh, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, pp. 1027-1035.
- Gray, Coin S., War. (1992). Peace, and Victory: Strategy and Statecraft for the Next Century (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 43-78; in *The Leverage of Sea Power. The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (New York: Free Press, 1992)
- Hershberg, James .(2022). Putin is repeating the USSR's mistakes, *Foreign Affairs*, February 23, 2022.
- Ikenberry, G. John. (2014). The Illusion of Geopolitics: The enduring power of the liberal order, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014.
- Lu, Donald and US State Department spokesperson in Prashant Jha. (2022). US believes China behind delay of \$500 m grant project in Nepal, *The Hindustan Times*, February 14, 2022, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-believes-china-behind-delay-of-500m-grant-project-in-nepal-101644830409010.html>,
- Jintao, Hu, Selected Works, Vol. 3, Beijing: People's Press, 2016, 234, cited in Rush Doshi, *The Long game: China's Grand Strategy to displace American Order*, Oxford University Press, 2021, 159-160.
- Kaplan, Robert D. (2009). Center Stage for the Twenty First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009, pp.16-32.
- Keqiang, Li .(2013). A Handshake Across the Himalayas, *The Hindu*, May 20, 2013, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead//article62114797.ec>
- Koirala, B.P. (1978). We are abandoned, Interview with B.P. Koirala by Associate Editor Theodore Jacqneney for Worldview, in Sushil Koirala (ed), *Democracy indispensable for Development*, Varanasi: Sandaju Publications, 1982.
- Koirala, Sushil. (2014). Priorities and Principles of Nepal's foreign policy, address by Prime Minister Sushil Koirala at a programme hosted in honour of Kathmandu based Heads of Diplomatic Missions on May 9, 2014, in Dinesh Bhattarai (ed), *Nepal's Foreign Policy: From Expediency to Pragmatism*, Kathmandu: Jananayak B.P. Koirala Memorial Trust, 2017.
- Mahan, Alfred Thayer. (1902). *Retrospect and Prospect: Studies in International Relations*, Naval and Political (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1902.

- Mahan, Alfred Thayer. (1890). *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co. 1890), p. 25.
- Mahubani, Kishore. (2022). *The Asian 21st Century*, Springer, p. 74.
- Marshall, Tim .(2015). *Prisoners of geography: ten maps that explain everything about the world*, New York, Scribner, p.19.
- Matthews, J. (1997). Power Shift, *Foreign Affairs*, 76, Jan-Feb 1997, pp.50-60.
- Mead, Walter Russell. (2014). The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal. (2022) available at <https://mofa.gov.np/response-of-mofa-spokesperson-to-be-issued-to-the-media/>, February 20, 2022.
- Panda, Ankit, Geography's curse: India's vulnerable 'Chicken Neck', The Siliguri corridor is a terrifying vulnerable artery in India's geography, *The Diplomat*, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/geographys-curse-indias-vulnerable-chickens-neck/>, November 8, 2013.
- President George W. Bush's speech on September 11, 2001, in Campbell, Kurt M., and Flournoy, Michael A., (eds), *To Prevail: An American Strategy for the campaign against terrorism*, CSIS Press, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001, p.351, 357, 359.
- See "Strategic Culture in Theory and Practice," part 1 in *Strategic Power: USA/USSR*, ed. Carl G. Jacobsen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Yitzak Klein, "A Theory of Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy*, Jan-March 1991, PP. 3-23, and Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security*, Spring 1995, pp. 32-64.
- Runciman, David.(2018). China's challenge to democracy, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2018.
- Rudd, Kevin .(2013). Beyond the Pivot: A New Road Map for US-Chinese Relations, *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 92, No..2 March/April 2013.
- Shah, Birendra Bir Bikram (1974). His Majesty grants interview to the New York Times, the Statesman and the Hindustan Times on March 9, 1974 in Bharat Kumar Prasai and Ratna Bir Tamrakar (compiled) *Royal Interviews 1965-1983*, Kathmandu: Gorakhatra Sansthan, 1984, pp. 16-17.
- Tunjic, Filip, War and Geopolitics-Really together again, *Strategic Digest*, Volume XX, Number 1, January 2000.
- The Economist*. (October 10, 2002). The Pearl River Delta: A new workshop of the world: Knitting together the world's most dynamic industrial region.
- The Economist*. (February 26, 2022). Where will he stop, History will judge Vladimir Putin harshly for his war, Russia's president has launched an unprovoked assault on his neighbour.
- The Economist*. (March 12, 2022). Banyan, The Yam between two boulders, It is getting harder for small states to balance great powers.
- The Kathmandu Post*. (December 8, 2020). 8,848.86 meters: That is the height of Mt. Everest, available at <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/12/08/it-s-official-mount-everest-is-8-848-86-metres-tall>, Accessed on April 3, 2022.

- Wenbin, Wang. (2022). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson at a press briefing on February 18, 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202202/t20220218\\_10643446.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202202/t20220218_10643446.html)
- Yew, Lee Kuan.(2002). The Cruel Game, Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 8, 2000.
- Yogi Narahari Nath and Acharya, Babu Ram. (eds). *Rastrapita Shri 5 Bada Maharaja Prithvi Narayan Shah Devko Dibya Upadesh, (Divine Counsel of the Father of the Nation, Five Times Illustrious Great Maharajas Prithvinarayan Shah)*, Kathmandu: Prithvi Jayanti Smaroha Samiti, 1951, pp.15-16, cited in Shah, Rishikesh, Foreign Policy, Pashupati Shumshere J.B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla, (eds.), *Nepal in Perspective*, Kathmandu: Center for Economic Development and Administration, 1973, p. 244.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Bhattarai, D. (2022) "Primacy of Geography in Nepal's Foreign Affairs"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44006>



# A Review of Environmental Vulnerabilities Related to Nepal's Graduation Process from Least Developed to a Developing Country Status

---

**Ambika P. Adhikari<sup>1</sup>**  
**Keshav Bhattarai<sup>2</sup>**  
**Basu Sharma<sup>3</sup>**

---

## **Abstract**

*Nepal has long aspired to graduate from the Least Development Country (LDC) to Developing Country category as defined by the United Nations system. Nepal had met two of the three graduating criteria and could have technically graduated from the LDC status in 2015. However, based on the Nepal government's request to defer the review, the new 2021 assessment by the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) recommended that the country should graduate from the LDC status by 2026. The graduation requires not only meeting pre-defined development-related thresholds, but also maintaining sustained improvements in at least two consecutive assessments in two of three areas: gross national income (GNI) per capita, human assets index (HAI), and economic and environmental vulnerability index (EnVI). Nepal's economy is dependent on several environment-related factors such as agriculture, tourism, hydro-power, and natural resources. This economic development is also solidly tied to the environmental well-being of the country. The authors agree with the Nepal government's desire to graduate from the LDC status. In this paper, we review the graduation process, assess indicators of the Environmental Vulnerability (EnVI), review the current situation with respect to environmental vulnerability, and point out where it needs to develop appropriate goals, policies, and programs to help the country graduate and join the ranks of developing countries.*

**Keywords:** Nepal, Least Developed Country, Developing Country, landlocked, environment, climate, vulnerability, United Nations.

“Sustainability is here to stay, or we may not be.”

- Niall FitzGerald.

## **Introduction**

The United Nations (UN) defines the Least Development Countries (LDCs) as “low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development” (UN DESA, 2022). The UN's Committee for Development Policy (CDP) regularly reviews the list of the LDCs to assess their progress for making any necessary changes to the categories. According to the UN, for a country to graduate from a LDC status to a developing country, it must meet

---

<sup>1</sup> Adjunct Distinguished Fellow, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Geography, University of Central Missouri, MO, USA

<sup>3</sup> Professor of Management, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, Canada

at least two of the three criteria: gross national income (GNI) per capita, human assets index (HAI), economic and environmental vulnerability index (EVI) (UNOHRLLS, 2019). In 2021, the respective thresholds for graduation were, Minimum GNI per capita of \$1,222; Minimum HAI of 66; and a maximum EVI of 32 (United Nations, 2021). Nepal's efforts to graduate from the LDC to developing status will need to be focused on all three criteria so that it meets at least two of the thresholds in two consecutive assessments by the UN's CDP. While we fully agree with Nepal's aspiration of graduating from the LDC status, here, we review the process of the graduation, and the current state of Nepal's economic and environmental vulnerability index (EnVI) and analyze how Nepal can do better in the EnVI arena. We examine whether despite being eligible to graduate from LDC Nepal can sustain the potentially high costs that often result in spending 2.1 to 3.7 percent of the total GDP during the year of disasters (Cavallo, Becerra, & Acevedo, 2021) to sustain the developing country status. The expenditures during the disaster years pose serious challenges to Nepal's economy because of the repetitive nature of natural disasters. To investigate this, we undertook literature survey using search engines like Academic Search Complete, Asian and European Business and References, Environmental Complete, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, and WorldCat and Google.com. We used environment, GNI, developing country, least developed country, Nepal, natural disasters, environmental changes, graduation, South Asia, and World Bank as keywords to search relevant sources. Since not all the disasters are the same, we focused on natural disasters in Nepal that affect people's lives and livelihoods. Also, we focused on who was affected, and how, when the disasters struck to understand how disasters cause destruction of human and physical capital that impact the economy. To analyze the local situations, we used gray literature from government and media to understand how one or more large and catastrophic disasters can impact the society.

We start our discussion with the UN sustainable development framework that divides the EVI into two areas: i) economic vulnerability index (EVI), and ii) environmental vulnerability index (EnVI). The UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021) provides the following four indicators to measure a country's performance related to the EnVI:

1. Share of population in low elevated coastal zones
2. Share of population living on drylands
3. Instability of agricultural production
4. Victims of disasters

The first of the EnVI indicators in the list is designed to provide information pertaining to vulnerability of people due to sea level rise and storm surges resulting from climate change. The second is related to vulnerability from global warming and its effects on desertification, land degradation, wildfires, and heat stress, especially in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid lands. The third indicator is concerned with instability in agricultural production. It is defined as "the standard deviation of the difference between agricultural production and its 20-year trend" (UNDESA, 2022). A high level of variability in agricultural production is indicative of high vulnerability due to natural shocks such as droughts and erratic rainfall patterns.



The fourth indicator is the share of population who are victims of disasters, defined as those killed or requiring immediate food, water, shelter, sanitation, or medical assistance. The first indicator does not apply to land-locked Nepal.

Even though Nepal has dry seasons resulting from global climate change, there are no large desert areas in the country. Thus, this second criterion applies only partially to Nepal, especially, for the western Churia (west of ~85° E longitude) range at the lower elevation and in the leeward sides of some mountainous ranges where rainfall is low. Both these areas have very thin settlements. Additionally, there has been an exodus of people from these areas to the urban areas the plains in the south. We do not focus in these areas. Thus, the second indicator related to drylands is also irrelevant to Nepal. The latter two are of utmost importance as over a third of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still accounted for by the agricultural sector, and because Nepal is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this paper is to assess the EnVI, review the current situation and point out areas where Nepal needs to develop appropriate goals, policies, and location-specific programs – in view of the diverse topography where climate/weather patterns vary within a short distances – to help the country do better in these areas for graduating from the LDC status, and sustaining the position of a developing country upon graduation.

## **Nepal's Progress Towards Graduation from LDC Status**

The UN CDP assesses a country's developmental status on whether a country meets the criteria for graduating from the LDC status and recommends graduation to other UN bodies for the final decision. Every three years, the CDP assesses the conditions of LDCs towards potential graduation. The first review of Nepal's potential towards graduating from the LDC status was done in 2015. At the time, Nepal had met two of the three graduating criteria and had technically become eligible for graduation. However, as the government of Nepal was concerned about the sustainability of the achievements, and that graduating from LDC status would make the country ineligible for certain trade-related benefits, it requested the CDP to defer its graduation until the next review in 2021. The CDP had deferred its recommendation to the second review that was done in 2021.

In its 2021 review, the UN CDP recommended that Nepal be graduated from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category and a five-year preparatory period for graduating into Developing Country in 2026. This information was relayed by Nepal's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York on February 26, 2021 (Nepal UN Mission (a), 2021). The CDP had said that Nepal met the threshold in two areas – Human Assets Index (HAI), and Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EnVI) – among three indices which are considered (FNCCI, 2021). Accordingly, Nepal was eligible to join the ranks of developing countries. Subsequently, CDP's recommendation for Nepal was endorsed by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2021. The final decision about the graduation of a country is made by the UN General Assembly. And Nepal's case for graduation was approved by the General Assembly in October 2021 (Nepal UN Mission (b), 2021).

To meet the EnVI criteria and make incremental progress, it is important for Nepal to fulfil the EnVI criterion sustainably. It must make sustainable progress in the EnVI elements because various sustainable development goal (SDG) targets have linkages with the graduation criteria (Khatun, Pervin, & Rahman, 2018). In its report, National Review of Sustainable Development Goals dated June 2020 (Government of Nepal, 2020) the Government of Nepal said its progress on SDG goals had been uneven. The report stated that while progress in some areas such as poverty reduction and gender equality, afforestation and reforestation had been impressive, challenges remained in the areas such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, and disaster management.

In its 15th National Plan, the Government of Nepal has aligned the country's development plans with many of the SDG targets. Actions taken by governments during previous plans and their continuation in the current plan led to progress in achieving some of the SDGs. For example, Nepal's poverty rate (SDG #1) was unusually high—38 per cent in 2000, which declined to 21.6 per cent by 2015 (National Planning Commission, 2020).

In terms of the adverse impact of climate change, Nepal is considered one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. An increased frequency of extreme weather events in recent years substantiates this. According to a Government of Nepal Report (IDS\_Nepal, \_PAC; GCAP, 2014), 1.5 to 2 percent of Nepal's GDP is lost due to such extreme climate events. The report added that in the years with extreme events, such economic loss can rise to 5 percent of the GDP. Nonetheless, the Government has become proactive in taking climate action (SDG #13) to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. Nepal has also made commitments to maintain and manage 45 per cent of the total area of the country under forest cover (SDG #15), to enhance carbon sequestration through soil and forest carbon storage, and to promote green economy, among others (NPC, 2020). However, spatial circumstances suggest that Nepal's environmental conditions are also significantly influenced by the industrial activities of its northern and southern neighbors.

Graduation from a LDC to a developing country is an important milestone for Nepal because it can boost national pride and signify a global recognition of its development achievements. It also provides a rebranding opportunity to attract foreign investors. Nepal has become a unique case in 2021 in that it has been recommended for graduation without meeting the GNI per capita criterion. However, meeting the criteria for being recommended to graduate only at a base level does not bring the process to finality. Maintaining the weights of the indices until graduation and sustaining them afterwards are more important. A weaker economy can have adverse consequences for building human assets and reducing economic vulnerability. Graduation also brings new economic challenges and demands full attention of policy makers to address them.

## **Trade-offs Related to Graduation from LDC Status**

As an LDC, Nepal has been receiving concessional loans, grants, and aid from various bilateral and multilateral donors. Many of these benefits will no longer be available in concessional

terms upon graduation. Grant assistance will also be unobtainable in some cases. It will have to be replaced by loans that require both principal and interest repayment. Also, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, two of the major lenders, will charge a higher interest rate on loans after the country transitions from a low-income country to a lower-middle income country category, which can roughly correspond to the transition from LDC to developing country. There will also be restrictions or higher costs on accessing vertical funds such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and Fund for Climate Change. As the country will need to move away from aid and grants to investment for financing economic growth, the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) will be critical in managing the transition.

FDI comes in a package of investment capital, technical know-how and managerial competence. Thus, it is a vital resource for economic growth and employment creation. In addition, FDI is also a conduit of export promotion. For these reasons, many developing countries, including India and China, have created investment friendly environments and have provided incentives to attract FDI. Nepal however has not had an abundance of FDI as investors often perceive the country as one where corruption and a cumbersome bureaucracy can make setting up, operating businesses, and repatriating profits challenging. Nepal needs to alleviate such perceptions by making the country investment friendly.

As LDC, Nepal enjoys preferential market access for its exports under different trade regimes. After graduation to developing country status, it will lose the duty-free quota-free (DFQF) benefits. Additionally, since the reciprocal trade preference to its counterparts will come to an end upon graduation, Nepal will enter a more competitive environment in the global trading arena. Several WTO rules and requirements that Nepal is currently exempt from as an LDC will have to be observed (FNCCI, 2021). These changes may adversely impact international trade/economic growth performance, increasing the possibility for economic as well as environmental vulnerability.

However, some mechanisms and negotiated approaches are available to smoothen the path to graduation and its sustenance. We outline these mechanisms below:

- i. In the export sector, the provision of DFQF access to European Union and the U.K. are generally extended for three years after graduation.
- ii. China, India, and many other countries may also extend the LDC scheme to Nepal for a certain period after graduation.
- iii. Nepal can also negotiate bilateral and regional free trade agreements as necessary. What is important at the beginning is to have a good transition plan to address these challenges for mitigating the adverse effects.
- iv. Nepal can also learn from the experience of Bangladesh's export success in apparels in its economic transformation (Razzaque, 2018), and emulate strategies for success in exporting carpets.
  - a. The U.N. has given Nepal five years (until 2026) to prepare for graduation.
  - b. Even after graduation, most of the concessions are extended for another three years, giving enough time for the transition to be smooth.

In addition, Nepal must also review the following issues related to her vulnerabilities.

- i. About 2-4 million Nepalis work outside the country and sent remittances in the order of about 24 percent of GDP in 2020 (World\_Bank, 2020). This dependence on remittances has contributed to low productivity growth, and triggered a muted structural transformation of the economy, where the share of agriculture in the economy has rapidly declined without a significant movement of workers out of agriculture to industries. Indeed, some 25 percent of agricultural land in the hills has been left barren due to the exodus of the able-bodied workforce (Online\_Khabar, 2021). Thus, the labor released from agriculture has been transformed into migrant workers seeking employment in foreign countries. Consequently, Nepal has been suffering not only from the “hollowing out” effect as more and more skilled workers and professionals migrate, but also from the alteration of the agricultural ecosystem in the hills to the detriment of production.
- ii. In the case of a normal structural transformation of the economy, low-productivity agricultural labor is absorbed by the industrial sector. The industrial sector keeps on expanding until all the surplus labor from agriculture is absorbed. Once that process is complete, productivity and wages begin to rise. This is not happening in Nepal because of the low level of industrialization.
- iii. Given the situation of a large percentage of population constituting of young people with almost half a million people entering the workforce each year, Nepal should be able to take advantage of its demographic dividend (World\_Bank, 2017). But the dividend is now collected by the foreign countries which employ the migrant workers.
- iv. Through better policies, Nepal can develop several productive schemes for utilizing remittances and skills gained in foreign countries by returning migrants as a stop-gap measure (Sharma, 2020). Capacity enhancement, achieved through an effective use of trained human capital, with financial resources earned from remittances will help in creating, conserving, and sustainably managing the environment, and contribute towards reducing the country’s environmental vulnerability.

## **Maintaining Progress Related to the Environmental Vulnerability Index**

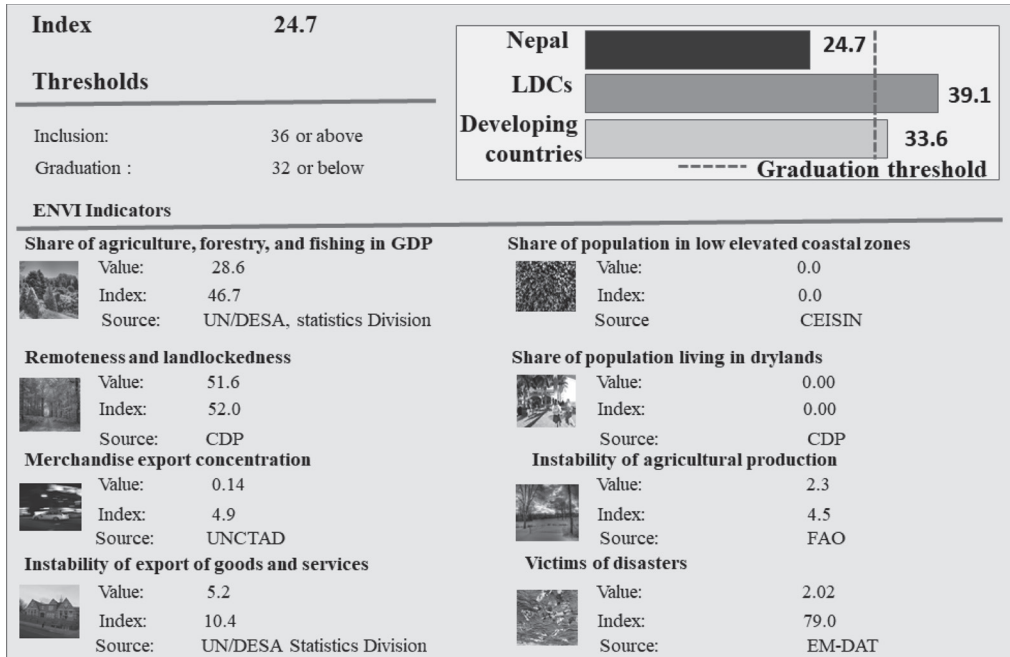
The CDP review in 2021 noted that Nepal had managed to make significant progress and to build resilience despite many challenges. Its heavy reliance on remittances and limited foreign direct investment (FDI) add uncertainty with regards to its recovery from the COVID-19 crisis since early 2020. The 2021 CDP review said, “For the smooth transition strategy, the Committee calls upon the Government to ... build resilience to disasters, accelerate economic diversification and enhance the capacity of the central and local governments” (UNCDP, 2021).

The CDP’s recommendation to Nepal for a developing economy status in 2021 are based on HAI, EnVI and GNI/Capita (Table 1; and Fig. 1).

**Table 1:** Criteria for graduation from LDC to Developing status economy

Criteria	Requirements	Nepal's attainment
Human Development Index (HDI)	64 or higher	74.9
Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EnVI)	32 or lower	24.7
Gross national income criterion (GNI/capita)	\$1,222 or higher	1,027

Economic and environmental vulnerability index(ENVI)\*



**Fig.1. Nepal's Economic and environmental vulnerability situation in 2021.**

Source: Redrawn from (UN, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021)

Note: This diagram uses Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) and EnVI abbreviations interchangeably.

The CDP report shows how Nepal has satisfied the two requirements for graduating from the LDC status. Accordingly, Nepal's Human Assets Index (HAI) is 74.9, whereas the minimum threshold needed for graduation is 64. A higher HAI number is better. Nepal's Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EnVI) is 24.7. The requirement to graduate from the LDC status is an index score of 32 or below. In the case of EnVI, a lower score is better. However, Nepal had not met the income criteria (GNI per capita) because it was \$1,027 in 2021 against \$1,222 or higher required for graduation.

Following the review, the CDP said,

“The Committee recommends Nepal for graduation, noting that it continues to meet the human assets index and the economic and environmental vulnerability index criteria, while

approaching the threshold for graduation of the gross national income criterion. Nepal has managed to make significant development progress and build resilience despite many challenges”. (UNCDP, 2021)

Nepal’s development is strongly related to its efforts to conserve and enhance its natural resources and improve and maintain its agricultural production in keeping with population increase and higher income per capita. Similarly, Nepal must have plans, programs, resources, and tools to deal with disasters that people regularly encounter such as floods, earthquakes, storms, landslides, droughts, and other emerging climate-related disasters.

Although Nepal met the EnVI threshold required for graduating from the LDC status, continuous work needs to be done by the country to reduce the vulnerabilities. The following paragraphs review and discuss each of the indicators.

## **EnVI Graduation Criteria in the Nepali Context**

### ***Share of population in low elevated coastal zones***

This indicator implies that the population living in low elevated coastal zones is subject to the damages and losses brought about by the impending climate change that causes sea level to rise. As Nepal is landlocked and does not have any coastal areas this criterion does not apply. Hence, the UN CDP report of 2021 shows the value and indicator for this element is zero.

However, Nepal does have low lying lands that are on the flood plains of various rivers that are prone to annual flooding. The damages caused by floods, including loss of human life and property, are significant. Climate change has worsened the situation. It is important that Nepal minimizes the loss and damage from floods, which are likely to continue as climate change increases both the frequency and magnitude of floods and storms in the flood plains. This issue is discussed further in Section 5.4.

### ***Share of population living on drylands***

According to Greenfacts (Greenfacts.org, 2022), drylands are the land areas where the mean annual precipitation is less than two thirds of potential evapotranspiration from soils and plants. The UN CDP report of 2021 shows the value and indicator for this for Nepal to be zero. This implies that Nepal does not have any permanent population living in the areas defined as drylands.

There are no hot deserts in Nepal. Landless squatters are settled in some areas without irrigation facilities, such as Churia and Bhabar regions. However, technologies like rain harvesting, storing rainwater in ponds, and piped water supply have helped the settlers to grow kitchen gardens and backyard crops that do not need regular external irrigation. These regions have small populations, which has been further reduced by migration to urban areas, to the plains/ Terai and for work abroad.



### ***Instability of agricultural production***

According to Sustainable Competitiveness Observatory, instability of agricultural production “reflects ... the vulnerability of countries to natural shocks, in particular impacts of droughts and disturbances in rainfall patterns” (SCO, 2018). For this indicator, the CDP report has allotted a value of 2.3 for Nepal against the index of maximum 4.5 (a lower value is better) as graduation threshold.

In its 2018 report, UN CDP (UNCDP, 2018) said that agriculture is a significant component of Nepal's economy contributing some 33 percent to the GDP. Further, agriculture employs many individuals and provides regular income to most rural households. As many able-bodied young Nepalis are now leaving the hinterlands, agricultural production has been experiencing an adverse impact caused unavailability of workers.

In 2010, only 29.7 percent of agricultural land in Nepal had access to perennial irrigation facilities (World Bank, 2010). Rest of the farming depended on monsoon rainfall that also made the production unpredictable. Since production fluctuates based on too much or too little rain annually, the Nepalis often joke about the economy being more dependent on the monsoon rains and less on economic policy.

Global climate change and climate-induced disasters affect agricultural production in Nepal. Since global temperature is likely to increase by at least 2°C from preindustrial levels before 2100 (IPCC, 2018), this will have multiple, far-reaching consequences for ecosystems, their services, and human populations in Nepal. As the mountain ecosystem deteriorates, communities living within the watershed areas face food insecurity because of crop losses due to phenological changes (Fig. 2) from droughts, floods, and soil erosion (Mills, D., & Manji, 2020).

Climate change leads to instability of agricultural productivity due to dry spells, delayed monsoon, and more frequent extreme climate events such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, wildfire, heat waves, hailstorm, and cloudbursts. Household food insecurity is experienced differently by different socio-economic groups. For example, poor and disadvantaged groups will suffer more than the well-off groups. Even though many disadvantaged groups have been able to improve their living conditions through remittance in recent years, this is not sustainable in the long run. Policies need to target how to harness the temporary benefits obtained from the remittance through proper investments and long-term productivity gains. Climate policies should on promoting sustainable livelihoods for the vulnerable groups.

Unexpected levels of precipitation, floods, storms and changing temperatures have impacted the general stability of weather that many farmers had experienced. Evidence suggests that inter-annual and intra-annual climatic fluctuations negatively impact agricultural productivity. For example, an increase in temperature reduces crop yields and encourages pest proliferation (Nelson, et al., 2009). Further, the changes in precipitation patterns increase the chances of short-run crop failure and long-run production decline. Table 2 shows the estimated quantity of rice crop destroyed in Nepal by the October 2021 floods.

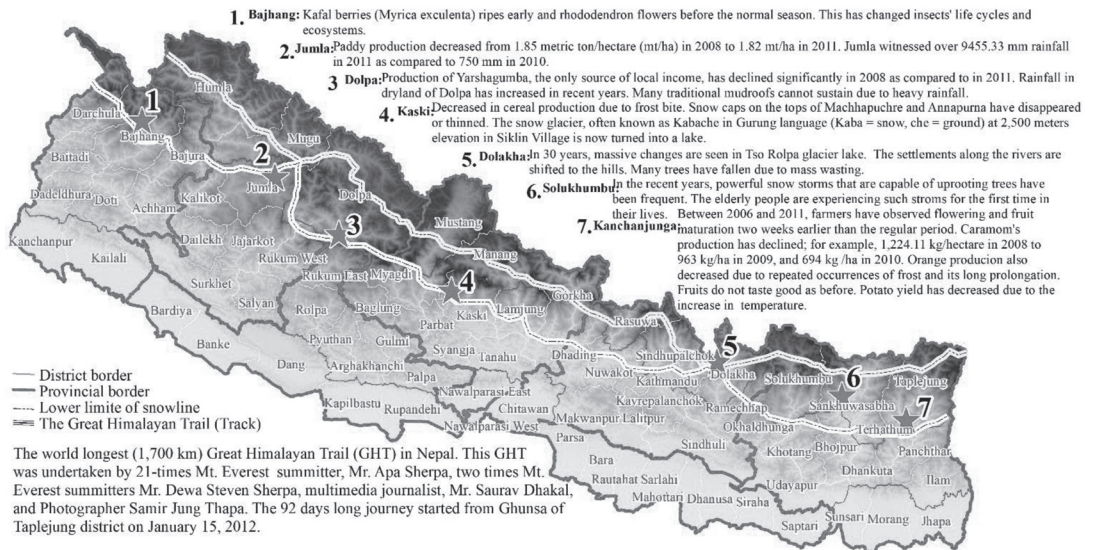
**Table 2:** Destruction of rice crop in October 2021 due to the torrential rain

Province	Flooded rice area (ha)	Area under rice crop destroyed by October 2021 flood (area in hectares)				Estimated quantity of rice destroyed (metric tons)	Total cost of destruction in million US Dollars
		Total destruction	Partial destruction	Slightly damaged	Relief Able Area		
Province 1	49,945	6,722	16,806	26,554	13,092	49,748	13.93
Province 2	48,684	5,355	30,500	12,829	15,146	57,557	16.11
Bagmati (3)	530	530	0	0	530	2,014	0.61
Gandaki (4)	1,192	1,192	0	0	1,192	4,530	1.26
Lumbini (5)	42,427	42,427	0	0	42,427	161,223	45.24
Karnali (6)	2,767	2,767	0	0	2,767	10,515	2.95
Sudur Pakshim (7)	46,849	32,000	0	0	36,455	138,528	38.79
	192,394	90,993	47,306	39,383	111,609	424,115	118.89

Source: (Adhikari A. , 2021)

Because of the undulated topography, fragile, and sandy soils in the plain and some parts of the hills, Nepal is hypersensitive to natural calamities such as landslide and floods in the monsoon season. Similarly, due to unscientific cropping systems, inappropriate infrastructure and poor technology, Nepal’s agriculture is equally sensitive to the long dry spells and high temperature during spring season and impacts of climate change (Fig. 2).

Generally, heavy rainfall occurs in Nepal during the monsoon season, but in 2021, Nepal witnessed unseasonal heavy rainfall shortly after the monsoon season. This unprecedented rainfall damaged an estimated 35 percent of the crops at the time of harvest (UN Nepal,



**Fig. 2. Climate change has changed livelihood patters of people all over Nepal**

Source: Adapted from (Bhattarai & Conway, 2021)



2022). A recent survey by UN Nepal has revealed the damages caused by unprecedented floods, landslides, and heavy rainfall cause most damage in Nepal (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Disaggregated hazard incidences (percentages) in Nepal

Incidence	House damaged/ destroyed	Damage to land	Damage to assets	Loss of crops	Loss of livestock	People displaced
Flood	57	42	44	86	30	26
Landslide	72	84	54	75	32	44
Heavy rains	53	56	33	83	21	25

*Redrawn from source: (UN Nepal, 2022).*

The same survey also revealed that of the 77 administrative districts of Nepal, in 12 districts<sup>4</sup>, school going children faced problems of residence (52%), health care (42%), food aid (34%), access to clean water (32%), child protection (27%), and lack of child friendly spaces (21%) due to infrastructure damages caused by unprecedented climatic events. Further, over 70 percent of the households were concerned about their food security followed by financial problems (62%), safety of family (43%), and shelter (21%). This had compelled many family members to borrow money (52%) from various sources for expenses, while some household members (47%) who were affected by the unprecedented rainfall, were planning to leave home for employment. Yet, some households (20%) were unsure where to go and how to sustain their livings (UN Nepal, 2022). These 12 districts are merely examples; similar situations have been reoccurring in various parts of the country due to unexpected weather and climatic conditions triggered by global warming.

Due to frequent and often consecutive drought years, food production and yield have been negatively impacted. For example, in the western region of the country, food production decreased by 12.5 percent, and in the eastern sector, it decreased by six percent between 2002 and 2005 (Regmi, 2007). In the tropical regions of Nepal, higher temperatures adversely affect rice yield. For every 40C increase in average ambient temperature, the average crop yield is reduced by 3.4 percent (roughly 0.8 per cent average crop yield decrease for every 1°C increase in temperature). Every 10 C rise in temperature has reduced rice yield by 0.15 percent (Joshi, Maharjan, & Luni, 2008). Without CO2 fertilization, effective adaptation, and genetic improvement, each degree-Celsius increase in temperature means a decrease in yield of these crops. In another observation, wheat crop production has decreased by six percent, rice by 3.2 percent, maize by 7.4 percent, and soybean by 3.1 percent between the period of 2007 and 2013 (Zhao, et al., 2017) mainly due to the increase in temperature, holding other variables constant.

**Victims of Disasters**

Nepal has been experiencing an increased brunt of disasters in the past several years. This is due to the combination of many factors including climate change, rapid urbanization often on vulnerable lands including flood plains, construction of roads on unstable slopes,

---

4 Bajhang, Banke, Bardiya, Dang, Darchula, Doti, Ilam, Kailali, Kanchanput, Morang, Panchthar, and Saptari.

and regular, but increasing frequency of natural calamities such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and unprecedented storms/rains. The UN CDP 2018 report noted that “Nepal’s geographical location exposes it to extreme precipitation, seismic activities and landslides.” This has contributed to increasing incidents of human death, loss of livestock and agricultural products, and destruction of infrastructure.

In an environmentally vulnerable country like Nepal, multiple environmental shocks can often occur in close succession. A case in point is the 2015 earthquake with epicenter in Gorkha, which was followed by above-normal rainfall in the monsoon season. The 7.8 magnitude (Richter Scale) earthquake killed some 9,000 individuals, and destroyed many houses that were not earthquake resistant. It took several years for Nepal to bounce back from the tragedy, and even today, many of the displaced families remain without permanent homes and away from their farming lands.

The unprecedented rainfall after the earthquake led to severe landslides as water percolated into cracks created by the earthquakes. As the country was already shaken by the earthquake, the above-normal rainfall led to increased incidences of landslides, destruction of agricultural land and assets, disruption in distribution of food aid, and damage of roads and communications infrastructures (Randell, Jiang, Liang, Murtugudde, & Sapkota, 2021).

Environmental vulnerability can adversely affect year-round access to safe and enough food. This will become an impediment for attaining one the SDGs related to ending global hunger by 2030. A better understanding of the effects of the intertwined, location-specific climate and disaster events will be necessary to design appropriate response to these vulnerabilities.

Nepal has more than 6,000 rivers and rivulets with a total cumulative length of 45,000 km. Many rivers flood during the monsoon season impacting families, livestock, and agriculture near the rivers and in the flood-plains. Torrential rains can also cause landslides that cause loss of lives and property. Nepal does not have strong flood-plain related regulations, specifically restricting construction and human habitation on areas that could be flooded in intervals of 50 or 100 years. Nepal needs to enhance its survey, mapping, and identification of the flood plain types where human settlements and construction activities need to be restricted through appropriate regulations.

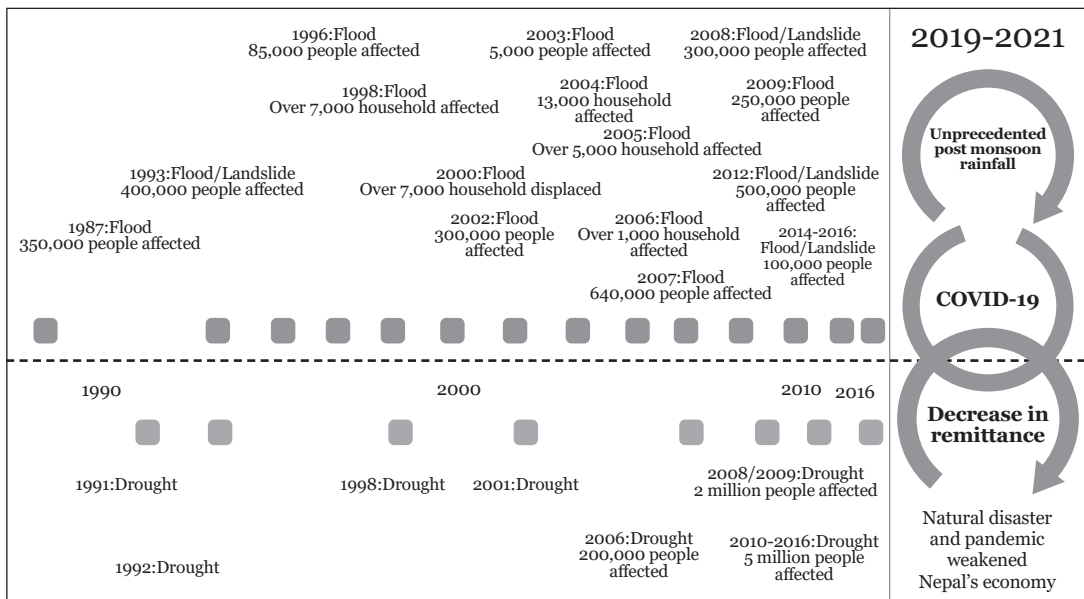
According to World Bank data, 28.68 percent of the total land in Nepal was arable in 2015 (World Bank, 1961-2018). Of this, less than 30 percent had perennial irrigation facilities. Agricultural production is reasonably stable (with little fluctuations due to extreme temperature) in the lands that are irrigated throughout the year. However, it is difficult to forecast production for lands that fully depend on rainfall, and which can often be affected by landslides and flooding.

Nepal has prepared various disaster mitigation plans and policies at the national, provincial, and local levels. But there are major gaps in disaster risk preparedness. Mitigation plans for accidental floods and landslides that destroy thousands of lives and expensive infrastructure (Vij, et al., 2020) are not well laid out despite claims about policy makers working for enhancing

the resilience of vulnerable communities (Djalante, Holley, & Thomalla, 2011). There is a lack of financial and human resources government departments at all three levels in Nepal for building community resilience and adaptive capacity to mitigate disasters. Despite having limited capacities, governments provide rhetorical encouragement to enhance response and recovery programs in the disaster policies and plans (Vij, et al., 2020).

The Government of Nepal had prepared the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) in 2010 to mitigate climate change through a consultative process. NAPA has become a strategic tool to assess climate vulnerability and systematically respond to climate change by developing appropriate adaptation measures. It hopes to attract funds from international donor agencies for its work. Additionally, Nepal also prepared climate change policy (2011), Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPA) framework to mitigate climate related incidences and to offer services to local communities. Recently, Nepal has developed a new national climate change policy, aligning its goals with the new federal structure of Nepal (Vij, et al., 2020).

Though Nepal spreads across 4° in latitude in the northern hemisphere and 8° in longitude in the eastern hemisphere, within this narrow range the elevation ranges from 65 m in the south to 8,848 m in the north. Elevation variations create different aspects, slopes, and orientation, where solar irradiance varies and impacts vegetation growth. Global climate change has brought several crop phenological anomalies. For example, citrus, and rhododendron have been flowering in the month of December instead of late February and early March (Sharma B. , 2020). These aspects and slopes also bring significant variations in rainfall patterns. Seasonal variations in rainfall patterns significantly impact agricultural practices and living conditions.



**Fig. 3. Natural disasters in Nepal**

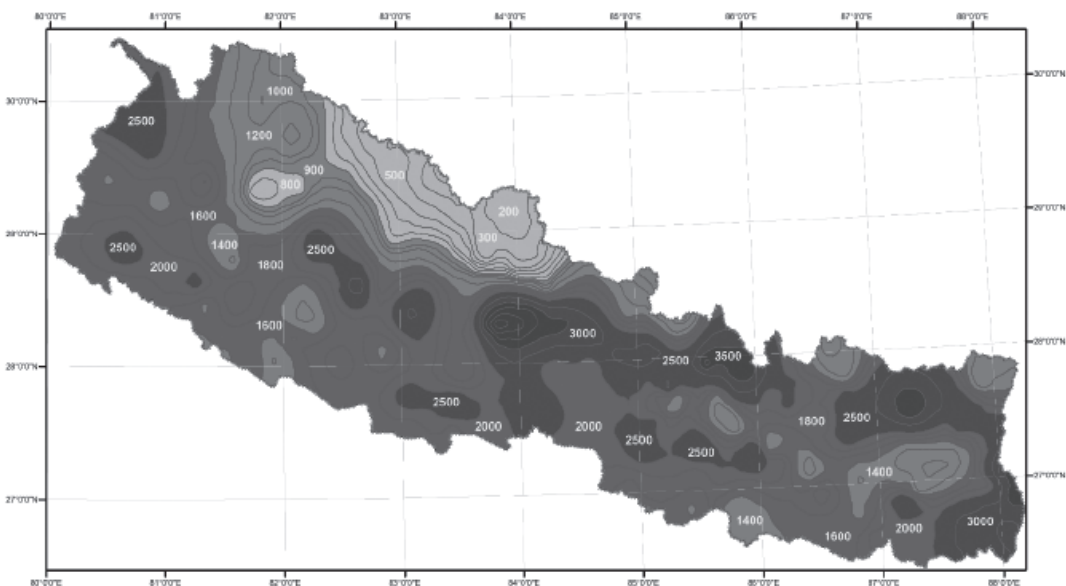
Source: Modified from (Bhattarai & Conway, 2021)

In addition, planners and policy makers also need to take into account different microclimatic conditions. For example, in the third week of October 2021, the torrential rainfall caused a loss of \$119 million worth of rice (Table 2).

Nepal receives rainfall from monsoonal winds that are caused by the low-pressure systems in the Bay of Bengal, which move north making the westerly winds active. That brings orographic precipitations in Nepal starting from the east and ending in the west. Since the late 1990s, intense rainfalls have caused several flood events. Rainfall is intense when more than 100 mm of rain occurs within 24 hours.

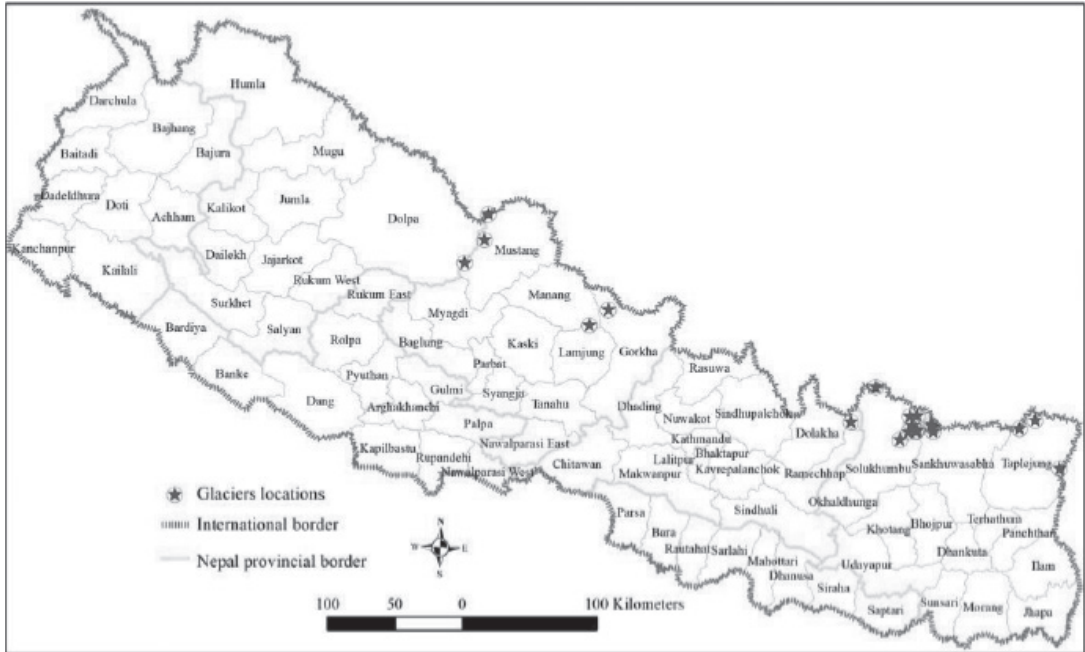
Further, the rainfall patterns have been erratic. For example, in 2004, Rampur, Chitwan witnessed 405-millimeter rainfall within 24 hours, and in 2005, 311 mm, but in 2021, the same place witnessed maximum rainfall of only 125 mm (Sharma K. , 2021). In late October 2021, , western Nepal received 211 mm of rainfall within 24 hours. Some areas such as Dipayal (Doti district) received 166 mm, Ghorahi (Dang district) 133 mm, and Bhairahwa (Rupandehi district) received 112 mm (Nepali Times, 2021). Rainfall varies widely across Nepal (Fig. 4). This has implications for food production and household food security (Gautam & Anderson, 2017).

Torrential rainfall in general, and late monsoon rains, cause floods and landslides and significant damages. Additionally, global climate change coupled with the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, has added to the woes of many communities. Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), an incidence that is exacerbated by climate change at the regional and global levels, damage infrastructure and cause loss of lives and property in the downstream catchment areas (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 4. Non-uniform precipitation in Nepal (mm/yr.). Isohyets.**

Source: Adapted from Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (Nepal) data 2021(DHM, 2021).



**Fig. 5: Location of glacial lakes in Nepal.**  
 Source: Adapted and modified from (Bhattarai & Conway, 2021)

In addition to the risks from GLOFs, high intensity rainfall has increased the risk of slope failures and landslides. Landslides sweep away homes, bridges and roads after heavy rain and flash floods (Hearth, 2021). In 2020, disasters caused by continuous rainfall killed 360 people and affected 23,478 families (117,390 individuals). In 2020, 5,125 houses were destroyed, and 7,457 houses were partially damaged, displacing around 7,000 families mostly by landslides. Various hazards have led to loss of lives and damage of infrastructure (Tables 3, 4, &5). Further, local governments in Nepal routinely resort to build unplanned or badly planned roads on unstable slopes (sometimes colloquially known as “bulldozer engineering”), which often results in slope failures and the complete destruction of the roads during the rains.

**Table 4: Disaster types and impact in Nepal**

Types of disasters	Events			Human and livestock losses (Head counts)				Property			
	Total	Loss with monetary values	Loss without monetary values	Deaths	Missing	Injuries	Livestock	Houses		Farmland (lost from landslides/floods)	Estimated values (Million in rupees)
								Perished (Lost)	Damaged		
Accident	2375	15	2360	2395	330	1051	35	66	648	61	94
Anthropogenic causes	1450	1019	431	266	0	462	108285	6269	583	167	5062
Others	124	3	121	255	81	285	0	59	5	0	1
Subtotal Manmade disasters	3949	1036	2913	2917	411	1798	108320	6394	1236	228	5157
Biological	3950	18	3932	16839	0	43115	79643	0	0	47865	25
Climate related	6016	3650	2366	1346	18	1336	22340	77265	2420	514422	27170
Geophysical	316	16	300	9719	0	29361	516353	639817	343647	0	7060580

Types of disasters	Events			Human and livestock losses (Head counts)				Property			
	Total	Loss with monetary values	Loss without monetary values	Deaths	Missing	Injuries	Livestock	Houses		Farmland (lost from landslides/floods)	Estimated values (Million in rupees)
								Perished (Lost)	Damaged		
Hydrological	7828	1572	6256	9475	1927	2666	554945	118856	157643	297950	17208
Meteorological	4531	547	3984	3174	40	4386	12901	4607	18685	264063	5323
Others	884	78	806	937	552	1064	183	1851	632	30055	78
Subtotal Natural disasters	23525	5881	17644	41490	2537	81928	1186365	842396	523027	1154355	7110386
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>27474</b>	<b>6917</b>	<b>20557</b>	<b>44407</b>	<b>2948</b>	<b>83726</b>	<b>1294685</b>	<b>848790</b>	<b>524263</b>	<b>1154583</b>	<b>7115543</b>

Source: (MoHA, 2019)

According to the UCN CDP report (2018), “Overall, about 37 percent of the country’s population is considered exposed to climate-related factors, particularly in the areas such as agriculture, forestry, water and energy, health, infrastructure, and tourism” (UNCDP, 2018).

**Table 5:** Number of victims of natural disasters in Nepal (1971-2017)

Period	Disaster Events	Human (Death & Missing)	Human Injuries	Livestock Lost	Farmland (ha)	Educational Center	Medical Center	Other lost	Other Damaged	Reported loss (Million RS)
1971-75	757	1573	1302	4538	20940.34	8	0	6943	1271	24.81
1976-80	1088	1926	959	14217	61247.3	68	1	24926	14678	59.17
1981-85	1020	2971	1241	11939	18055.71	33	0	7303	2795	166.15
1986-90	1044	2580	13722	3392	13408.69	2401	0	31376	50048	462
1991-95	2512	6470	3240	28835	351338.9	22	1	41299	38352	3604.66
1996-00	2437	5912	3583	32666	131093.4	25	3	46965	17937	2489.74
2001-05	4573	5533	19307	38073	174629.2	86	4	24576	12413	4238.33
2006-10	4820	3897	13164	519178	217883.3	2076	17673	25516.94	40527.04	4129.79
2011-17	5274	13165	25410	533527	165758.7	27900	3627	628638	329203.5	7093648

Source: EM-DAT: The Emergency Event Database- Universite Catholique de Louvain (UCL)- CRED, D. Guha-Sapir- www.emdat.be, Brussels, Belgium. (EM-DAT, 2017)

## Some Policy Considerations

Centralized and decentralized systems have implications for administrative capacity and efficiency in environmental management. Nepal became a federal republic in 2015, but the federal structure is still evolving and therefore it may take some for the country set its priorities particularly in terms of the new climate-induced natural disasters. Several coordination bodies have been set up, but these agencies lack capacity, knowledge, and resources to design mechanisms of successful disaster governance. There have been frequent changes in the government in the recent past. For example, 23 governments were formed between 1990 and 2017 (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2017), and two governments were formed between 2017 and 2021. Such changes in government leadership have created unstable work environments and weakened institutions. In theory, federalism has decentralized the power structure, but clear mandates and division of power to delineate the authority of the different levels of governments remain to be finalized. Nepal can improve its management of natural resources and can minimize the impacts of future disasters through coordinated policies of federal, provincial, and local governments.



As it is clear from the data and discussion presented above, that there are issues related to both the instability of agricultural production and victims of disasters that will need to be addressed. Addressing these issues strategically and on time is the way forward towards graduation to a Developing Country. Continued progress in the human and economic development depends heavily on the Government's ability to manage natural resources (for example, greenery for carbon sequestration) and minimize disaster losses by carefully using location-specific environmental variables in development planning. Towards these objectives, Nepal needs to devise several environment, agriculture, and disaster related policies to sustain the gains made in these areas and be able to maintain progress after graduation. For example, Nepal can consider schemes for using the currently bare and fallow lands and adopt measures to conserve its natural resources and protect the environment. Food security for the people is an important component of the goal to reduce environmental and economic vulnerability. The government also needs to consider how the disadvantaged groups in the country are protected from food-insecurity and environment-induced disasters.

While Nepal has made progress in many of these fronts while working towards attaining the SDG goals and the country's own policy priorities, increased focus is required for attaining the EnVI goals to support Nepal's graduation from the LDC status.

Nepal needs to establish sound earthquake safety policies, programs, and standards for all types of infrastructure to minimize and eliminate the loss from the future earthquake events. Earthquake safety can be achieved by following disaster resilient urban planning and design guidelines (Malla, 2015). For example, buildings that have symmetrical plans and elevations, and include minimal cantilevered floors, slabs, and projections from walls, have low height, lower center of gravity, equal floor height, and short room spans are more earthquake resilient. Likewise, planning for safe settlements by mapping possible vulnerable areas can help ameliorate the impact of natural disasters.

Providing adequate and evenly distributed open spaces in urban areas is important for earthquake-resilient planning. Open spaces provide spots for people to gather during earthquakes and emergencies. Further, provision of adequate right-of-way for roads is critical in urban areas to offer sufficient access to emergency vehicles following earthquakes and other disasters.

Several programs are in operation to alleviate climate related disasters. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) in coordination with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) provides rescue operation services to people during disasters. Civil society organizations and donor agencies also offer services to help communities cope with various natural disasters. Such efforts are important for reducing vulnerability of the people.

It is also important to note that a weak economy cannot build human assets and mitigate or reduce environmental vulnerability. Thus, a failure to achieve a high, or at least a moderate level of economic growth may create obstacles in the path to graduation. Hence economic growth should become a top priority for graduation. A corollary to this will be resource mobilization both externally and internally.

Externally, Nepal should develop policies to attract foreign direct investment. Internally, it should promote entrepreneurship and improve the governance system, alongside other reforms. Another important success factor for graduation and its aftermath will be a proper preparation during the transition. Since Nepal will lose a lot of benefits now available, especially in trade, the government should begin to negotiate bilaterally and regionally for extension of DFQF-type trading preferences after graduation. This can help to offset/minimize the effects of end of preference after graduation. Nepal must also seek the support of international agencies and trading nations to maintain trade-related concessions and facilities for some time after its graduation.

As many other countries have created effective programs in climate change, disaster management, enhancing agricultural productivity, and water resources management, Nepal can review the lessons learned and create suitable policies and programs. Since Nepal has already experienced good results in micro-hydro, community forestry, mobilization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for development, and in biodiversity conservation, it can formulate effective policies and programs in other areas related to the environmental conservation and improvements to sustain the momentum.

## **Conclusion**

After many years of work towards the goal of graduating from the LDC status, and after two deferrals in the graduation process, Nepal is now close to becoming a member of the developing countries group. Despite several challenges, including its land-locked situation, a difficult terrain, and dramatic climatic variations within a small geographic area, Nepal has made progress in several areas to be able to now consider leaving behind its underdeveloped status. As the UN CDP, has rated Nepal's performance as satisfactory, the country is now poised to officially graduate from the LDC category in 2026.

There will be some trade-offs once Nepal graduates to join the developing countries group. While Nepal will benefit from its new stature, image, and success, the country will also lose some trade, foreign aid, and investment-related benefits and concessions. However, Nepal can negotiate bilaterally and multilaterally to make its transition easier. We have articulated some policy pathways for this in sections three and six above.

For sustaining its status as a developing country, Nepal should strictly regulate activities that harm the environment and biodiversity. Examples areas for policy and program improvements include conservation of natural resources, afforestation, disaster-resilient planning, flood control, flood plain management, and checking the uncontrolled road construction on unstable slopes. In addition, disaster management programs designed to mitigate the effects of floods, landslides, earthquake, GLOF, epidemics, and heat and cold waves should be continually tested and improved. Engaging the services of environmental and community-based NGOs can also help the country progress towards these goals.

Nepal needs to create and implement earthquake-resilient planning, policies, and zoning regulations through detailed land use mapping. Planning capacities should be enhanced and



delegated across the different levels of government. In the areas related to climate change adaptation, disaster prevention, and management, Nepal needs to learn from best practices elsewhere in countries such as Costa Rica, Chile, USA, and Japan, and craft appropriate policies.

Our objective in writing this paper was to examine aspects of EnVI for Nepal's graduation from a least developed country. We have assessed achievements and identified problems for sustaining and improving on the EnVI measures required for graduation. We have identified key areas of concern and articulated some policy-measures required for addressing these issues. Proper policies and their timely implementation are necessary to rectify the problems for making the graduation possible, meaningful, and sustainable. In closing, we would like to reiterate that good transition strategies are the key to a successful graduation of Nepal from the LDC status. Developing sound strategies and mobilizing resources, and building capability to implement them, will largely determine how easily Nepal can cross the LDC finish line to join the group of developing countries.

## References

- Adhikari, A. (2021). *Unprecedented rain damaged \$118.89 million equivalent harvested paddy on the field*. Kathmandu: Nayapatrika. Retrieved 10 28, 2021, from <https://nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/73650/2021-10-29>
- Adhikari, S., & Adhikari, D. (2019). *An account of Nepal disasters and economic fallout*. Kathmandu: HAL Open Science. Retrieved from <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01995386/document>
- Bhattarai, K., & Conway, D. (2021). *Contemporary Environmental Problems in Nepal*. Switzerland: Springer.
- Cavallo, E., Becerra, O., & Acevedo, L. (2021). *The Impact of Natural Disasters on Economic Growth*. Colombia: Inter-American Development Bank.
- Dhakal, S. (2015). *Disasters in Nepal*. Tribhuvan University. Web: ResearchGate.
- DHM. (2021). *Department of Hydrology and Meteorology*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal. Retrieved from <https://www.dhm.gov.np/>
- Djalante, R., Holley, C., & Thomalla, F. (2011). Adaptive governance and managing resilience to natural hazards. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*. , 1-14. Retrieved 10 28, 2021, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs13753-011-0015-6>
- EM-DAT. (2017). *The Emergency Event Database*. Belgium: EM-DAT. Retrieved from [www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be)
- FNCCI. (2021). *Nepal's Graduation from LDC: A Private Sector Perspective*. Kathmandu: Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry. Retrieved from <https://www.fncci.org/publication/detail.php?id=46>
- Gautam, Y., & Anderson, P. (2017). Multiple stressors, food system vulnerability and food insecurity in Humla, Nepal. *Reg Environ Change*, 17, 1493-1504. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-017-1110-z>
- Government of Nepal, N. (2020). *Nepal: National Review of Sustainable Development Goals*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, NPC.
- Green Facts: *Facts on Health and the Environment*. (2021, 07 30). Retrieved from Dryland Systems: <https://www.greenfacts.org/glossary/def/drylands.htm>

- Greenfacts.org. (2022). *Dryland systems*. Retrieved January 20, 2022, from Greenfacts, Facts on Health and the Environment: <https://www.greenfacts.org/glossary/def/drylands.htm#:~:text=Definition%3A,wood%2C%20and%20other%20ecosystem%20services>.
- Hearth, K. (2021). *Deadly flooding and landslides devastate Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mission Network News. Retrieved from <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/deadly-flooding-and-landslides-devastate-nepal/>
- IDS\_Nepal, \_PAC; GCAP. (2014). *Economic Impact Assessment of Climate Change in Key Sectors in nepal*. Kathmandu: IDS-Nepal.
- IPCC. (2018). *Summary for policymakers: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the*. Geneva: World Meteorological Organization.
- Joshi, N. P., Maharjan, K. L., & Luni, P. (2008). Effect of climate variables on yield of major food-crops in Nepal. . *J Contemp India Studies*, 1, 19-26.
- Khatun, F., Pervin, S., & Rahman, M. (2018). Bangladesh's pursuit of the 2030 Agenda: Will it facilitate smooth transition after LDC graduation? In B. (. Debapriya, *Bangladesh's Graduation from the Least Developed Countries Group: Prifalls and Promises*. London: Routledge.
- Malla, G. (2008). Climate change and its impact on Nepalese agriculture. *J. Agric Environ*, 62-71.
- Malla, R. (2015). *Earthquake Preparedness and Disaster Relief in Nepal-A Position Paper, American Society of Nepali Engineers (ASNEng)*,. Kathmandu: America Nepal Medical Foundation (ANMF), and Computer Association of Nepal-USA (CAN-USA).
- Mills, A. J., D., T., & Manji, A. K. (2020). Ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change: Lessons learned from a pioneering project apanning Mauritania, Nepal, the Seychelles, and China. *Plants, People, Planet.*, 2020(2), 587–597. Retrieved 10 28, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp3.10126>
- MoHA. (2019). *Deinvestar Database, DRR Portal in Adhikai & Adhikari (2019)*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), and Hall Open Science. Retrieved from <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01995386/document>
- Nelson, G., R. M., Koo, J., Robertson, R., Sulser, T., Zhu, T., . . . Palazzo, A. (2009). *Climate change: impact on agriculture and cost of adaptation: Technical Report*. . Washington, D. C. : International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Nepal UN Mission (a). (2021). *The Permanent Mission of Nepal to the UN*. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from [https://www.un.int/nepal/statements\\_speeches/press-release-cdp-recommends-nepal%E2%80%99s-graduation-ldc-category](https://www.un.int/nepal/statements_speeches/press-release-cdp-recommends-nepal%E2%80%99s-graduation-ldc-category)
- Nepal UN Mission (b). (2021, November 24). *The Permanent Mission of Nepal to the UN*. Retrieved from UNGA adopts resolution on Nepal's graduation from LDC category: [https://www.un.int/nepal/statements\\_speeches/unga-adopts-resolution-nepal%E2%80%99s-graduation-ldc-category](https://www.un.int/nepal/statements_speeches/unga-adopts-resolution-nepal%E2%80%99s-graduation-ldc-category)
- Nepali\_Times. (2021). *Post-monsoon rain ruins Nepal's crops: The flood disaster season in Nepal is not over, as rains lash country in destructive swath*. Kathmandu: Times. Retrieved 10 29, 2021, from <https://www.nepalitimes.com/latest/post-monsoon-rain-ruins-nepals-crops/>

- NPC. (2020). *National Review of Sustainable Development Goals, Kathmandu: National Planning Commission*. Kathmandu: National Planning Commission (NPC), Nepal.
- Online\_Khabar. (2021). *One-fourth of the agricultural land in the hills is barren*. Kathmandu: Online Khabar. Retrieved from <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2021/12/1053616>
- Randell, H., Jiang, C., Liang, X., Murtugudde, R., & Sapkota, A. (2021). Food insecurity and compound environmental shocks in Nepal: Implications for a changing climate. *World Development*, 145(105511), 105511. doi:<https://doi.org/10-1016/j.worlddev.2021.105511>
- Razzaque, M. A. (2018). The tipping point: Bangladesh's graduation from the group of least developed countries. *Harvard International Review*, 39(3), 34-38.
- Regmi, H. R. (2007). Effect of unusual weather on cereal crop production and household food security. *J Agric Environ*, 8, 20-29.
- Reliefweb. (2021). *Nepal: Monsoon Floods and Landslides - Final Report DREF Operation n° MDRNP010*. Kathmandu: Reliefweb. Retrieved 10 28, 2021, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-monsoon-floods-and-landslides-final-report-dref-operation-n-mdrnp010>
- SCO. (2018). *Instability of agricultural production*. Clermont-Ferrand, France: Sustainable Competitiveness Observatory (SCO) FERDI.
- Sharma, B. (2020). *Capacity Building in Developing and Emerging Countries*. (E. Chrysostome, Ed.) Switzerland: Springer Nature. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16740-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16740-0_9)
- Sharma, K. (2021). *Why Bharatpur of Chitwan often gets inundated?* Kathmandu: Nayapatrika. Retrieved from <https://nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/52606/2020-10-07>
- Shrestha, N. R., & Bhattarai, K. (2017). *Historical Dictionary of Nepal* (Second ed.). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- The\_World\_Bank. (2020). *Personal remittances, received (1% of GDP), Nepal*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=NP>
- UN. (2004). *United Nations Development Programme: Bureau of Crisis Prevention, Reducing disasters Risk: A Challenge for Development*. New York: United Nations.
- UN. (2021). *Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Economic Analysis*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-criteria.html>
- UN. (2021). *Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category-nepal.html>
- UN DESA. (2022). *Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economic Analysis*. Retrieved January 16, 2022, from United Nations: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html>
- UN Nepal. (2022). *Community Perception Report: Flood, Landslide and Heavy Rainfall*. London: UK Aid. Retrieved from file:///E:/Articles/Foreign\_Policy/Collections/Community%20Perception%20Report%20-%20October%202021%20heavy%20rains\_o.pdf

- UN\_CDP. (2021). *Committee for Development Policy Report on the Twenty-Third Session (22-26 February 2021)*. New York: Economic and Social Council Official Records. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from <https://undocs.org/en/E/2021/33>
- UNCDP. (2018). *Vulnerability Profile of Nepal*. New York. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-PL-2018-6c.pdf>
- UNCDP. (2021). *UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP) - The 2021 triennial review of the list of LDCs*. UN. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from [https://www.un.org/technologybank/sites/www.un.org.technologybank/files/ldcs\\_graduation\\_review\\_2021\\_for\\_info.pdf](https://www.un.org/technologybank/sites/www.un.org.technologybank/files/ldcs_graduation_review_2021_for_info.pdf)
- UNDESA. (2022). *Economic Analysis, EVI Indicators*. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA): <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/evi-indicators-ldc.html>
- United\_Nations. (2021). *United Nations-Committee for Development Policy (Report on the twenty-third session: 22-26 February 2021)*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/en/E/2021/33>
- UNOHRLLS. (2019). *A guide to Least Developed Country Graduation*. New York.: United Nations. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from [https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/un\\_graduation\\_booklet\\_2019\\_final\\_s.pdf](https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/un_graduation_booklet_2019_final_s.pdf)
- Vij, S., Russell, C., Clark, J., Parajuli, B. P., Shakya, P., & Dewulf, A. (2020). Evolving disaster governance paradigms in Nepal. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 50(101911), 1-8. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101911>
- World Bank. (1961-2018). *Agricultural land % of Nepal*. Washington D. C.: The World Bank. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS?locations=NP>
- World Bank. (2010). *Agricultural irrigated land (% of total agricultural land) - Nepal*. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from The World Bank Data: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.IRIG.AG.ZS?locations=NP>
- World\_Bank. (2017). *Climbing Highe- Toward a Middle-Income Nepal*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank. Retrieved 10 30, 2021
- World\_Bank. (2020). *World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History*. Washington, D. C. : The World Bank. Retrieved 10 30, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>
- Zhao, C., Liu, B., Piao, S., Wang, X., Lobell, D. B., Huang, Y., & Mengtian, H. (2017). Temperature increase reduces global yields of major crops in four independent estimates. 114(35), pp. 3-7. Washington, D. C. : Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1701762114>

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Adhikari, A. P, Bhattarai, K. and Sharma B. (2022) "A Review of Environmental Vulnerabilities Related to Nepal's Graduation Process from Least Developed to a Developing Country Status"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), volume 2. Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.43868>

# Science Diplomacy: An Overview in the Global and National Context

---

Sunil Babu Shrestha<sup>1</sup>  
Laxmi Kumar Parajuli<sup>2</sup>  
Marina Vaidya Shrestha<sup>3</sup>

---

## Abstract

*Science Diplomacy seeks avenues for strengthening humanity and consolidating the existing inter-nation relationships through academic and industrial collaboration between nations on various scientific and technological frontiers. Science and technology are effective tools for addressing global challenges and cross-boundary disputes amicably by promoting international scientific collaboration to harness the potentials of partner countries. In this perspective, we revisit the global developments in science diplomacy and with a particular focus on Nepal, we explore how science diplomacy has been vital for establishing scientific collaborations. The paper also highlights the effort and the role played by the Nepali diaspora for enhancing scientific collaboration and technology transfer between Nepal and the scientifically advanced nations. While further strengthening diplomatic ties that Nepal currently enjoys with friends worldwide, we discuss various policy measures that can leverage scientific output in the country by encompassing scientific and technological collaboration as an integral part of foreign policy. We believe that this paper can also serve as a useful reference to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and combat global challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, and pandemics through science diplomacy and cooperation.*

## Keywords

*Foreign policy, Nepali diaspora, Pandemic, Soft diplomacy, Sustainable Development Goals*

## Introduction

The rapid progress made in science and technology has redefined the concept of classical diplomacy by integration of scientific minds and agendas in the diplomatic spheres (Ahmed et al., 2021; Sterling, 2018). Acting as a critical link between track one and track two diplomacy, science diplomacy speaks a universal, neutral, and apolitical language supported by evidence. It is an important component of soft diplomacy as it can amicably leverage collaboration and even connect transnational political players with different political ideologies, or countries with different socioeconomic profiles (Johny, 2018). Since people tend to trust scientists more than politicians (International Science Survey, 2019-2020), it is inevitable for political

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Sunil Babu Shrestha is the Vice-Chancellor of Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) and Chief Editor of Nepal Journal of Science and Technology.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Laxmi Kumar Parajuli is a Project Associate Professor at the University of Tokyo, Japan..

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Marina Vaidya Shrestha is an Assistant Professor of Kathmandu Medical College, Kathmandu University.

diplomacy and science diplomacy to act in concert to achieve result-oriented solutions. Science informed political diplomacy that integrates all three components of science diplomacy – namely science for diplomacy, diplomacy for science and science in diplomacy – has become the key strategy for all the economically advanced nations for attaining economic prosperity.

Science based soft diplomacy has been instrumental in easing political tensions and has led to landmark events and initiation of international research centers. Even when nations were in the state of tension during cold war period, science has acted to connect those nations despite the growing political rifts and tensions. In the 1970s when the United States of America (USA) and Soviet Union were in the state of cold war, the initiation of scientific collaboration for space exploration in the name of Apollo-Soyuz Test Project had a far-reaching implication on the humanitarian ground in addition to the scientific mission, as it greatly eased the political tension and brought Americans and Soviet Union citizens closer (Krasnyak, 2018). Subsequently, this collaboration also became instrumental in the establishment of the International Space station. Similarly, after the conclusion of the second world war, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) was established in 1954 by 12 European countries to promote science collaboration and international peace.

Scientifically advanced and economically well-off countries have made several active efforts to integrate science as a part of diplomacy. In Japan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formed an advisory board for the promotion of science and technology diplomacy since 2015 to aid the government in facilitating science and technology diplomacy both bilateral and multilateral. Similarly, to increase the visibility of German science, innovation and scientists, the German government initiated the German Centers for Research and Innovation (DWIH) with offices in New York, Sao Paulo, Moscow, New Delhi, and Tokyo. The Federal Foreign Office has been supporting the DWIH centers placed in strategic locations. Some countries have rightly realized the importance of technology-based industries in shaping diplomatic decisions between nations. For example, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the office of the tech ambassador of Denmark has a tech ambassador along with its offices and TechPlomacy team in Silicon Valley, California, Copenhagen, and Beijing (Klynge et al., 2020). Moreover, in the current era where there is a global hunt for talent, advanced nations have eased border entry requirements, visa regulations and permanent residency criteria for academicians, including scientists. Further, non-state actors such as universities, academies and non-profit organizations have also played a critical role in promoting awareness and advocating the integration of the scientific domain as a critical component of political diplomacy. One such effort is the magazine *Science and Diplomacy* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences. Similarly, The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), a platform for promoting scientific research and sustainable development in the developing countries, and The Global Young Academy, an international consortium of young scientists, also conduct workshops and seminars on science diplomacy. Universities are also a vital component for advocating science diplomacy through seminars, conferences, and formal teaching programs.



Science diplomacy is indispensable for achieving the 2030 roadmap for sustainable development and the targets set by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Shrestha, 2021). The United Nations believes that the interaction between science and policy is necessary to accelerate the progress made so far in achieving the SDGs. Strengthening the science-policy interface has been the key role of the high-level political forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, a body formed to follow-up and review the progress made for the 2030 agenda. Similarly, the scientific advisory board of the UN Secretary General and important global summits such as the Rio+20 summit of the head of the states and ministers stressed on the need to enhance science-policy interface for evidence-based decision making for sustainable development. Scientific knowledge is essential for understanding the technology used for biological warfare and weapons of mass destruction. However, it is only through the means of science diplomacy that nations can achieve peace and security. Similarly, equitable access to technology is required to achieve sustainable development by increasing life expectancy, decreasing infant mortality, reducing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, and for planned urbanization. The rapid explosion of scientific technologies has led to accumulation of huge amounts of data. Sharing big data for scientific research and making it available to scientists and policymakers globally to achieve sustainable societies, is an important aspect of data diplomacy.

This article aims to depict the status and the scope of science diplomacy in Nepal.

## **Method**

This article dissects the status of the science diplomacy in Nepal, largely by using qualitative information obtained from various sources including academic literature, government websites, expert opinion, and from online news portals. A comparison of Nepal's current standing in science diplomacy, the secondary data and information suggest that the country has yet to make a substantive progress in assimilating science diplomacy in its foreign policy. This article suggests that Nepal must reorient its traditional diplomacy by including science and technology as a crucial component of soft diplomacy and capitalize on the expertise of Nepali academicians based in Nepal or abroad.

## **Discussion**

### ***Science Diplomacy in SAARC Region***

Albeit slow, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as an institution has made efforts in the direction of science diplomacy. The establishment of the Center for Science and Technology of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre) in New Delhi in 1989, is one of the first steps towards promoting science diplomacy along the member states of the non-aligned movement. So far, 47 developing countries have taken membership of the NAM S&T centre (NAM S&T Centre, 2022). The centre conducts international seminars, training workshops and collaborative projects on scientific issues



that are pertinent to developing countries. Headquartered in Nepal, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) – an inter-governmental organization of eight countries in Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region – can also be taken as a successful example of science diplomacy at the regional level (Amadei, 2019). As high Himalayas suffer tremendously from the impact of the climate change, ICIMOD has a pivotal role for advocating for change in the context of climate diplomacy. The recent HKH Ministerial Mountain Summit 2020 is an example of ICIMOD's effort to protect mountain ecosystem through science diplomacy (ICIMOD, 2020). The ministers from all eight member countries had signed a historical declaration to protect mountain ecosystem and improve the livelihoods of people in the HKH region.

The Colombo Plan is another excellent example of how South Asian nations came to a political consensus to shape the development of human resources in the region. With its headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka, The Colombo Plan was launched in 1951 by seven commonwealth nations (Australia, Canada, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Great Britain, India, New Zealand, and Pakistan) with an aim of socio-economic development in the Asia and Pacific region through capacity building. Experts have also argued that Colombo plan was a part of strategic foreign policy by the commonwealth nations to fight against the increasing influence of communism in the Asian countries in the 1950s (Oakman, 2010). Whatever its motives, the Colombo Plan has now grown into an inter-governmental organization of 27 nations and has played an instrumental role in human resource development in the SAARC region. Several politicians, bureaucrats, and academicians in South Asia have received scholarships for university education through the Colombo Plan. As several policymakers in the SAARC region have befriended each other from their university days under Colombo Plan scholarship, this also helped to some degree to increase mutual understanding and co-operation in political decisions. Although in the early years the Colombo Plan scholarship supported education programs (typically university level) that lasted for a couple of years, it now appears that most of the fellowships for training programs are awarded for the short-term, typically for a couple of weeks or months. In addition to the Colombo Plan, the establishment of South Asian University in 2010 is another important milestone in the direction of science diplomacy in the SAARC region.

## **Status of Science Diplomacy in Nepal**

Nepal's diplomacy has primarily focused on infrastructure development and economic diplomacy. The political diplomacy of Nepal suffers from challenges such as lack of political consensus among political parties, lack of agreement on identification of national interests, and lack of institutional strength (K.C. and Pandey, 2018). Although the Foreign Policy of Nepal, 2077 does mention strengthening and incorporation of technology transfer as a priority component of economic diplomacy; very few concrete efforts have been undertaken to materialize this. Of the financial assistance and grants that Nepal receives from international donor agencies, the funds for scientific research sectors have been absolutely minimal. Similarly, despite of the huge potential of developing indigenous technology, Nepal has been unable to commercialize such technologies globally.

Nepal does have some notable points in science diplomacy. For example, Pyramid International laboratory located at an altitude of 5050 meters in Khumbu Valley in Sagarmatha National Park was established in 1990 as a collaboration between the Italian government and Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST). Many prominent international research papers have been published using this facility. The NepaliSat-1 nanosatellite developed by two Nepali students at the Kyushu Institute of Technology (Kyutech) in Japan in collaboration with NAST can also be taken as another good example of science diplomacy. The Nepal government funded the cost incurred for developing the satellite and NAST coordinated the project. The satellite weighing 1.3 kilos was imprinted with Nepal's flag along with the logos of the collaborating institutions, namely NAST and Kyutech. The ground station constructed at the NAST premises receives signals from NepaliSat-1. Although the NepaliSat-1 nanosatellite is not suitable for undertaking advanced research projects, its development can still be taken as a foundation for the development of advanced satellites in future. The importance of NepaliSat-1 can also be realized from the tweet of the then Prime Minister Mr. KP Sharma Oli: "Though a humble beginning, with the launching of NepaliSat-1 Nepal has entered the Space-Era. I wish to congratulate all those scientists and institutions that were involved right from the development to its launching thereby enhancing the prestige of our country." Similarly, the high-level visit of the then Minister for Education, Science and Technology, Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokharel and the vice-chancellor of NAST, Dr. Sunil Babu Shrestha to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) in June 2019 to attend the live video conference of NepaliSat-1 rotating in the orbit can also be taken as a science diplomacy related activity to further strengthen the excellent diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan. During their visit to Japan, the Minister and the vice-chancellor of NAST also met with several notable academicians and administrators of Japanese Government research institutions. One was a meeting with the vice-president of National Institute of Material Science (NIMS). The meeting paved the way for the conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NIMS and the NAST. The vice-chancellor of NAST and the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) of Nepalese Embassy in Tokyo together had a meeting with the President and the high-level officers of Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) to discuss future collaboration. In addition to the NepaliSat-1 project, other initiatives by NAST such as the Flora project, 6U project, and establishment of an Information Access Center (IAC) in the NAST premises with support of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) from South Korea are other aspects of science diplomacy. In addition, NAST also organizes knowledge exchange symposia with the foreign and Nepali experts and has MOU with the prominent international organizations such as the Center for Science and Technology of the non-aligned and other developing countries (NAM S&T center), The Association of Academies and Societies of Sciences in Asia (AASSA), Non-resident Nepali Association (NRNA), University of Hawaii, USA, Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, China; and CITYNET, Japan, which are also activities that contribute towards science diplomacy.

## **Nepal's Vaccine Diplomacy During COVID-19**

The Corona virus disease (Covid-19) has sent a strong message that science and knowledge cannot be limited within a confined geographical boundary. Another message is that “the sciences are never at war”, as rightly put by the British Physician Edward Jenner (Varshney and Prasanna, 2021). The formation of Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI) in 2000, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) in 2016 and Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiatives in 2020 suggest that the world can stand united at times of need to provide fair and equitable access to vaccines to all the nations, irrespective of their economic power (Singh and Chattu, 2021). Although Nepal benefitted from these initiatives, it had a relatively weak standing in terms of the vaccine diplomacy. It appeared that most of the high-level government committees for Covid-19 response were dominated by physicians rather than biomedical researchers and scientists. It is believed that the Covid-19 pandemic would not have been as bad had there been representation of scientists in the Covid-19 response arrangements at different ministries.

Nepal's excellent diplomatic relationship with its immediate neighbors India and China, and their strategies for vaccine diplomacy (Lee, 2021) worked in Nepal's favor for acquiring Covid-19 vaccines. Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India in collaboration with the University of Oxford and the AstraZeneca, and the Vero Cell vaccine, manufactured by the Chinese state-owned enterprise located in Beijing, were one of the first vaccines to receive approval from the World Health Organization (WHO). Both vaccines could be accommodated in the existing storage and cold chain transport capacities of economically underdeveloped countries as well. These technical factors coupled with effective vaccine diplomacy of both India and China proved to be a boon to Nepal in fulfilling its unmet and desperate need for vaccines. However, owing to its relatively poor vaccine diplomacy, Nepal was unable to acquire the required quantities of vaccines to immunize most of its citizens in a timely manner.

## **Advocacy for Mountain Ecology**

Mountain ecology is a domain that could help Nepal assume a leading role in the formation of an inter-governmental advocacy group through science diplomacy. The topography of Nepal itself makes it a natural laboratory, with an altitude difference of 8800 meters between the highest altitude in the Himalayas and lowest altitude in the plains. This large altitude difference makes Nepal an ideal country for different flora and fauna. Due to the weak science diplomacy from Nepal's end, it has been unable to effectively represent this at international biodiversity forums to garner funds and world attention for high altitude ecological research. Although Nepal has a negligible role in emitting greenhouse gases and contributing to global warming, the weaknesses in climate diplomacy has hampered our ability to receive the climate funds to the extent that we deserve. The Government of Nepal (GoN) does realize that global warming will affect our high-altitude ecosystems. The rise in global temperature will lead to glacier melt and rise in water levels in our rivers, and invite other natural calamities such as floods and landslides. Although the GoN has not yet been able to take a lead in raising voice against

global warming and transboundary pollution, it has made some efforts to garner international attention for addressing climate change. For example, the cabinet meeting held in Kalapathar near the Everest base camp at an altitude of 5250 meters during the premiership of Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal in 2009, and the government's plan to hold Sagarmatha Sambaad, a global dialogue forum on the theme "Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity" are some of Nepal's efforts in responding and advocating for climate change.

## **Key Players for Promoting Science Diplomacy in Nepal**

Government think-tanks such as the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) Nepal has played a crucial role in promoting science diplomacy mainly by training diplomats and organizing seminars on the issues revolving around science diplomacy. Universities are also important stakeholders in science diplomacy as they bring together experts on science and technology and foreign policy, which makes them the right platform for discourse on science diplomacy. Seminars conducted by the Research Center for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST), Tribhuvan University in collaboration with Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, by inviting top scientists and policymakers in the field is a testimony to the role of academia in promoting science diplomacy. Similarly, the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tribhuvan University also conducts activities to disseminate awareness on science diplomacy. Nepali universities also attract international funding from funding agencies, government institutions including embassies and conduct research projects in collaboration with foreign academicians. Such engagements also play a role to enhance science diplomacy.

Individuals need a valid visa for cross-border travel but knowledge does not. Nepali academicians residing and working abroad have always demonstrated a great degree of patriotism and made outstanding contributions for establishing scientific collaboration in Nepal. In particular, the NRNA has facilitated the technology transfer activities at an institutional level. While largely acting as the focal unit for technology transfer, the Skill, Knowledge and Technology Transfer division of the NRNA plays a vital role to connect diaspora intellects and provides platform for networking and knowledge sharing through events such as the NRN Global Knowledge Convention in collaboration with the GoN. Similarly, Nepali academicians working in Japan had organized the Nepal-Japan Dialogue Series in collaboration with the Nepal's embassy in Tokyo to discuss technology transfer in various sectors including agriculture, ICT and healthcare. The organizers had invited high-profile panelists such as the professors of Japanese universities and directors of companies. The output of each of the dialogue series events, and the avenues and recommendations for technology transfer was compiled and a 23 -page report was submitted to the then Minister for Education, Science and Technology Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokharel; the vice-chancellor of NAST, Dr. Sunil Babu Shrestha, and the Ambassador of Nepal to Japan Ms. Prativa Rana. These types of interactions in foreign lands with high-profile foreign academicians and industry professionals can be instrumental in fostering science diplomacy.

Rightly realizing the strength of Nepali academicians and technocrats working in foreign lands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has established a Brain Gain Center to facilitate the knowledge exchange and technology transfer through various online conferences. Similarly, the Brain Pooling Nepal program of NAST has been helping returnee scientists and technocrats to connect with science related careers and academic societies in Nepal. However, there is still a need for the government to effectively connect the broad spectrum of the Nepali diaspora intellect and make their inputs evident in policy. In this regard, perhaps, the MoFA should consider appointing at least one science and technology ambassador from among Nepali professionals in each country, similar to the practice of appointing honorary consuls or tourism ambassadors. These positions are largely honorary and appointing science and technology ambassadors incur minimal financial obligations, but the local networking that these professionals can do and their knowhow of local language and culture will assist GoN towards assimilating science as a vital component of diplomacy.

## **Way forward**

### ***Increase Governmental Spending on Science and Technology***

Science diplomacy is relatively a new concept even in affluent countries. Aligning foreign policy with the demands of the global trends of science diplomacy and proactive leadership is required for integrating science diplomacy into regular foreign policy. When conceptualizing science diplomacy, policymakers should bear in mind that science speaks evidence and facts. Facts and data can be generated only by investing in capacity building of human resources and allocating adequate resources for research. Providing seed funding to start-up technology ventures, financial support to promising research projects, and investment in scientific research and education are crucial investments for capacity building. However, the government's investment in science and technology in Nepal remains abysmally low. For example, in contrast to investments elsewhere – 4.5 percent of GDP in science and technology in South Korea, 3.3 percent in Japan, 2.8 percent in USA, and 2.1 percent in China – Nepal spends only 0.3 percent of its GDP (The World Bank: data of 2018 for South Korea, Japan, USA and China, and 2010 for Nepal). Learning lessons from practices in developed countries, the government should also focus on schemes to attract private sector to invest in science and technology. Strategies such as relaxation in tax policies and easing of legal hurdles and hassles can contribute towards increasing private investment in scientific research.

### **Intergovernmental Collaborative Funding in Research and Development**

Nepal should also lobby in international forums to attract intergovernmental collaboration and funding. Nepal could be an excellent location for the international community to research on high-altitude ecosystems, biodiversity, and climate change. Strong science diplomacy from GoN

to establish an international research center in Nepal with funding from multiple countries can not only contribute to economic upliftment but will also have broader implications on knowledge creation. Nepal can learn from Chile's experience. The Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA), the largest astronomical project in the world with intergovernmental funding from the European Union, USA, Japan, Canada, South Korea and Taiwan, has benefited Chile's socioeconomic development (Mauduit, 2017). The unique and ideal atmospheric condition there is conducive for establishing a satellite observatory. It also has stable politics, friendly government policies such as diplomatic immunity for researchers, tax relaxations, political support, and proactive science diplomacy. These helped Chile to attract foreign investment and highly skilled human resources in astronomical sciences. As vast majority of observatory officials are Chileans and Chile is now seen as the Astro-tourism hub in the world, the ALMA project created job opportunities for the locals.

The quality of astronomical research in Chile has also enriched with the establishment of the ALMA observatory as it supports capacity building of Chilean university students, technicians, and researchers. Similarly, ALMA Region II fund from the ALMA project supports tourism and infrastructure development of the Antofagasta area, the region where the satellite observatory is located. The establishment of a similar intergovernmental research facility in Nepal can also assist its socio-economic development.

## **Focal Persons for Science Diplomacy**

Nepal's government agencies do not have a full-time, focal personnel for science diplomacy. The MoFA should devise a mechanism to appoint a full-time science attaché who can engage in science diplomacy at some diplomatic missions abroad. Similar to the practice in France, such personnel could be an established, Nepali scientists from either the government research institutes such as NAST, Nepal Agriculture Research Council (NARC), or universities and private research institutes. To assist science attaché with the local scientific culture and language, it will also be necessary to appoint at least one Nepali scientist with a doctorate degree working in the scientific research sector in that country. Moreover, in regions of high strategic interest, MoFA should deploy some of the high-profile Nepalese scientists from government research institutes and universities to missions abroad for a short-term, typically for a couple of weeks. This concept of "Scientopolitics" is similar to that of the U.S. Science Envoy Program that has been in operation since 2010 during the presidency of Barack Obama (Zewail, 2010). Some of such envoys included Dr. Ahmed Zewail, recipient of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry; Dr. Elias Zerhouni, former director of the National Institutes of Health; Dr. Geraldine Richmond, former president of American Association for the Advancement of Science; Dr. Margaret Leinen, Director of Scripps Institution of Oceanography; Dr. Alice Gast, former President of Lehigh University and the current President of the Imperial College London; Dr. Rita Colwell, former director of the National Science Foundation; and Dr. Bruce Alberts, former president of the National Academy of Sciences. In the Nepali context, a science and technology advisor to the Prime Minister in the Federal Government and the Chief Ministers in provinces can also support



science diplomacy. Similarly, inclusion of scientists in high level delegation during visits of the President or Prime Minister to foreign countries can ease discussions in the area of science and technology.

## Conclusion

Science diplomacy has become an integral component of diplomacy in developed countries. In this article, we have highlighted some of the initiatives that advanced nations have adopted to promote science diplomacy as a key component of soft diplomacy. However, in Nepal, there has hardly been any mention of science diplomacy in foreign policy. Further, there are only a few academic research and opinion articles regarding Nepali science diplomacy in national and international journals. Although some seminars and conferences on science diplomacy have been organized, their outputs have not been disseminated to the public. To promote science diplomacy, Nepal needs to prioritize science and technology and establish a dedicated center for promoting science diplomacy. Similarly, a strong voice on the need of adopting science diplomacy as a crucial component of diplomacy needs to come from the current and former Nepali diplomats. The media could also play an instrumental role to increase awareness among politicians and bureaucrats on matters relating to science diplomacy. Key players of science diplomacy such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, NAST, universities, and the Institute of Foreign Affairs should also prioritize science diplomacy. Perhaps establishment of science and technology related organizations at major universities, such as Tribhuvan University or Kathmandu University could pave the way for science diplomacy (Shrestha, 2018). Different stakeholders should also regularly organize events related to science diplomacy and capacitate the government agencies to establish relations with foreign agencies and research centers. In this context, the initiative from NAST to establish Nepal Science Diplomacy Forum (NSDF) could be useful to promote such activities. The existing bureaucratic and legal procedures should be accordingly amended to incorporate innovative policies tailored to the needs of scientists and foreign policy experts, thereby making it easier to facilitate transfer of technology to Nepal from abroad. Priorities should be placed in facilitating technology transfer and promoting technology-driven, research-based industries in sectors such as clean energy, biodiversity, and mountain ecosystem. Above all, science diplomacy should be taught at the universities to build capacity of both the existing and aspiring diplomats. Nepal will be able to fully synchronize science in diplomacy only through capacity building of scientists and diplomats.

## References

- Ahmed, M., et al. (2021). An Overview of Science Diplomacy in South Asia. *Science and Diplomacy*.
- Amadei, B. (2019). Engineering for Peace and Diplomacy. *Sustainability* 11(20), 5646.
- Johny, E. (2021). Nepal and India Hydropower Cooperation: A Beneficial Peaceful Diplomacy, *International and Public Affairs*, 5(1),19-22.



- K.C., K., & Pandey, N. (2018). The Post 1990 Diplomacy Practices of Nepal. *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 32(1), 83–104.
- Klynge, C., Ekman, M., Waedegaard, N. J. (2020). Diplomacy in the Digital Age: Lessons from Denmark's TechDiplomacy Initiative. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 15(1-2), 185-195.
- Krasnyak, O. (2018). The Apollo-Soyuz Test Project: Construction of an Ideal Type of Science Diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 13 (4), 410-431.
- Lee, S. T. (2021). Vaccine Diplomacy: Nation Branding and China's COVID-19 Soft Power Play. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.
- Mauduit, J. C. (2017). Open Skies Policies in Astronomy: The Growing Need for Diplomacy on the Final Frontier. *Science and Diplomacy*.
- Oakman, D. (2010). Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan. *The Australian National University e-Press*. ISBN: 9781921666926.
- Singh, B., Chattu, V.K. (2021). Prioritizing 'equity' in COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution through Global Health Diplomacy. *Health PromotPerspect*, 11(3):281-287.
- Shrestha, S.B. (2018). Science Diplomacy for The Prosperity of Nepal. *NCWA Annual Journal*, 36-39.
- Shrestha, S.B. (2021). Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Of Nepal. *NAM S&T Newsletter*, 31(1), 8-11.
- Sterling, D.P. (2018). A New Era in Cultural Diplomacy: Promoting the Image of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative in Asia. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2),102-116.
- Varshney, S., Prasanna, N. K. (2021). Vaccine Diplomacy: Exploring the Benefits of International Collaboration. *Current Trends in Biotechnology and Pharmacy*, 15(1), 110–114.
- Zewail, A.H. (2010) Science in Diplomacy. *Cell*, 141 (2), 204-207.
- <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS> (Last accessed on January 27, 2022)
- <https://www.icimod.org/landmark-event-ministers-from-eight-countries-sign-declaration-to-work-together-for-the-hindu-kush-himalaya-region/>
- <http://www.namstet.org/about.html> (Last accessed on January 27, 2022)
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/09/29/scientists-are-among-the-most-trusted-groups-in-society-though-many-value-practical-experience-over-expertise/> (Last accessed on January 27, 2022)

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Shrestha, S.B., Parajuli, L.k. and Shrestha M. V. (2022) "Science diplomacy:

An overview in the global and national context"

*Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA)*, Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.43892>



# Sphere pressure: When Politics Contends with Geopolitics

---

Sanjay Upadhya<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Nepal's strategic vulnerability owing to its location between two giants of Asia has risen and fallen with the status of India and China relations, the quality of their bilateral relations, and the principal external variables influencing them. In recent years, Nepal's boisterous domestic politics has emerged as an additional source of instability. In the past, the internal fundamentals, regardless of the political system of the day, were sturdy enough to cope with often-competing pressures emanating from the north and south. The improvisation that has become the defining feature of the contemporary Nepali state, has made today's geopolitical spasms far more ominous. While it may be outlandish to suggest that Nepal's politics and geopolitics have become antithetical, there is sufficient basis for probing that question.*

**Keywords:** *China, India, United States, European Union, geopolitics, domestic politics, vulnerability, instability.*

## **Introduction**

Throughout history, Nepal's strategic vulnerability owing to its location between two giants of Asia has increased or decreased with the fluctuation in the power dynamics of India and China, the quality of their bilateral relations, and the principal external variables influencing them. During moments of warmth in China-India relations, each neighbor has advised Nepal to bolster ties with the other to strengthen regional security and stability, sometimes even prompting a sense of abandonment. When relations between the Asian giants have soured, each neighbor has strenuously sought Nepal's support, even to the point of impinging upon the country's ability to make sovereign choices. In the past, Nepal's internal fundamentals, regardless of the political system of the day, appeared sturdy enough to cope with often-competing pressures emanating from the north and south. However, in recent years, the country's boisterous domestic politics has emerged as an additional source of instability.

While growing political awareness coupled with easier access to means of instantaneous communication has heightened Nepalis' understanding of their place in the world, it has also

---

<sup>1</sup> He is a Nepali author based in the United States. His books include: 'Empowered and Imperiled: Nepal's Peace Puzzle in Bits and Pieces' (Kathmandu: FinePrint, 2022); 'Backfire in Nepal: How India Lost the Plot to China' (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2021); 'Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India' (New York and London: Routledge, 2012); and 'The Raj Lives: India in Nepal' (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2008).

exacerbated their fears about the motives and intentions of the two neighbors. Historical experiences of how Nepal has been a contested sphere of influence between India and China continue to linger in the political arena, as the high-decibel psychological play has extended to other key external protagonists, such as the United States and the European Union. With such deep-seated perceptions fuelling the domestic discourse, distrust has crept into diplomacy in general.

The bulk of the available literature focuses either on Nepal's bumpy democratic trajectory or on the country's precarious geopolitical position. The interrelationship between these two factors has seldom been studied. This article attempts to fill a crucial gap by attempting to probe the interactions between Nepal's politics and geopolitics by raising the question of whether the two have become antithetical.

### **Mutual exclusivity?**

The controversy surrounding the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact is a case in point. A project ostensibly in Nepal's national interest when it was initially sought, the MCC has been sucked into a geopolitical vortex exacerbated by the boisterousness of Nepali politics. The development dimension has been overshadowed by an obsession with the US grant's perceived military-security implications and ramifications. From the same set of official documents and affirmations, each side of the debate believes it has found the validation it sought. The issue has polarised Nepali society to the point where members of rival camps have been reduced to calling each other "traitors". While the opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on account of its "debt trap" has not acquired such frenetic public posturing – owing to the nascence of public scrutiny of Beijing's motives and intentions as well as the paucity of BRI projects online – a sense of mutual exclusivity is beginning to cast a shadow over what resource-starved Nepal badly needs: foreign investment in development.

This situation stands in sharp contrast to the atmospherics surrounding the construction of the Kodari Highway between Nepal and China and the East-West Highway amid the heightened geopolitical strains of the 1960s. Although the official Nepali version postulated that the Kathmandu-Kodari-road was an initiative of the royal palace, the circumstances of the signing of the agreement appeared to contradict that stand. For instance, the accord was signed on the last day of King Mahendra's visit to Beijing in 1961 by Tulsi Giri, a senior government minister who had accompanied the monarch (Rose, 1971).

Clearly, the move could not have come without the monarch's blessing. Still, King Mahendra may have sought to keep his name off what was sure to be a highly controversial document to which New Delhi would raise strenuous objections. Equally, he may also have wanted to quietly demonstrate his dissatisfaction with the pressure tactics which, according to some sources, the Chinese had employed to obtain his assent to the road agreement (p. 239). In previous meetings in Beijing, neither side had raised the subject of a road agreement. Suddenly, on the day before the king's departure, the Chinese presented a draft road agreement in such terms as to imply that implementation of the boundary treaty depended upon a favorable response

on the road question.

Although New Delhi maintained a relatively restrained official stance, the Indian media were strident in their opposition to the accord and the royal regime's audacity in signing it. It took an extended period of quiet diplomacy by the palace to assuage India's concerns even partially. A secret arms agreement signed in 1965 – under which New Delhi agreed to underwrite as far as possible the entire requirements of the Royal Nepal Army – was an instance of the palace's efforts to assuage Indian concerns.

Similarly, when Nepal precluded the Chinese from participating in constructing a section of the East-West Highway in the Terai in 1964 under Indian and American pressure, Beijing expressed its displeasure in private. To be sure, neither episode might have passed so quietly had Nepal still had an elected government in place, the parliamentary system having been abolished in December 1960. Still, a closed political order – for all its faults – managed to avert political skirmishes that might have worsened regional tensions in the critical periods immediately before and after the Sino-Indian border war.

Although the Americans concluded that the monarchy would be in total control for the immediate period, they saw Nepal's increasing vulnerability to Chinese pressures in this concentration of royal powers and prerogatives. Washington also considered Nepali suspicions of New Delhi's motives and intentions as hampering India's efforts to counter Chinese moves. King Mahendra, for his part, never visited China again and nor did any senior Chinese leader arrive in Nepal. The monarch paid high-profile visits to the United States, United Kingdom and Europe, while a US-backed anti-Chinese Tibetan insurgency was operating from northern Nepal, albeit under strict Nepali surveillance.

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was engaged in high-profile projects such as a critical sector of the East-West highway and a cigarette factory close to the Indian border and training Nepali students in engineering, medicine, and other specialised disciplines. Nepal could thus simultaneously navigate the US-Soviet strategic rivalry and the Sino-Soviet split, aided in no small measure by Beijing's preoccupation with its Cultural Revolution. Apart from some fiery public quarrels between Kathmandu and Beijing, there were few enduring strains on bilateral relations.

By contrast, today's vibrant politics and free flow of information have heightened the battle of perceptions rooted in history, wherein Nepal's domestic and foreign affairs continually rattle each other. As key external protagonists have confronted new realities, their core adjustments have been easily construed as crude acrobatics, further fueling the internal frenzy.

For much of the post-1950 era, the dominant sentiment in Delhi has focused on some compact Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had supposedly reached in 1954. Under that arrangement, whose existence Nehru himself had publicly affirmed at the time (Upadhyaya, 2012), Beijing would honour India's claim of influence over Nepal while Delhi recognised total and irrevocable Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

During times of bilateral strains, Indians remained suspicious of Chinese motives but was reasonably confident of the limits of Beijing's options in Nepal. After Nepal purchased anti-

aircraft guns from China in 1988, New Delhi went on to impose a crippling trade and transit blockade against the landlocked nation. As the palace-led partyless regime sought to mobilize international support against the blockade, New Delhi succeeded in shifting attention to a growing movement for the restoration of multiparty democracy, abolished three decades earlier. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe had heralded a shift in international geostrategic alignments. Meanwhile, Beijing found itself on the defensive following global outrage over its bloody crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests. In the swift collapse of the Panchayat regime and the restoration of multiparty democracy, some saw clear limits to Chinese influence in Nepal.

Lately, Indian fears of a Chinese strategic encirclement seem compounded by recognition of China's enhanced willingness and ability to shape developments in Nepal. This, in turn, has been exacerbated by Delhi's palpable unease over the fallout of possible Chinese responses to growing American assertiveness in Nepal.

The informal split of Nepali politics into rival Indian-Western and Chinese camps today is reminiscent of the *bhardari* (courtiers) clusters preceding the rise of the Rana oligarchy in 1846. However, the people at large are involved. Amid the prevailing political cacophony, reading the Indian, Western, and Chinese motives in Nepal has become difficult for all the governments involved and all protagonists. When action from one results in a reaction from the other, it immediately raises political rancour inside Nepal. Wild surmises bordering on outlandish conspiracy theories easily tend to encroach upon the space belonging to informed deliberations.

During the prolonged transition that followed the collapse of the royal regime in April 2006, it was understandable for India, China, and the West to remain keenly attuned to the twists and turns of a peace process inaugurated amid deep contradictions. The complicated internal and external dynamics involved in reinventing the state – an amorphous concept at best – left them with little else than awaiting the eventual verdict of the people. Although initially giving the palace the benefit of the doubt, the US grudgingly went along with India to back the opposition alliance between the mainstream parties and the Maoists. A longtime backer of the monarchy, Beijing did not come out in unambiguous support of the royal regime. Instead, it began reaching out to all political parties. New Delhi and Beijing went on to support a UN political mission to foster a peace process.

## **Northern discomfort**

As the principal external protagonists scrambled to adjust to the new realities, contradictions deepened in public. Beijing used the 2006-2008 period to build bridges with the newly empowered political parties. Ever the pragmatists, the Chinese reached out to Maoists, whom they had vigorously opposed politically, calling them anti-government guerrillas. The former Nepali rebels, who had long accused the post-Mao Zedong leadership of betraying the Great Helmsman, reciprocated with great alacrity. They virtually forgave Beijing for supplying arms to the royal regime in its effort to quell the rebellion.

The new northern dynamics surfaced in other interesting ways. At times, interim prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala – uncharacteristically enough, in view of his political record and reputation – warmed to Beijing, especially after the Indian Oil Corporation interrupted critical petroleum supplies on one pretext or the other. Although the Chinese ambassador had become the first foreign representative to present his credentials to Koirala, in his capacity as interim head of state, the symbolism had its limits. Beijing declined Kathmandu's request to revoke the royal regime's contract to purchase two aircraft by the erstwhile Royal Nepalese Army. Still, when Koirala implicitly linked India to the unrest in the Terai, it was hard to separate that with repeated Chinese concerns over the region's deepening instability.

By the time of the Maoists' unexpected electoral triumph in 2008, Beijing had become increasingly candid in asserting its interests in Nepal. The persistence of the Free Tibet protests in Kathmandu hardened China's perceptions of Nepal's open border with India as a threat to its own security. From describing the royal palace massacre as an external conspiracy aimed at scuttling closer Nepal-China ties to affirming Beijing's commitment to prevent Nepal from becoming another Sikkim or Bhutan, voices from the north became more abundant and unequivocal (Wang, 2007). Significantly, they seemed equally aimed at audiences in India. The arrival of a succession of Chinese civil and military delegations in Kathmandu underscored the fundamental transformation underway in Sino-Nepali relations. The Indians appeared on the defensive, a role they were unaccustomed to in recent memory.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to China in 2008, days after assuming the premiership, prompted many Indians to cry foul. In New Delhi's view, the Maoists had violated some unwritten code under which an incoming Nepali leader always visited India first. During his subsequent visit to New Delhi, Dahal emphasised Nepal's commitment to a policy of equidistance/ equiproximity with both neighbours as a geopolitical compulsion. Although it initially won over key constituencies in India, Dahal's charm offensive could not penetrate others. Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa's visit to China, days after Dahal returned from Delhi, left sceptics in India with a deep sense of vindication, but certainly not one they could rejoice in.

The fact that Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee chose to visit Nepal as his country was holding crucial state elections served to underscore Delhi's growing anxieties. On the eve of Mukherjee's arrival, Deputy Prime Minister Bam Dev Gautam raised the regional stakes by urging Beijing's involvement in resolving Nepal's Kalapani dispute with India. (IANS, 2008). Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi hit the headlines even before he landed in Kathmandu, simply because he was paying an official visit barely a week after Mukherjee's departure. Urging Kathmandu to help check anti-China activities that could grow in 2009, the 50th year of the Dalai Lama's flight into and self-exile in India, Yang pledged Beijing's help to protect Nepal's sovereignty and independence. He also asserted that China intended to develop relations with Nepal in a way that would serve as a role model for bilateral ties between big and small countries. Clearly, this double whammy could not have been lost on the Indians.



Two days after Yang's departure, Beijing sent a military mission headed by the deputy chief of its army, Lieutenant General Ma Xiotian. During a meeting with Defence Minister Thapa, the Chinese general pledged to provide the Nepal Army with some non-lethal equipment and training facilities. Gen. Ma's visit succeeded another mission led by the Chinese military commander responsible for the areas bordering Nepal. As all this was going on, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard Boucher, who was expected to arrive in Kathmandu to, according to some reports, announce the withdrawal of his government's terrorist tag on the Maoists, put off his travel plans indefinitely. It became hard to see the events as unrelated.

The Nepali Congress took the China question to the constituent assembly, specifically asking Prime Minister Dahal whether Yang's offer was made in response to any request he had placed before Beijing. Moreover, the party demanded to know where the threat to Nepal's sovereignty emanated from. India-friendly media outlets in Nepal reacted with far greater stridency to what they almost universally considered Beijing's gratuitous concern.

Despite having raised its overall profile so substantially, the China carefully calibrated its Nepal policy. They did not seem to have developed unqualified faith in the top leadership of the Maoists, especially considering their long-standing links in India during the decade-long bloody insurgency. In early 2008, the Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) warned it would not allow Tibetans to hold anti-China protests. Once the demonstrations erupted, the YCL – and Maoist organisations in general – were almost invisible. If this was a gesture to the United States, which was in a watch-and-wait mood on the terrorism tag, it must have made some impression.

Indeed, China's ambivalence on the Maoists led to broader initiatives, the results of which were no less ambiguous. Beijing's interest in forging a wider communist front incorporating the Unified Marxist-Leninists had been stymied by the factionalism in that party. By raising the Yang issue in the legislature, the Nepali Congress pretty much distanced itself from a putative northern alliance.

Yet the logical question persisted: how far would the Chinese go in supporting the Maoists? History provided little reassurance here. From imperial times, Beijing (known then as Peking) had made explicit pledges to defend Nepal from foreign threats. Under the 1792 Betravati Treaty that concluded Nepal's war with Tibet and China, Beijing had pledged assistance against foreign aggressors in exchange for Nepal's agreement to send quinquennial tribute missions to the Qing emperor. Yet, the Chinese declined Nepali pleas for aid during the 1814-16 war with British India. China refused to bail out King Birendra and King Gyanendra in 1990 and 2006, respectively, especially when the palace's disputes with India had been directly related to Nepal's growing defence and strategic ties to Beijing.

Like those of the other external stakeholders, Beijing's focus fell on the military, which, after the abolition of the monarchy, considered itself the last line of defence vis-à-vis Nepal's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. The reading here seemed that the nationalism plank would be attractive enough to forge an alliance between the junior and middle ranks in the Nepal Army and the former rebels. Against this scenario, China's

purported interest in Maoist commanders taking up positions in the higher echelons became even more understandable.

Since Beijing's ongoing engagement increasingly appeared to be predicated on reciprocal institutional and official obligations, the question of the future of the Maoists – or any other group – in power became immaterial. The geopolitical equations had been rewritten drastically, and perhaps irrevocably. Nepal's challenge was exacerbated by its growing inability to influence the intricate variables. So, when the Maoist government collapsed in 2009, ostensibly under Indian pressure, Beijing hardly shed a tear.

## **Southern discomposure**

In seeking to build an international alliance against the palace's takeover in 2005-2006, New Delhi was aware it would be ceding some of its traditional monopoly in Nepal. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had noted, "though Nepal was an independent country, it was very closely allied to India in culture and tradition, and we did not look upon it as a foreign country" (Gokhale, 2021). While India's post-independence ties with Nepal were predicated on the intimate cultural and historical links between the two countries, they were manifested in practice in New Delhi's preponderance in Kathmandu's political evolution. India played a major role in the political changes of 1950-51, 1990 and 2006. New Delhi also regarded China as an 'interloper' in Nepal in 1950 who threatened India's security and interests in the region. Moreover, New Delhi believed Kathmandu shared its concerns about Beijing. There has been delayed recognition in India that New Delhi had ignored at least a century of Sino-Nepalese history centring around Tibet and how the misperception has contributed to a skewed understanding of Sino-Nepal relations.

Yet old habits have persisted. India's initiatives to cultivate former king Gyanendra even after New Delhi played a key role in the peace process that eventually led to the abolition of the 250-year monarchy capped India's contradictions. Initially, the move may have been less about drawing the ex-monarch into a democratic alliance than about preventing him from veering too close into a Maoist-led nationalist platform. On one plane, the fact that the restoration of the monarchy has remained part of the mainstream national conversation indicates the fickleness of the Nepali psyche. At an operational level, New Delhi recognised it as symptomatic of a backlash against the political flaws and flimsiness of the transformation process. Unspoken though, was the acknowledgment that the monarchy's cultural and social affinities to Hinduism continued to make it a sound pillar for New Delhi. In Nepal, this was seen as a continuation of India's eagerness to play all sides. By the time Nepal drew up a new federal, secular, and republican Constitution, New Delhi – the prime mover of the peace process a decade ago – could not extend an enthusiastic welcome. Instead, it imposed a virtual economic blockade, ostensibly in support of Nepalis of the country's south who felt marginalized under the new dispensation. While New Delhi continued denying it had imposed a blockade amid worsening shortages of food and fuel, Nepalis experienced the "suzerain" mentality of Indian officialdom and China won the tactical advantage.

Coordinating closely with India, the United States found itself engaging with the Maoists while the ex-rebels were still on Washington's official terrorist list. Disenchantment with the royal regime, New Delhi's prodding and apprehensions of Beijing, among other factors, pushed Washington toward this seeming illogicality. Once in the political arena, the Maoists, too, tuned out their 'anti-imperialism' rant that dominated much of their "people's war". The European Union, too, sought to project a unified front on its Nepal policy.

The EU – including the EU Delegation and the EU Member States – remained the biggest provider of development aid to Nepal, focusing mainly on three sectors: education, rural development, strengthening democracy and decentralisation. Following the devastating 2015 earthquakes, reconstruction also became an important focus. Still, member-states such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany that had longstanding bilateral engagements with Nepal sometimes struggled against the temptation to stand out individually.

## **Competing spheres**

Nepal's two neighbours remain the preponderant external factors and part of the framework of the geopolitical debate is apparent enough. India sees Nepal as part of its northern security system given its topographical similarities and contiguity, and the large and mostly unregulated border. It feels vulnerable in the presence of external powers on Nepali territory beyond normal diplomatic activity and practices. New Delhi, therefore, expects Kathmandu to remain sensitive to its security concerns. As late as 2021, a former Indian ambassador in Nepal was contemplating a Bhutan-like relationship with Kathmandu, under which India would administer the country's foreign and security policies (Rae, 2021). Nepal sees this expectation and aspiration as an infringement of its sovereignty and independence.

The Khadga Prasad Oli government's decision in 2020 to release a new political map incorporating not only the traditionally disputed territory of Kalapani but also Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura further west, was only the latest reaction to instances of what Nepal sees as Indian cartographic aggression over the decades. At some level, to be fair, Indians were not wrong to wonder whether Nepal was doing China's bidding in releasing the map at a time of heightening Sino-Indian border tensions. But that happened to be a mere coincidence, as the Kalapani area has been disputed for over 60 years. Also heightening Indian suspicions of Chinese influence was the fact that the new Nepal map had left out the Susta sector, the other traditionally disputed area. Unlike the first region, where Nepal and India conjoin China, Susta lies along the Nepal-India border.

If Prime Minister Oli's subsequent claim that Lord Ram was born in Nepal sounded like an attempt to break Nepal's civilisational relationship with India, perhaps it is because Indians have not forgotten how stung they were by Zhou Enlai's assertion in the 1950s that China had blood relations with Nepal (Rose, 1971).

Given the subsequent turn of events in the region from India's standpoint, perhaps Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel turned out to be more prophetic than he was at the time he supposedly

sought Nepal's inclusion in the Indian Union. Yet in Nehru's view, bilateral treaties of friendship and peace with the three northern Himalayan kingdoms – Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim – and an offer of a no-war pact to Pakistan was enough to deal with South Asia (Pande, 2020) freeing him to seek prominence on the Asian and global stage. No handwringing can change the fact that Nepal has remained an independent nation ever since.

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nehru's ambassador and the absolute ruler of a tottering oligarchy may have been one way India thought it could handle the three disparate Himalayan states. That Nepal did not go the way of Sikkim (annexation) or Bhutan (protectorate) is as much a fact as India-Nepal relations are regulated by the 1950 treaty. The two countries agreed to grant each other's citizens national treatment in all matters, including taking up jobs, doing business and owning property. This was ensured through an open border and the free circulation of Indian currency in Nepal. Evidently, the benefits were more for Nepal, whose citizens could take advantage of India's big market and higher level of development. In practice, the Indians could not get reciprocal benefits here in practice because of the same asymmetries. As it resembled the 1923 Nepal-Britain Treaty, the 1950 Treaty did not materially change the existing situation. Nor was there any viable alternative before either side, given the absence of any natural geographical boundaries or tradition of regulating the India–Nepal border (Sikri, 2006).

Equally important is the fact that Nepal came to the treaty table intending to assert and preserve its status as a sovereign nation. If Nehru's notion of security expressed through the 1950 Treaty had resonance for Nepal, it was to the extent of ensuring an independent Nepal did not threaten India's interests. It may be entirely fortuitous that the new treaty triggered a chain of events that would culminate in the grand Delhi Compromise. Still, the parties and palace that displaced the Ranas adhered to Nepal's original expectation from the treaty. Only nine years later, when Nepal was under an elected government, would the reciprocity the Indians sought become public knowledge, when New Delhi revealed the confidential exchange of side letters to the treaty.

Those letters obliged Nepal to depend on India for its security. In case of any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor, the two governments would consult with each other and devise effective counter measures. Nepal agreed that it would not import arms, ammunition, and other military equipment except with India's consent. Yet when Nepal and India agreed to joint staffing of posts on the Nepal-Tibet border and set up an Indian Military Mission in Nepal, they did so when Nepal feared a Chinese threat, particularly after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. These steps were not Kathmandu's confirmation of India's invocation of any right to control Nepal's political and economic life.

The security aspects lost their relevance as Nepal established diplomatic ties with China and concluded the boundary agreement. Nepal's pursuit of a foreign policy intended to assert its independent identity no longer automatically provided India a second vote at the United Nations General Assembly. A landlocked country dependent on transit through India for trade with third countries went on to find new opportunities for economic diversification. Thus, adhering to international law, it considered transit to be a right but trade a matter of convenience.

Every time Nepal sought a review of the 1950 Treaty, India pointed to the provision for unilateral termination on a year's notice. It was only after democratically elected leaders in the 1990s began pressing the case that New Delhi agreed to discuss the matter. Yet even some of the same Indians, who acknowledge how the Indian government and public have never shown adequate sensitivity to Nepali pride in their sovereignty and independence, have difficulty seeing Kathmandu's assertion of its independence as more than skilful leveraging of its geographical contiguity with China. During the latest border dispute, many Indian experts and analysts have placed much faith in how the unique people-to-people relations would see the two countries through this crisis. While urging India to do everything it should to nurture the invaluable asset it has in the goodwill of Nepali people, some in this fraternity still counsel India to reject the Nepali state's ill-conceived territorial claims.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pledge in 2014 to see a revision done during his tenure and invitation to Nepal to present proposals was the clearest articulation of India's change of heart. Yet Modi still has not had the time to receive the report prepared by the bilateral Eminent Persons Group in 2018. How much are pledges worth if a set of non-binding recommendations agreed together cannot merit sufficient official attention in New Delhi?

A leading Chinese expert on South Asia contends that India itself was prompting Beijing to reassess its policy in the region (Zhao, 2010). Arguing that New Delhi had failed to address the "strategic autonomy" of other South Asian nations, he described the resultant discordance as a threat to Chinese interests. If India is anxious to lead South Asia by virtue of its size and strength, he contended, then it must only do so with the consent of its smaller neighbours. As for Nepal, short of annexing the country and assuming the associated costs, India can do little but reconcile itself to the fact that it is an independent nation. Catchphrases like "special relations" or "roti-beti" ("bread-daughters") cannot help because they have become terms of estrangement. Just as India cannot apologise for being big, Nepal must not be expected to pay the price of being small and sandwiched between two giants that distrust each other. Nepal's grievances with China might not seem as serious as those with India, but they do exist. Beijing has maintained relative silence on the substance of the India-Nepal border dispute, preferring to club it together with China's general support for Nepali sovereignty. Yet China has not hesitated to send subtle reminders that the Kalapani question is quite identical to one concerning the Doklam.

Nepal recognises that most pledges from China to ease the country's dependence on India foresee the long term. Moreover, little of tangible consequence has even begun, a fact that has the potential to raise public impatience. Greater exposure to Chinese business tactics, the darker side of growing interactions such as crime, and the general Chinese perceptions of themselves and their place in the world risk bringing more Nepali discontent to the fore. Dismissing Nepali grievances with India as Chinese-instigated ploys could present New Delhi with stricter challenges from Nepal. This assertion stems not from Nepali arrogance but from anguish over the additional pain that might be inflicted upon the country.

So, instead of obsessing over why Nepalis see China the way they do, India might want to delve deeper into how China sees Nepal. Although it might not advertise it, Beijing sees Tibet and Nepal as part of its integrated “peripheral policy”. Nepal’s northern border is an easy gateway to the Tibet Autonomous Region. China worries that political instability in Nepal could lead to enhanced anti-Chinese activities in Nepal. Every time India is tempted to wave the Tibet card to China, it is enough to wobble Nepal.

Although Beijing considers the situation in the Tibetan region more stable, it expects the region to continue to be a core factor in relations with Kathmandu. With the three external powers most active on the Tibet issue – India, the United States, and the European Union – increasingly involved in Nepal’s peace process, Beijing’s concerns about renewed potential for destabilisation from that volatile frontier has grown. The inevitable passing of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and ensuing succession politics are certain to re-energise the increasingly restless exile community in Nepal and those living across the porous border in India and beyond in Europe and America.

The Chinese passed regulations in 2007 that, in effect, ensured their final say in the choice of the new Dalai Lama. Tenzin Gyatso, who in March 2011 announced his retirement from active day-to-day leadership, has said in the past that he might break tradition and name a successor and that his successor might not even be reincarnated inside Tibet. To forestall potential unrest inside Tibet, Beijing had begun adopting multi-pronged measures. Substantial levels of aid have been pledged for the estimated 6.5 million Tibetans living in what Beijing has designated as the Tibet Autonomous Region as well as the neighbouring provinces of Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai.

For long, many Indians have believed that a resolution of the Tibet issue held the key to a durable settlement of their disputes with China. Now hardliners in India are becoming more forthright in their assertion that New Delhi should exploit what they consider China’s Achilles heel. To secure progress on the border question or on Kashmir, they feel India should remind the Chinese that they could raise the cost in Tibet.

Considering China’s growing sensitivities ahead of an impending vicious struggle over the Dalai Lama succession issue, Beijing is likely to see India’s use of the “Tibet card” as a dangerous escalation. The unprecedented media publicity given to the participation of the Special Frontier Forces – an elite paratrooper unit drawn mainly from India’s Tibetan exile community – alongside regular Indian army units in a key battle has raised the stakes considerably (Ramachandran, 2020). A new security crisis in Tibet would create a substantial flow of refugees into Nepal, increasing its geostrategic vulnerabilities.

The Chinese have moved beyond Tibet in their engagement with Nepal, at least in the traditional sense. There is new recognition in China that, given its border disputes with India and absence of diplomatic relations with Bhutan, only Nepal could provide it physical connectivity to South Asia (Hu, 2015). Beijing has divided South Asia into western (Afghanistan and Pakistan) and eastern (India at the centre) components and sees Nepal the most viable bridge to the latter. Expressions of such benign motives will not impress India, which has long seen trans-Himalayan ambitions as growing from a desire to keep a check on India’s rising capabilities.



More broadly, however, it would be critical to merge the future with the past to explore where Nepal may lie amid the contours of an emerging Sino-centric world. Most analysts concede that the visible elements of China's recent assertiveness can be interpreted in various ways. Still, they note striking similarities between the ancient tribute system and the way Beijing currently engages with parts of the outside world (Rolland, 2020). These moves do not indicate a coherent model enlivening every aspect of China's diplomatic practice. But this may also be because the tribute system, while a manifestation of Confucian norms of hierarchy, was, in the words of John K. Fairbank, a "repertoire of means available to the rulers of the Chinese empire in their relations with non-Chinese...along a spectrum that runs from one extreme of military conquest and administrative assimilation to another extreme of complete non intercourse and avoidance of contact" (Fairbank, 1968).

Today, under the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the strands of *tianxia* (everything under heaven) appear interwoven with a modern Marxist-Leninist power structure, organization and ideological system (Rolland, 2020). In that case, it becomes important to remember that Nepal was the last tributary to the Qing Dynasty. For a country with a prodigiously long memory and a pragmatic sense of historical continuity, the implications are immense for China. Knowing that, Mao Zedong's "five-fingers and a palm" analogy would cease to oscillate between evoking distress and derision in New Delhi and begin encouraging an understanding of the ceaseless churning that goes on in Beijing.

At the practical level, a deeper understanding could even foster some creative thinking by India and China. Terms like "trilateral cooperation", "corridor" and "bridge" are anathema to New Delhi in the context of China, Nepal and India. Frustrated, some Chinese analysts have called for Beijing and Kathmandu to move ahead with trans-Himalayan development, with or without New Delhi (Hu, 2017). China and India have always shared competing national interests in and over Nepal. Experience has taught Kathmandu it may be largely irrelevant if China and India are "good" to Nepal without also being good to each other (Koirala, 2011). Given their simultaneous rise and great power aspirations that rivalry is likely to intensify.

King Birendra's 1975 Zone of Peace proposal – which over the next decade and a half won the support of 116 countries – envisioned "institutionalising peace in the region" to safeguard Nepal's independence and territorial integrity through the unpredictable vicissitudes of history and time. India's strong and consistent opposition was enough for the drafters of the 1990 Constitution to discard it. What has endured is the reality of Nepal's enormously geostrategic location between India and China, which has a proven history of military conflicts (Josse, 2020).

Theoretically, the 2+1 dialogue mechanism would help India and China narrow their mutual suspicions sufficiently to spur Nepal's development. Practically, though, it would be a non-starter. Whether relations with Beijing are in thaw or tense, India is no mood to further diminish Nepal's status as its exclusive zone of influence. A more financially and diplomatically energised China would take a more sweeping world view to developing mutually beneficial bilateral relations with Nepal. In such a situation, Nepal's own perplexity becomes understandable.

The concept first emerged during the April 2018 Xi-Modi informal summit in Wuhan, convened against the backdrop of the Doklam standoff. China proposed the model as



a way of minimising conflict with India over smaller South Asian states. During Prime Minister Oli's visit to China in June, Xi briefly shared his discussions with Modi on the concept. The Chinese and Indian leaders discussed the 2+1 mechanism during their second informal summit in Mamallapuram. Xi's decision to fly to Nepal from India – as opposed to travelling from China – may have reflected Beijing's desire to inaugurate this concept (Bhattarai, 2019).

During talks in Kathmandu, Xi shared the proposal with Nepali leaders. Rejecting it, Oli was said to have explained to Xi Nepal's preference for trilateral cooperation. Oli later explained that partnerships needed to be based on equality. Many Nepali experts began stressing that the 2+1 approach undermined Nepal's ability to deal independently with its neighbours on important projects. The 2+1 mechanism required Nepali concurrence with what China and India could agree on. That way the economic dimensions of cooperation would be made subservient to the security considerations of Nepal's two neighbours. China's continued insistence is believed to have partly contributed to Oli's renewed eagerness to secure parliamentary endorsement of the MCC compact with the United States. Just as the onus fell on Nepal to amplify its preference, the corona virus disease (Covid-19) blended the underlying contradictions of the Sino-Indian relationship into the border conflict. New Delhi was likely to torpedo either model even before relations with Beijing nosedived.

While it is tempting to see the break-up of the Maoist-UML unity, the split in the UML and collapse of the Oli government as a blow to China, Beijing has made sufficient economic, social, and diplomatic investments to allow it to become politically active in Nepal's domestic affairs.

Some in India see that under President Xi Jinping, China's policy toward Nepal has shifted from protecting its periphery to a broader goal of bringing Nepal under its strategic control and detect political and economic levers that Beijing is using to build a preeminent position in Nepal (Gokhale, 2021). While conceding to Nepal's closer cultural and social affinities to India, some scholars in Beijing contend that economics and geopolitics have bound Kathmandu closer to its northern neighbour.

China's policy towards Nepal has become an amalgam of national security, military, political, and economic objectives that aims at deepening integration and strengthening political influence. The comprehensive transit and transportation agreement operative as of February 2020 offered Nepal the theoretical ability to end its sole dependence on India for goods and trade by granting the country vital access to Chinese ports. While the economic viability of Chinese facilities as an alternative to Indian ports is questionable, the agreement served to provide a clear and immediate political signal to New Delhi.

The two countries have signed several agreements on legal issues including boundary management and mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. Nepal has requested Chinese aid for major projects such as the Pokhara International Regional Airport, a cross-border optical fibre link, and the upper Marsyangdi hydropower station. The Kerung-Kathmandu railway project is expected to facilitate Nepal's connectivity through China's road network with the rest of the world (Pal, 2021).

While military ties and security exchanges with Nepal have been among China's weakest in South Asia, new initiatives have been announced since 2017, including an annual joint military exercise. The Covid-19 pandemic has allowed China to advance its vision of a Health Silk Road in Nepal. By March 2020, Kathmandu had signed up to the "Chinese model against Covid-19" and started working with China on best practices to handle the pandemic, using Chinese testing kits and other equipment. Thirty Chinese NGOs have been operating in Nepal as Beijing has made offering Mandarin courses more attractive for schools by bearing the cost of employing teachers. Through financial aid and scholarships, China has increasingly made itself the destination of choice for Nepali students seeking technical skills and graduate degrees. Media cooperation has been expanding with regular exchanges of teams of journalists from both countries (Pal, 2021).

Although scepticism of China's motives and intentions has not paralleled that concerning India, it is growing in Nepali media circles and social media. Allegations of land encroachment by China in the northern district of Humla have dominated the public discourse for over a year (Kafle, 2021). The alleged involvement of Chinese intelligence agents in spreading disinformation against the MCC is being reported by sections of the Nepali media (KhabarHub, 2021). This intensifying battle of perceptions in geopolitics comes amid increasing rancour in Nepal's politics, which cannot bode well for either domain.

## **Conclusion**

All three countries must devise a way to ensure that Nepal is not drawn into the Sino-Indian vortex only to be continually castigated as a source of their conflict. Going forward, much would depend on the ability of India and China to evolve a minimum understanding on Nepal, mindful of how sudden and precipitous action can trigger reactions detrimental to both Asian giants. With little prospect of improvement in bilateral ties in the near term, China and India have nevertheless developed sufficiently durable economic and other complementarities to limit areas of contention. Positioning Nepal as one of those areas would complete half the task. The other part would have to come from Nepali confidence in the neighbours' collective goodwill. The perils therein have been accentuated by Kathmandu's apprehensions of the 2+1 initiative. A revival of King Birendra's Zone of Peace proposal complete with the explicit endorsement by India could help allay Nepali concerns (China having extended support right after it was made in 1975).

In the absence of confidence-building measures, polarised politics and partisan media sensationalism would continue to play upon traditional Nepali fears and suspicions of its immediate neighbours and foreign countries in general. If the domestic environment proceeds unabated towards fuelling India's or China's insecurities and fears, the consequences for Nepal could be costly. As to the key question raised at the beginning, the evidence is anecdotal at best to suggest that Nepal's politics and geopolitics have become adversative. Still, the imperative of ensuring that Nepal's uninhibited internal politics do not work against the neighborhood's unstable geopolitics is gaining urgency by the day.

\*Sanjay Upadhyais the author, most recently, of ‘Empowered and Imperiled: Nepal’s Peace Puzzle in Bits and Pieces’ (Kathmandu: FinePrint, 2022). His previous books are ‘Backfire in Nepal: How India Lost the Plot to China’ (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2021), ‘Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India’ (New York and London: Routledge, 2012) and ‘The Raj Lives: India in Nepal’ (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2008).

## References

- Bhattarai, Kamal Dev (2019). ‘China-India Plus: Is it in Nepal’s interest?’. *Annapurna Express*. November 3, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/china-india-plus-is-it-in-nepals-interest-1987>.
- Fairbank, John K. (1968). *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gokhale, Vijay (2021). ‘India’s Fog of Misunderstanding Surrounding Nepal-China Relations’. Working Paper. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <https://carnegieindia.org/2021/10/04/india-s-fog-of-misunderstanding-surrounding-nepal-china-relations-pub-85416>.
- Hu Shisheng (2015). ‘Nepal most viable bridge between China and South Asia’. Interview. *The Kathmandu Post*. October 12, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://kathmandupost.com/interviews/2015/10/12/nepal-most-viable-bridge-between-china-and-south-asia>.
- Hu Shisheng (2017). ‘Trans-Himalayan Handshake’. *The Kathmandu Post*. August 17, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://kathmandupost.com/opinion/2017/08/17/trans-himalayan-handshake>.
- IANAS (2008). ‘Nepal seeks China’s help to fix border dispute with India’. *Indo-Asian News Service*. November 20, 2008. Retrieved from: [http://twocircles.net/2008nov20/nepal\\_seeks\\_chinas\\_help\\_fix\\_border\\_dispute\\_india.html](http://twocircles.net/2008nov20/nepal_seeks_chinas_help_fix_border_dispute_india.html)
- Josse, M.R (2020). ‘Nepal: A Sino-Indian condominium?’ *Peoples Review Weekly*. Kathmandu. August 24, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.peoplesreview.com.np/2020/08/24/nepal-a-sino-indian-condominium/>.
- Kafle, Tejendra. ‘We have ample evidence that China has encroached upon our land in Humla: Lawmaker Shahi’. *KhabarHub.com*. September 22, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://english.khabarhub.com/2021/22/210809/>
- Koirala, Bhaskar (2011). ‘Sino-Nepalese Relations: Factoring in India’. *China Report*. 46:3: pp.231-242
- ‘Nepali security authorities identify a Chinese intelligence agency official involved in anti-MCC propaganda’, *KhabarHub.com*. November 12, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://english.khabarhub.com/2021/12/219645/>
- Pal, Deep (2021). ‘China’s Influence in South Asia Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries’. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/13/china-s-influence-in-south-asia-vulnerabilities-and-resilience-in-four-countries-pub-85552>

- Pande, Aparna (2020). *Making India Great: The Promise of a Reluctant Global Power*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India.
- Rae, Ranjit (2021). *Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties*. Vintage Books. New Delhi.
- Ramachandran, Sudha (2020). 'India's "Tibet Card" in the Stand-Off with China: More Provocative than Productive'. *China Brief*: 20:17. The Jamestown Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://jamestown.org/program/indias-tibet-card-in-the-stand-off-with-china-more-provocative-than-productive/>.
- Rolland, Nadège (Editor) (2020). 'An Emerging China-Centric Order: China's Vision for a New World Order in Practice'. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*. NBR Special Report #87. August 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/an-emerging-china-centric-order-chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order-in-practice/>.
- Rose, Leo E. (1971). *Nepal: A Strategy for Survival*. University of California Press.
- Sikri, Rajiv (2006). *Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Upadhya, Sanjay (2012). *Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Wang Hongwei (2007) "Chin Chup Lagera Basdaina" [China Won't Sit Silently By], *Nepal*, November 5, 2007.
- Zhao Gancheng (2010). 'South Asia's Position in the International Order and Choice Before China', *South Asian Studies* (Chinese), No.1.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Upadhya, S. (2022) Sphere pressure: When Politics Contends with Geopolitics:

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ifa.v2i01.44007>

# Rethinking Climate Diplomacy Gains: Strategic Benefits to Nepal

---

Chandra Lal Pandey<sup>1</sup>  
Ngamindra Dahal<sup>2</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world when it comes to climate change, which has become a major threat to development and in building disaster-resilient urban and rural communities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth assessment report of 2021 termed the climate crisis as “Code Red”, signifying that climate change is already causing substantial physical, environmental, social, and economic losses, and damages in both developing and developed countries. The impacts of climate change are disproportionate for countries like Nepal, which must bear the brunt of the impacts even though their contribution to making global warming is minimal. However, the politics of developed and the developing countries and changing economic realities of many influential nations complicate multilateral, bilateral, trilateral and regional climate negotiations. Most recent scientific reports suggest that if countries do not take decisive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions now, the world is going beyond the 2°C rise limit soon and will affect, inter alia, the mountain ecosystem, freshwater system, agriculture, livelihood, and development practices. The impacts of climate change are increasing rapidly in various sectors of Nepali human and natural ecosystems. Therefore, addressing the impacts of it is paramount, and requires mitigation and adaptation measures, which includes efficacious climate diplomacy. Qualitative assessments indicate that Nepal needs to adopt a new approach to climate diplomacy to ethically encourage big economies and the rest of the world to go beyond conventional binary options of relations between the developed and developing countries. Adaptation and mitigation are the best available approaches to addressing climate change vulnerabilities and building resilient communities. Therefore, an interdisciplinary negotiation team would be needed in the diplomatic efforts to articulate priorities and evidence-based impacts and for tapping the international resources – state-of-art-knowledge, finances, and technologies – to assist the country to fight against climate threats.*

**Keywords:** Climate change, diplomacy, Nepal

## **Introduction**

Climate change is one of the most burning issues of the 21st century. The IPCC's sixth report (2021) labeled the climate crisis as a “Code Red”, suggesting climate change is causing

---

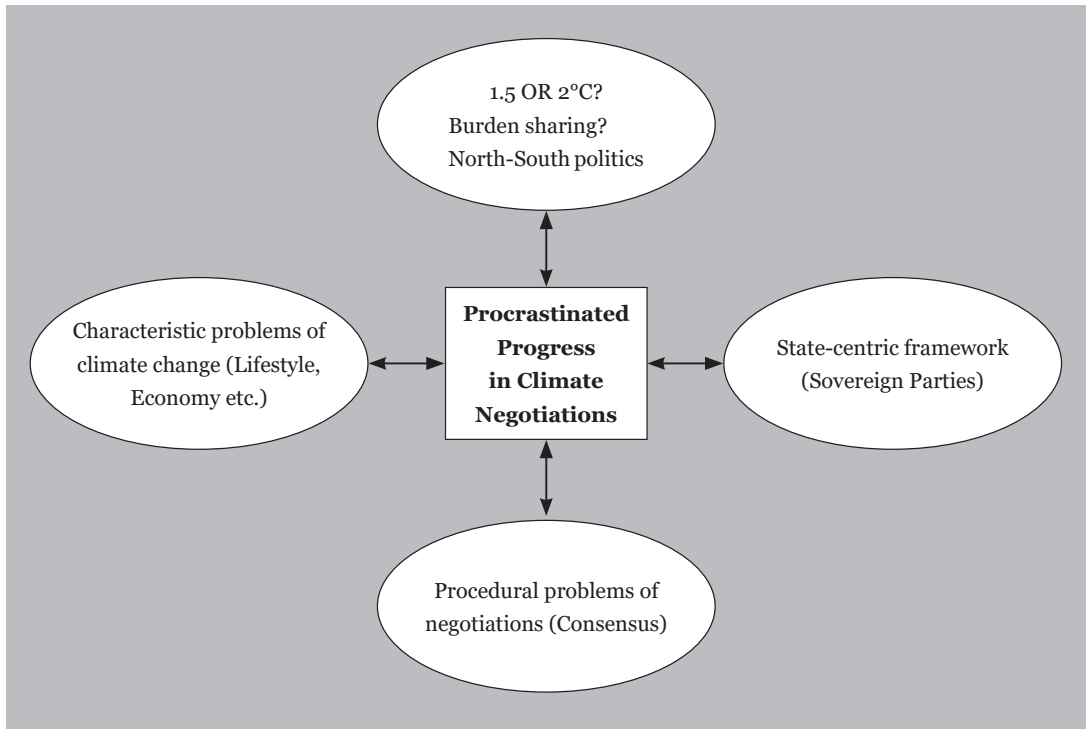
1 Dr. Chandra Lal Pandey is the Acting Head of the Department of Development Studies, School of Arts, Kathmandu University. Dr. Pandey's areas of expertise are public policy, environment/climate and development.

2 Dr Ngamindra Dahal, a hydromet graduate with extensive research experiences on the diverse aspects of climate change and environment issues, is serving as the Chairperson of Nepal Water Conservation Foundation for Academic Research (nwf.org.np) onward 2018

substantial physical, environmental, social, and economic stresses in the world, and especially in the developing countries including Nepal. International climate change negotiations for addressing threats of climate change have been underway since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, the emissions of global greenhouse gases (GHGs) and their concentrations in the atmosphere have been rapidly increasing and have contributed to heating the world by over 1°C compared to pre-industrial levels. The Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreements have made a little contribution in reducing GHGs and the lack of progress has been attributed to the problems in the international system—the structural state-centric framework, procedural problems of negotiations—consensual decision-making approach, and the characteristic problems of climate change and it covers a wide range of issues that influence the roles of states at climate negotiations (Pandey, 2012; Pandey, 2014; Victor, 2011; Downie, 2011; Grubb, 2011; Helm, 2009; Volger, 2011; Also see figure 1 for details).

Nepal is a Party to the UNFCCC and is also one of the most vulnerable countries to anthropogenic climate change in the world. Climate change is becoming the most powerful threat to development outcomes and to efforts of building climate resilient urban and rural communities. The impacts of climate change are disproportionate, and it is the least developed and the developing countries that have to bear the brunt of the escalating impacts even though their contributions towards creating the problem is minimal. Yet, in the state-centric framework of international negotiations, the politics of the developed and the developing countries and changing economic realities of influential nations have been complicating UNFCCC led climate negotiations. Recent climate reports suggest that, if countries take no action soon, the world will go beyond the 2°C limit and affect mountain ecosystem, freshwater system, agriculture, livelihoods, and development practices. Climate impacts have become more visible in all sectors of Nepali socio-economic activities, and addressing them is important and would require both mitigation and adaptation measures. Adaptation and mitigation are the two best available approaches to addressing climate change; however, incorporating these in development practices requires a substantial human capacity, knowledge, technological and economic resources, which are generally beyond the access of Nepal. In this backdrop, we argue that Nepal needs to adopt a reconsidered, sophisticated approach with renewed leadership to climate diplomacy to encourage the developed North and the developing South, the emerging economies, and the rest of the world to go beyond the conventional binary options in the politics of the developed and the developing countries.

Employing qualitative, primarily, secondary data, the first section of the paper briefly introduces the global climate challenges, negotiations issues and the key arguments. The second section focuses on climate change impacts in Nepal. The third section discusses the practice of UNFCCC negotiations and introduces the negotiating blocs. The fourth and the fifth sections focus on Nepal's existing climate diplomacy and approaches for the future followed by the conclusion.



**Figure 1: Procrastinated Progress in Climate Change Negotiations.**

*Source: Adapted from Pandey, 2012; 2014.*

## Global climate change and its impact on Nepal

The most recent IPCC report (2021) unequivocally says that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land and the rate of warming is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years. Continued global warming is projected to further intensify the global water cycle, its variability, monsoon precipitation, and severity of wet and dry events. Monsoon precipitation is projected to increase in the mid- to long-term in Asia and Africa, particularly in South Asia and East Asia and West Sahel (IPCC, 2021). Nepal is ranked as the fourth most vulnerable country in the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) developed by Germanwatch, while it is in the 11th position among the most vulnerable on average from 1998 through 2017 (Eckstein et al., 2019). According to Nepal's third national communication to UNFCCC (2020), the recent projections (based on RCP4.5 and RCP8.5 models) suggest that Nepal will experience temperature rise between 1.730C and 3.690C by the end of the 21st century (MoFE, 2021). The temperature will rise at varied rates in the different the physiographic regions: Tarai between 1.72 0C and 3.690C, Siwalik (up to 3.660C) and High Mountain (up to 3.610C). Seasonally, the post monsoon period and winter will become warmer by 2.50C to 4.50C and 2.10C to 40C. The annual maximum temperature trend will have a growth rate of 0.056°C yr<sup>-1</sup> with 99.99 percent significance.



Data from 1971–2007 show that floods affected many people (over 4.6 million) but caused fewer deaths (per event). Cumulatively, however, they caused a significant number of deaths (3,902 people in 1971–2007). Conversely, per event, landslides killed or injured more people (as high as 5,000 per event) but affected fewer people (though still a high number) or 607,091, in the same period (Shrestha 2019). The most common climate-induced hazards – floods (in the plains) and landslides (in the hills) – are associated with the monsoon (June–September). The loss of life and damage to property and infrastructure annually affect the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people. The estimated direct costs of current climate variability are equivalent to 1.5–2 percent of GDP per year in Nepal based on 2013 prices (GCAP, 2014).

The shrinking of glaciers in the Himalayas and the formation and expansion of glacial lakes are some of the indicators of global warming. The Rika Samba, Lirung, and Khumbu glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate while the formation of glacial lakes has become relatively common due to the rapid melting of glaciers (UNDP, 2013). Likewise, the Imja, Tsho Rolpa, Thulagi, and Barun glacial lakes are expanding. The increasingly visible glacial shrinking and the formation of lakes have led to several Glacial Lake Outbursts Flood (GLOF) events over the past few decades. The occurrence of GLOF implies that there is indeed some warming happening. It also means that the overall pattern of risks is changing. The pattern of change is also visible in the middle hill hydrological system in the form of declining stream flow and shifting characteristics of precipitation (Dahal et al., 2019).

Nepal's geographic position represents a major portion of the Himalayas and northern belt of the densely populated Gangetic plain. Stretching from the world's highest mountain (Mount Everest -8848.86 m) to the plains at 60 m within a range of 200km, the country has a unique diversity of flora and fauna. This is the context in which the recently released technical summary of the Working Group 1 of the IPCC 6th report (2021) needs to be read. It has projected that climate will further increase the temperature in Asia leading to the melting of permafrost at higher rates. Consequently, increases in permafrost temperature and its thawing have been observed over recent decades (high confidence). Future projections indicate a continuing decline in seasonal snow duration, glacial mass, and permafrost area by mid-century (high confidence). Snow-covered areas and snow volumes will also decrease in most regions of the Hindu Kush Himalaya during the 21st century and snowline elevations will rise (high confidence), and glacier volumes are likely to decline with greater mass loss in higher carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions scenarios. Heavy snowfall is increasing in East Asia and North Asia (medium confidence) but with limited evidence on future changes in hail and snow avalanches.

An analysis of the historical climate data indicates an important deviation in Nepal's climate. This is primarily about the shifting average temperature. According to DHM (2017) analysis of temperature data from 1971 to 2014 reveals significant positive trends both annually and seasonally. This is true for both maximum temperature (0.0020C/yr.) and minimum temperature (0.0560C/yr) as the trends are significantly positive. However, no significant trends have been observed in precipitation. The annual all Nepal maximum temperature trend is significantly positive, while the annual minimum temperature trend is also positive,

but insignificant. Data on intra-annual rainfall and monsoon rainfall for the years 1921-2010 shows a trend from negative to positive deviations (UNDP 2013, pp.19). Likewise, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology of Nepal revised the average dates of onset and withdrawal of monsoon effectively from 2021, which is an indication of expanded monsoon period by about a week. The revised dates are June 13 and October 2 respectively. Earlier the average dates of onset and withdrawal used to be the June 10 and September 23.

The DHM (2017) study also analyzed the annual precipitation for the period 1971 to 2014. The findings revealed a significant negative trend in the High-Himalayan region only during the pre-months. In other seasons, precipitation trends were insignificant in all physiographic regions. Some extreme precipitation trends were also observed. For example, number of rainy days was increasing significantly mainly in the northwestern districts. Likewise, very wet days and extremely wet days were decreasing significantly, mainly in the northern districts. Consecutively dry days were decreasing significantly, mainly in the northwestern districts of Lumbini and Karnali provinces.

Various studies (MoE, 2010, NCVST 2009, Baidya and Karmacharya, 2007) have consistently reported the main driving factors and the general characteristics of Nepal's climate variability and the changing characteristics of climate hazards through key indicators. These include extreme temperature, intense rainfall, floods, landslides, droughts, and GLOFs. But past weather data remains patchy. For example, the temperature data used in the analysis by Practical Action Nepal Office (2009) relied on only 44 weather stations located mostly in the middle mountain region since many stations had not recorded data continuously for a sufficiently long period. Indeed, continuous data is only available for a few decades making it difficult to discern current climate trends with certainty. In addition, there is no data available for the Himalayan region. There is also no national data available on snow and glacier mass balance and not having local data and its analysis can be of little help to effectively address climate change concerns.

## **Climate Change as a barrier to SDG targets: Agriculture and food security**

Nepal's agriculture and water resources are among the sectors most vulnerable to climate change (Ministry of Environment 2010; Pandey, 2012; Also see figure 2 for details). Crop productivity is projected to decline significantly in midterm scenarios mainly due to rise of mean temperatures and changes in precipitation leading to frequent pest infestations and loss of soil moistures (MOFA, 2021). The agriculture sector is highly exposed to climate change anomalies for the lack of access to basic infrastructures including regulated irrigation, pest control, fertilizers, technicians, and advanced technologies for plantation and harvesting. Climate change policy (2019) and other major policy documents recognize that agriculture sector as being most vulnerable to climate change and requiring urgent and immediate investments. This is closely linked to food security as well because over 90 percent of poor households in the communities depend on subsistence agriculture for primary employment and livelihoods (UNDP, 2013 pp. 10). The report said:

Only 15 percent of agricultural products are traded, and rest of the produces are consumed at homes. Over 70 percent of the crop area depends on rains brought about by the summer monsoon (June-September with 80 percent of the total rainfall), which is a major cropping season in the country. Attempts at prioritizing the sector to increase rural incomes, reduce poverty, and ensure food and nutrition security are met with problems like low agricultural productivity due to lack of access to reliable irrigation. The total value of crops exposed to climate sensitivity amounts to around US\$ 1.5 billion of which annual loss of US\$ 75 million was caused by droughts compared to US\$ 4 million caused by other hazards. Annual losses of crops during extreme droughts led to food deficits of 400,000 tons resulting in the rise of food prices of up to 300 percent in various locations. These reductions in food products led to increase in food prices, thus, affected most of the population (mainly) in the poor households who were subsequently forced to cope with risks by reducing food consumption, selling productive assets, migrating due to distress, among others.

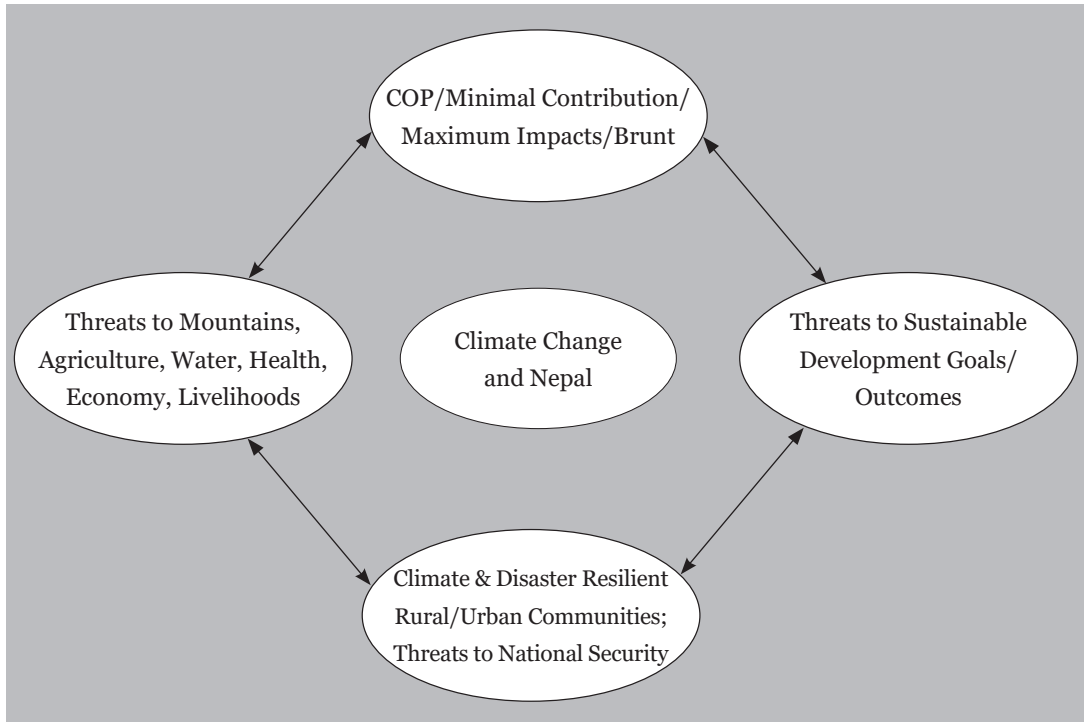
Climate change is emerging as the major barrier for achieving the national targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mainly due to the additional financial burden as revealed in the study undertaken by the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2018). The study estimated annual investment requirements for achieving the targets of poverty reduction to be between NRs. 76.7 billion to NRs. 211 billion. Likewise, the investment needs to stand between NRs. 77.2 billion to NRs. 141 billion per year for agricultural development, NRs. 56.3 billion to NRs. 220.1 billion per year for the health-sector, NRs. 138.8 billion to NRs. 493.4 billion per year for education and NRs. 100.5 billion to NRs. 37 billion for the clean water and sanitation sector. Further, the SDG targets of affordable and clean energy and Nepal's efforts at of hydropower generation will be affected by extreme climatic changes (Pandey, 2020). The average investment requirement for climate change adaptation and mitigation would be NRs. 21.1 billion per year. More than 50 percent of the climate investment would go for climate proofing of infrastructure projects while the average investment requirement for the entire SDG period is NRs. 2,024.8 billion per year. As a percentage of GDP, the annual average investment requirements is 48 percent. The average financing gap is NRs. 585 billion per year for the entire SDG period from 2016 to 2030. With respect to GDP, annual financing gap on average is 12.8 percent of GDP.

A clean environment that minimizes diseases, supports pollination of crops, and provides forest products are some other ecosystem services that are vital for communities, and loss or degradation of this natural capital can have serious repercussions on human well-being and economic and social stability. Nepal's terrestrial forest ecosystems are also home to vulnerable wildlife such as tiger, Asian elephant, greater one-horned rhinoceros, clouded leopard, snow leopard, wild dog, and hornbills that require extensive spatial areas to support their ecological and behavioral requirements; species that are ill-treated because of the propensity for conflict with people; the habitat specialist species such as red panda, musk deer and several other less charismatic species of flora and fauna; and point endemics with very small range distributions whose habitat can be completely lost from forest loss

and degradation. Importantly, ecosystem degradation also affects ecosystem function of biological communities and ecological services that also support human communities (Thapa et al., 2015). The livelihoods, lives, and local and national economic investments in the Himalaya are also strongly dependent on sustained provision of water. Conservation and restoration of degraded forests, lands and biodiversity has been a national development goal after Nepal committed to maintain at least 40 percent of land under forest cover. Nepal’s forest ecosystem and biodiversity have been facing climate change impacts in the forms of forest fires, diseases, fragmentation, conversion, and degradation but remain essential for conserving water and other vital ecosystem services of the region that supports millions of people. Since these ecosystems and forests form an integral part of the Himalayan terrestrial ecoregions, they are of great concern to Nepal’s neighbors as well.

### Climate Change Negotiations and Negotiating Blocs

International climate change negotiations began some 25 years ago. The main intergovernmental negotiating body on global climate change is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an entity tasked with supporting the global response to the threat of climate change. It was established in 1992 within the United Nations. The UNFCCC had 197 state parties as of writing. Since 1992, the UNFCCC



**Figure 2. Climate Change Impacts on Nepal.**

*Source: Adapted from Pandey, 2012.*

negotiation process has focused on long-term measures to address climate change to stabilize atmospheric GHG concentrations at a level that would help avoid catastrophic global warming consequences. The major agreements through the UNFCCC include the Convention itself in 1992; the Kyoto Protocol in 1997; and the Paris Agreement in 2015. The primary goal of the Paris Agreement is to contain the global average temperature at 1.5°C to 2°C above pre-industrial levels (the reference period is 1850-1900). The ultimate objective of most climate agreements is to stabilize GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system, within a time frame that would allow ecosystems to adapt naturally and enable sustainable development.

The UNFCCC organizes and supports between two to four negotiating sessions each year. The most important and largest session is the Conference of the Parties (COP), which is held annually in different locations around the globe and is attended by around 25000 participants on average (UNFCCC, N.D.). All the Parties of COP participate in the climate summit individually but negotiate through various negotiating blocs, and some negotiate only on behalf of their own countries. The key negotiating blocs are generally classified as the developed and the developing countries, but there also are different blocs between and within the developed and the developing country groups as shown in the table below:

**Table 1:** Key negotiating blocs at the international climate change negotiations

Negotiating Blocs	Temperature Limit	Treaty Status	Burden Sharing
Umbrella Group 10 Countries	2°C	All-Inclusive	Developed & Developing Countries as per individual capabilities
European Union 27 Countries	1.5°C to 2°C	All-Inclusive	Developed & Developing Countries as per individual capabilities
G-77/China 130 Countries	1.5°C to 2°C	Developed Countries	Historical Responsibility of Developed Countries
AOSIS 43 Countries	1.5°C	Developed Countries	Historical Responsibility of Developed Countries
LDC 46 Countries	1.5°C	Developed Countries	Historical Responsibility of Developed Countries
AU 54 Countries	1.5°C	Developed Countries	Historical Responsibility of Developed Countries
EIG 6 Countries	1.5°C to 2°C	Developed Countries	Historical Responsibility of Developed Countries

Source: Adapted from Pandey, 2014.

Table 1 shows that there are seven key negotiating blocs at the UNFCCC. Countries like the United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus have grouped to identify themselves as the umbrella group. The European Union has 27 countries, 43 countries in the Alliance of Small Island Countries (AOSIS), 54 countries under African Union (AU) bloc and the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) of non-aligned countries including Switzerland, South Korea, Mexico, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and Georgia. One of the most interesting groups is called Group of 77/China (G-77/China), which includes over 130 countries and Parties from AU, AOSIS, LDCs, as

well as the emerging economies of the 21st century. G-77/China includes emerging economies like China, India, Brazil, South Korea, and Mexico and countries like Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal.

The G-77/China established itself as a powerful international negotiating bloc in 1964, demanding a New International Economic Order within the UN and this group continues even though it has more than 130 members with heterogeneous political and economic realities. The term ‘Global South’ to capture all developing and the least developed countries has always been politically and economically heterogeneous (Hochstetler, 2012). Although diversity exists, there is also a common set of concerns that the G-77/China represents in global negotiations; they also have common concerns based on structural divisions rooted in different historical experiences and material realities of the Global North and South (Miller, 1995; Roberts and Parks, 2007). While Najam (2005) and Williams (2005) have argued that the South’s collective action was based less on objective facts than on members’ willingness to adopt a collective identity, Williams (2005, pp. 57) has argued that “the construction of a North-South divide is an integral part of the bargaining process”.

Climate change negotiations have been underway for three decades since 1990 but have become better known to have been “ossified”, “gridlocked” and “limited”, producing little meaningful results so far to arrest global temperature rise and to address climate change (Depledge, 2006; Dimitrov, 2010; Victor, 2011; Pandey, 2014b; Pandey, 2015b). The negotiations have often also been locked due to disagreements between the developed North and the developing South connected to the North-South politics of development; burden-sharing of mitigation and adaptation cost based on the core principles of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), and historical responsibility. However, neither the global North nor the South is homogeneous, and therefore, the basic North-South binary framework is no longer useful for understanding global climate change governance (Hochstetler, 2012; Pandey, 2014b). The coalition formed during the Copenhagen and post-Copenhagen negotiations, changing economic realities of emerging economies and steady rise of global temperature already over 1°C have demanded the need to redefine the conservative “developed North” and “developing South” binary opposition into a more mosaic spectrum of heterogeneity within the developed and the developing countries (Pandey, 2014b).

G-77 has been an institutional manifestation of a decolonized collective identity in many international settings including global climate change negotiations for their “poverty of influence” and the “imagined community of the powerless and vulnerable” (Najam, 2005; Williams, 2005; Barnett, 2008). This marginalized and vulnerable sensitivity of developing countries is associated with “development-sovereignty nexus” and limited positive influence they have on substantive outcomes of international negotiations in the state-centric framework of the intergovernmental setting. Alongside new manifestations of South-South cooperation such as BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the emerging powerhouses in the international community of countries, have firmly maintained the state-centric framework of sovereignty, the right to development and pursuance of economic interests, consistently



arguing that they must take billions of people out of poverty without changing much of their business-as-usual development journey. The Copenhagen Accord of COP-15 in 2009 and follow-up agreements including the Paris Agreement of 2015 were in the interests of these new coalitions and the USA. Although the formal negotiations were held to produce each of these Accords or Agreements, the ultimate products resulted from closed-door negotiations among the emerging economies and the USA. The provisions from a legally binding treaty with specific targets from the developed countries to keep the temperature below 1.5°C, from the EU, the AU, the AOSIS and G-77/China have disappeared from the final agreements—be it the Copenhagen Accord or the Paris Agreement, rendering them effectively toothless.

## **Nepal's climate diplomacy**

Climate change is posing complex challenges to achieving the SDGs in Nepal. As discussed above, climate change scenarios project that the temperature of South Asia including Nepal will further rise, resulting in a considerable retreat of glaciers, overflowing of rivers for a certain period, and a gradual shortage of clean water supplies (IPCC, 2021; Pandey, 2015a). Floods and landslides from erratic precipitation, have been significant causes of loss of life, and damages to property (Lal et al., 2011; Pandey, 2012). Climate change has not only been an environmental issue but is a major concern owing to its relationship with multiple disasters including erratic rainfalls, floods, glacial outbursts, landslides, droughts, the reemergence of eradicated diseases; insecurities related to food, water, critical infrastructures, and the imbalance between environment, economy, and equity. While the impacts of climate change on Nepal are irreparable, its global GHG emissions contribution is negligible. Nepal has been engaged in international climate change negotiations since the establishment of the UNFCCC had submitted its Initial National Communication in 2004 (GoN, 2011). The second National Communication was submitted in 2014 and the third National Communication in 2019. Nepal also submitted its first Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as an integral aspect of the Paris Agreement in 2016 and the second NDC in December 2020. As Nepal is also one of the Parties to the UNFCCC, it pursues and supports efforts to limit global temperature rise within the limit of 2°C leading to 1.5°C above pre-industrial age (GoN, 2016). The NDC document of Nepal (2016) adds that Nepal believes that the cumulative impacts of NDCs submitted to the UNFCCC would greatly contribute to limiting temperature rise to safe levels and towards making this planet livable.

Nepal aligns with the G-77/China and the LDCs during negotiations. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another heterogeneous multilateral forum through which Nepal positions in climate change negotiations. In COP-15 at Copenhagen, the SAARC had tabled its common position that said,

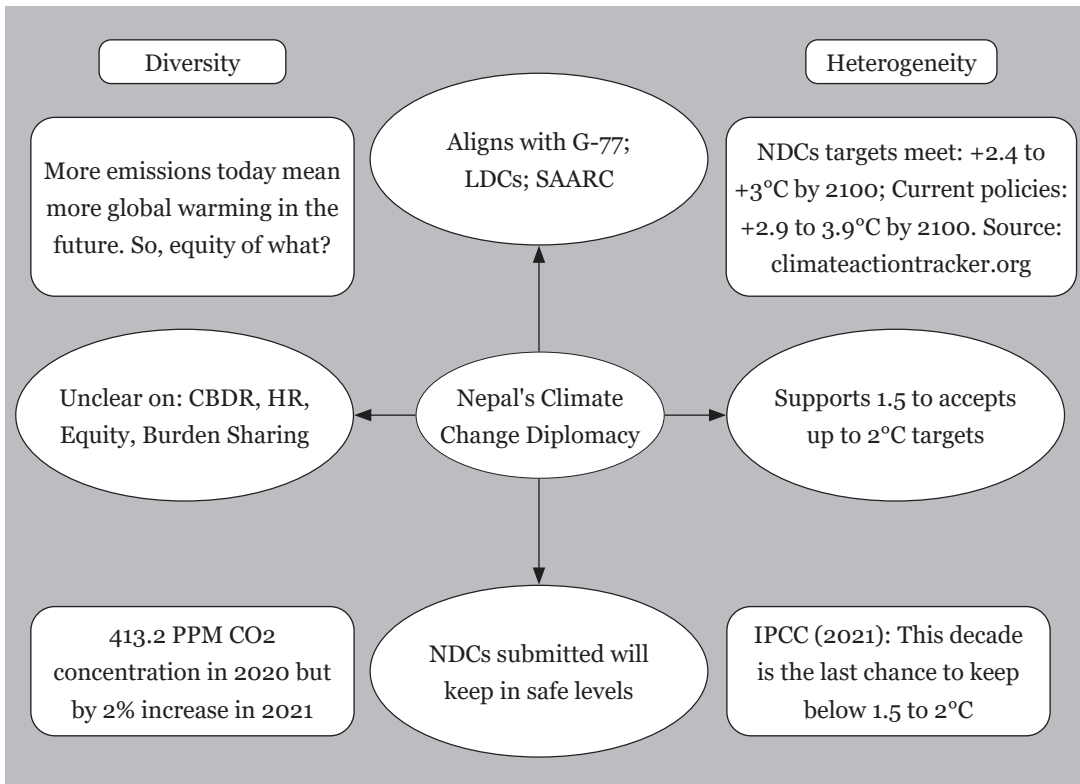
... given the historically high levels of GHG emissions, to which South Asia made an insignificant contribution, adherence to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is critical in combating climate change following the principles and provisions of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol. (SAARC/UNEP, 2009, p. v)



As discussed above, G-77/China has more heterogeneity than homogeneity. This bloc comprises the emerging giant economies such as China and India, and Nepal has been sandwiched between them in climate change negotiations and other complex geopolitical realities. China is the world's most populous and the third-largest country in terms of land area. Its population is approximately 47 times larger and its land area is 65 times that of Nepal. India is the world's second-most populous country, which is 45 times larger in terms of population and 22 times the land area of Nepal. China and India's share in world GDP adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is 18.78 percent and 7.19 percent, respectively while Nepal's share is only 0.09% (Statista, 2021a, b, c). Both, China and India are members of BRICS and BASIC, a group of major emitters and emerging economies, and belong to the Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)—a negotiating block of developing countries comprising emerging economies and oil producing countries, the first and third major energy consumers in the world, respectively and their need for energy continues to rise (Statista, 2020; Pandey, 2015a).

The goal of emerging economies of BRICS and BASIC, which include both China and India, at UNFCCC are to ensure that they have “equitable access to development” and “poverty alleviation over emissions reductions” (Pandey, 2014a; Pandey, 2015a). They argue for upholding the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibility, and historical responsibility. All negotiating blocs, G-77-China, AU, AOSIS and LDCs, contend for support from the developed North through channeling of climate finance, transfer of low or zero-carbon technologies, payment of loss and damages, and transfer of other capacity-building components to the developing countries along with more stringent quantified mitigation targets for the developed countries (SAARC/UNEP, 2009; Masters, 2014). While the developed countries have often clubbed together to effectively “kill the Kyoto mission”, to renege their emission reduction commitments etc., the G-77/China's emphasis on equality and partnership is also rhetorical given its diverse membership, economic strength and overall capability.

Yet, the emerging economies like China and India firmly bargain based on equity particularly based on national per capita income and per capita emissions, and they always ignore the per capita gaps between the emerging economies and other developing and the least developed countries exposing the challenge of upholding horizontal and South-South equity. One comparison can provide an explanation: China and India are global powers as well as warehouses, have entirely export-driven economies, possess the second and fourth standing military capability in the world and the GDP per capita of US\$ 10500 [2020] and USD 1900 [2020], respectively. In contrast, Nepal a country sandwiched between the two is an entirely import driven economy, 119th in terms of global military standing and with a GDP per capita of US\$ 1155 [2020] (The World Bank, 2020). The information above illustrates how different these three countries are in terms of their GDP per capita, military standing, energy needs, energy consumption, production houses, GHGs emissions, and the share of the global economy yet they are grouped together and have been negotiating following the state-centric framework, while manipulating the developed North versus the developing South politics. As result Nepal has not been able to identify, consider and articulate its national interests and pursue smart diplomacy with creative solutions, with sound negotiations tactics within G-77/China, LDCs and beyond.



**Figure 3: Nepal's Climate Diplomacy.**

## Reconsidered climate diplomacy for Nepal

Karl Hood, the former chairman of AOSIS criticized the roles of both the developed North and the developing South, especially emphasizing the roles of major emitters, and asked, "Must we accept our annihilation? While they [emerging economies emphasis on China and India] develop, we die. Why should we accept this?" (Also cited in Pandey, 2015a).<sup>3</sup> This is a powerful analysis, suggesting that the small island states are facing multiple hazards and an existential threat, and the argument sounds like a veiled criticism of the negotiating positions of India and China for their argument in climate negotiations that the developed North needs to cut GHG emissions while they must be given more space and time to develop (Dodd, 2012). After 23 years of negotiations, the Paris Agreement was adopted by 196 Parties at COP-21 on 12 December 2015, and it entered into force on 4 November 2016. The Paris Agreement was intended to be a milestone in multilateral climate change negotiations as it brought all nations on board to make ambitious efforts to combat climate change by limiting global warming below 2°C and if possible, at 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015). However, the Climate Action Tracker (2021) shows that most targets and actions taken so far remain highly or critically insufficient to address climate change, and meeting the goals of the Paris

<sup>3</sup> See GCI, "COP-17-A Comment on the Outcome and the Perception on It.

Agreement (For details, see [www.climateactiontracker.org](http://www.climateactiontracker.org)). While the IPCC report of 2021 on climate science has reinforced the absolute urgency of climate action, it has yet again clearly demonstrated the concerns of feasibility and urgency of climate mitigation actions to reduce GHG emissions as these continue to lag far behind of what is needed in all countries and sectors. Climate finance to aid action in developing countries is falling short and even countries with strong targets are mostly not on track to meet them and most have failed to bring forward stronger commitments for 2030, which reinforces the Code Red status of climate change threats (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). Clearly, more ambitious targets and real actions to achieve the targets are needed to keep the world below 1.5°C.

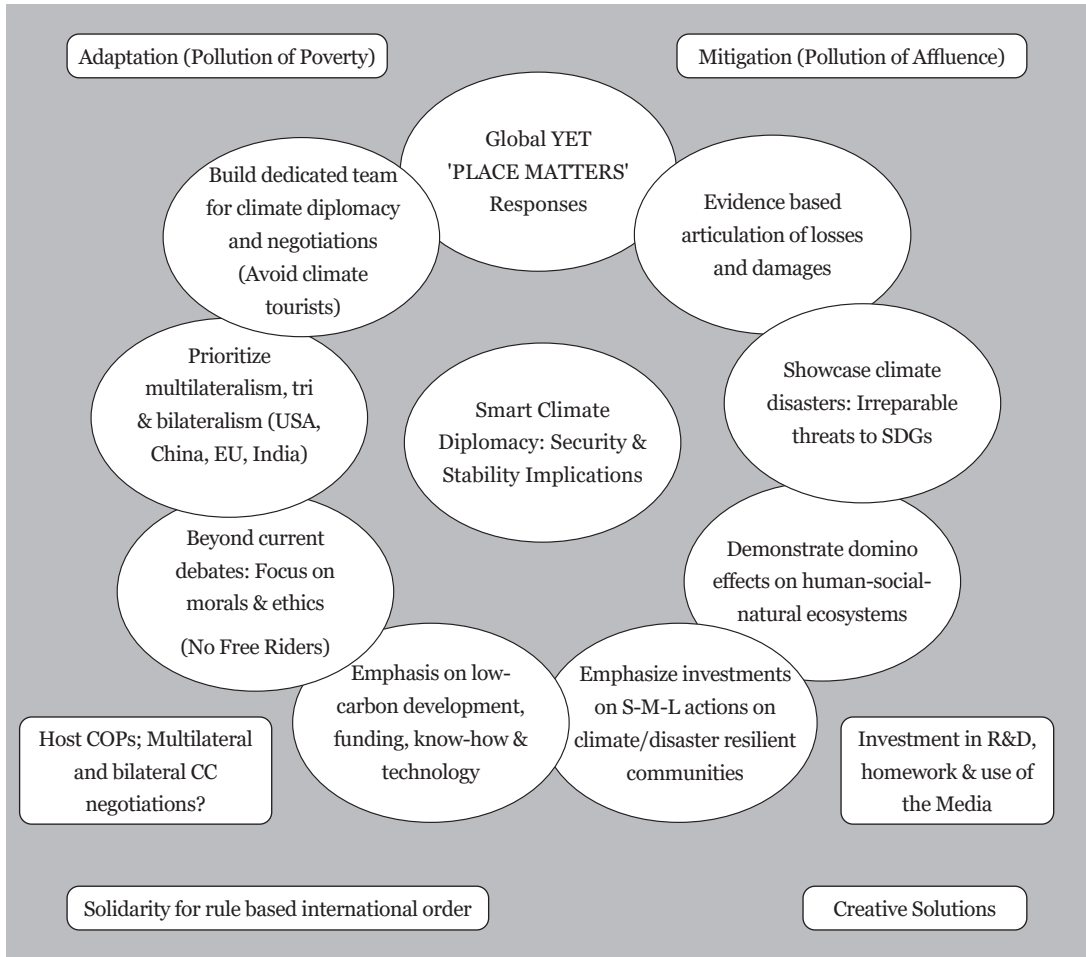
International climate change negotiations have been full of complexities because it involves diverse actors from across the globe and has more than seven negotiating blocs with common and distinct interests to understand, interpret and manipulate existing climate principles. The existing climate policies relating to “historical responsibility”, “polluters pay”, “capability to address”, “country-wise emissions”, and “per-capita emissions” have created more complexities relating to who is shouldering responsibility and financial burdens and who is not. Addressing climate change requires deep and drastic changes in global economic systems, which affect the positions of emerging economies. Losses and benefits of continued mining of dirty fuel to oil producing countries and potential benefits of climate change (temperature rise) to many countries, including Russia, have further gridlocked actions against climate change (Pandey, 2015b). Given this background, Nepal would need to comprehend and critically analyze the positions of negotiating blocs and the rapidly increasing global GHG emissions, rising temperature and their effects on Nepal’s natural and human ecosystem, and multifaceted interests and sensitivities of climate actors and arrive at a position that would be in the national interest.

Ever since climate change negotiations began, Nepal has always limited itself in the bandwagons of G-77/China and LDCs and supported the politics of the South in the North-South positioning. While these blocs are pertinent components of climate politics and negotiations and contributed towards establishing the international environmental discourses and burden sharing frameworks, Nepal needs to engage with them but also move beyond for furtherance of its national climate interests. For this it needs to demonstrate how global temperature rise will affect the Himalayan range, water towers and the lives, livelihoods and natural systems if the climate politics and negotiations continue in the business-as-usual mode. The receding snows and glacial lake outbursts – and its impact, i.e., too much or too little water – are major concerns of Nepal. One recent examples of too much water was experienced in 2021, when Nepal experienced multiple floods during the monsoon in the high altitudes that devastated the Melamchi Bazar and damaged the largest drinking water supply project in the country. Further, due to the incessant, intensive, and concentrated precipitation the same year 2021, many districts – Myagdi, Rupandehi, Dang, Darchula, Sindhuli, Nawalparasi East, Nawalparasi West, Kanchanpur, Kailali, Udaipur, and Mahottari – were badly affected by floods and landslides.

Similarly, heavy unseasonal, post-monsoon rainfall in Nepal that started on 17 October 2021 was something unknown in the past and beyond the experience-based knowledge of farmers and of science. This caused irreparable losses (including human casualties), damage to property (inclusive of roads, bridges, hydropower stations and other physical infrastructure) and substantial impacts on agriculture (damage to land and crop yields) across the country, particularly in Sudurpaschim, and Karnali Provinces and also in Provinces 1 and 2 (UNORC, 2021). Such disasters cannot simply be attributed to a single factor but had resulted from multiple anthropogenic and climatic factors and processes (ICIMOD, 2021). These highly erratic rainfall of 2021 and the associated losses were aligned with the IPCC conclusion that human-induced climate change is the primary driver of heavy precipitation, landslides, floods, water induced disasters and frequent droughts. The effects of climate change will pose economic, social, political, and cultural predicaments and disrupt successful implementation of the SDGs. Climate related disasters directly and indirectly affect all 17 SDGs as they not only cause direct losses (for example, of physical infrastructure, public and private property, human lives, damages to environmental and cultural assets) but also indirect losses, including reduced productive capital investments for sustainable prosperity (for example, reduced investments in human capital, and research and development). In this climate-uncertain future, Nepal can pursue its climate diplomacy employing strategies shown in Figure 4 for pursuing its national interests.

The approaches to climate diplomacy include:

1. Adopt multiple negotiation approaches -- multilateral, trilateral and bilateral – to pursue Nepal’s national interests relating to climate change. Strengthen New York, Beijing, New Delhi, Geneva, and Brussels embassies and pursue mature climate diplomacy for mutual benefits. Take leadership role by hosting COPs and other negotiation platforms.
2. Promote climate change as a transboundary global problem that requires global actions but prioritize how its disproportionately effects, demanding differentiated, localized ‘place matters’ responses.
3. Showcase climate induced anthropogenic climate disasters such as, inter alia, melting of snow, impacts on agricultural productivity, and floods that have displaced families, led to deaths, and have caused irreparable damages to development initiatives, or take an evidence-based climate diplomacy approach.
4. Demonstrate how Nepal has been suffering from “too much water” and how it could suffer in a situation of “too little water” arising from anthropogenic climate change induced rapid snow melt and its effects on human-social-natural ecosystems, leading to national insecurity.
5. Invest, design, and implement short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions against climate vulnerability to build climate resilient communities.
6. Articulate losses and damages and those likely in future with clear evidence to convince the international community of the need to promote global mitigation responses and to channel major funding, state-of-art-knowledge, and technology for climate insurance, adaptation, and mitigation.
7. Encourage the developed countries, including the emerging large economies, to shoulder the burden of addressing anthropogenic climate change, and making capabili-



**Figure 4: Pathways for smart climate diplomacy for Nepal.**

Source: Adapted from Pandey, 2015a.

- ty-based contributions.
8. Pursue low-carbon development initiatives and green technologies focusing on hydro-power development and regional trade. Provide leadership role in renewable energy production, consumption, and distribution.
  9. Establish that Nepal as a mountain region is bearing the brunt of anthropogenic climate change, and therefore, the need to get special attention of its immediate neighbors, regional and global powers to assure provision of technical and financial resources for loss minimization, recovery and building resilient communities.
  10. Develop a dedicated team of climate leaders for climate diplomacy and negotiations to encourage the world to take ambitious and achievable actions against climate change, and also for tapping into the highly competitive financial and technological resources desperately needed for achieving the country’s goal of sustainable, climate resilient development.

## **Conclusion**

Anthropogenic climate change has today become one of the most pressing challenges of the world. The surface temperature of the world will continue to increase, and warming will exceed beyond 2°C within the 21st century unless deep cuts are made in CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG emissions. Even rapid emission cuts can only reduce the risks but not eliminate the problem. Despite this, “Three degrees of global warming is quite plausible and truly disastrous” (The Economist, 24 July 2021). The negative impacts of global climate change are already affecting Nepal as explained by observed changes in weather patterns, precipitation, droughts, and climate extremes. Three decades of international negotiations have made little progress. The Paris Agreement requires countries to submit their NDCs, yet the latest report of IPCC [2021] and the Climate Tracker [2021] clearly demonstrate that the world has been moving anti-clockwise in terms of reducing GHG emissions and addressing climate change.

The climate change negotiations are complex as they go deep into global economic, political, and social systems. This also allows some countries to be free riders because the loss of global commons is collective, while benefits from their exploitation could be enriching individual countries. This also explains the few achievements that have been made in the negotiations. Nepal is a Party to the climate change Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreements and it usually aligns with G-77/China, and LDC positions in the negotiations. These highlight per-capita emissions instead of nation-wide emissions and global economic status. While the calculation based on per-capita emissions is important, it does not have to be tallied between the developed North and the emerging economic power and warehouses. Instead, comparisons and contrasts need to be done among and between the least developed, developing, emerging economies and advanced economies because economic power has been constantly changing since 1992.

Nepal needs to rethink a novel and sophisticated approach of climate diplomacy to encourage large economies and the rest of the world not only to use existing climate negotiations platforms and blocs but also go beyond the conventional developed-developing binary option and the associated politics. Showcasing anthropogenic climate induced disasters and the loss and damages they have caused, and credible risk projections for the future need to be the core aspects of Nepal’s climate diplomacy. Nepal also needs to assume a leadership role through a dedicated team of experts to articulate its multifaceted interests from, inter alia, protecting the snow on the Himalayas, to water security, to agricultural productivity, to diversified livelihoods options, and to a transition towards a low carbon economy. Articulation of the specific interests of the Himalayan country beyond North South politics is required for building climate and disaster resilient communities. Clearly, adaptation and mitigation are the two best available approaches for addressing climate change. A well-versed, dedicated interdisciplinary team of negotiators for climate diplomacy and global negotiations can provide renewed Nepali leadership in the negotiations and help Nepal to tap into the competitive knowledge, financial and technological resources available for tackling climate vulnerabilities and building climate resilient communities.



## References

- Baidya, K. S. and J. Karmacharya. 2007. Observed and future climate change in Nepal. In: *Climate Change and Human Health: Potential Impact, Vulnerability and Adaptation in Nepal*.
- Climate Action Tracker. 2021 (September). Climate Target Updates Slow as Science Ramps up Need for Action. Available at: [https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/871/CAT\\_2021-09\\_Briefing\\_GlobalUpdate.pdf](https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/871/CAT_2021-09_Briefing_GlobalUpdate.pdf)
- Dahal, N.; Shrestha, U. B.; Tuitui, A.; Ojha, H. R. 2019. Temporal Changes in Precipitation and Temperature and Their Implications on the Streamflow of Rosi River, Central Nepal. *Climate*. Vol. 7 (1):1-15.
- DHM. 2017. Observed Climate Trend Analysis in the Districts and Physiographic Regions of Nepal (1971-2014). Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, Kathmandu.
- Downie, D. L. 2011. 'Global Environmental Policy'. In *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law and Policy*, edited by R. S. Axelrod, S.D. Veneveer and D. L. Downie, 70-91. Washington DC: CQ Press.
- Depledge, J. 2006. The Opposite of Learning: Ossification in the Climate Change Regime. *Global Environmental Politics*. Vol. 6 (1): 795-821.
- Dodd, T. 2012. Notes From a Small Island State: AOSIS Negotiators on Making the Case for Emissions Reductions. CarbonBrief—Clear on Climate. Available at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/notes-from-a-small-island-state-aosis-negotiators-on-making-the-case-for-emissions-reductions>
- Eckstein, D. Hutflits, M-L and Wings, M. 2019. *Global Climate Risk Index 2019*. Germanwatch: Bonn.
- GCAP (Global Climate Adaptation Partnership), 2014. Assessing the economic impacts of climate change in Nepal. Available at [https://cdkn.org/project/economic-impact-assessment-of-climate-change-in-nepal/?loclang=en\\_gb](https://cdkn.org/project/economic-impact-assessment-of-climate-change-in-nepal/?loclang=en_gb) .
- GoN [Government of Nepal]. 2011. *Climate Change Policy 2011*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Population and Environment.
- GoN. 2016. *Nationally Determined Contributions*: October 2016. Kathmandu: Ministry of Population and Environment.
- Grubb, M. 2011. The Darkest Hour. *Climate Policy*. Vol. 11 (6): 1269-72.
- Helm, D. 2009. 'Climate Change Policy: Why Has so Little Been Achieved?' In *The Economics and Politics of Climate Change*, edited by D. Helm and C. Hepburn, 9-35. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hochstetler, K. A. 2012. The G-77, BASIC, and Global Climate Governance: A New Era in Multilateral Environmental Negotiations. *Revista Brasileira de Politica Internacional*. Vo. 55: 53-69.
- ICIMOD. 2021. The Melamchi Flood Disaster: Cascading Hazard and the Need for Multi-hazard Risk Management. International Center for Integrated Mountain Development: Kathmandu.
- IPCC, 2021: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T.K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press.



- Lal, R. Sivakumar, M.V. Faiz, M.A. & Mustafizur, R. (Eds.). 2011. *Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia*. Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer.
- Masters, L. 2014. The G77 and China in the Climate Change Negotiations: A Leaky Umbrella? South Africa: Institute for Global Dialogue. Available at: [http://www.igd.org.za/jdownloads/Global%20Insight/project\\_35\\_policy\\_brief\\_111\\_final\\_final.pdf](http://www.igd.org.za/jdownloads/Global%20Insight/project_35_policy_brief_111_final_final.pdf)
- Ministry of Environment. Government of Nepal. 2010: *National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Environment.
- Ministry of Forest and Environment (MoFE), 2021: Nepal's Third National Communication Report to UNFCCC. Accessible at [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/NationalReports/Documents/986542371\\_Nepal-NC3-1-Nepal\\_TNC\\_Final.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/NationalReports/Documents/986542371_Nepal-NC3-1-Nepal_TNC_Final.pdf)
- Milleer, M. A. L. 1995. *The Third World in Global Environmental Politics*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Najam, A. 2005. Developing Countries and Global Environmental Governance: From Contestation to Participation to Engagement. *Global Environmental Agreements*. Vol. 5: 30-321.
- NCVST, 2009: *Vulnerability Through the Eyes of Vulnerable: Climate Change Induced Uncertainties and Nepal's Development Predicaments*, Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal (ISET-Nepal), Kathmandu and Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET) Boulder, Colorado for Nepal Climate Vulnerability Study Team (NCVST), Kathmandu.
- Pandey, C. L. 2012. The Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture and Adaptation in Nepal. *Agribusiness and Information Management*. Vol. 4 (1): 13-23.
- Pandey, C. L. 2014a. *International Climate Change Governance: Issues of Democracy, Institutions, and the Media*. Waikato, New Zealand: University of Waikato.
- Pandey, C. L. 2014b. The Limits of Climate Change Agreements: From Past to Present. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*. Vol. 6 (4): 376-390.
- Pandey, C. L. 2015a. 'Climate Change in South Asia: Green Bridging between Nepal and India'. In *Environmental Security in the Asia-Pacific* edited by I. Watson & C. L. Pandey, pp. 95-126. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pandey, C. L. 2015b. Resources and International Climate Change Policy Gridlock. *Chinese Journal of Population, Resources and Environment*. Vol. 12 (3): 199-209.
- Pandey, C. L. 2020. Green Governance for Sustainability in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic. In *COVID-19 Multidisciplinary Narratives: Contribution to Nepal's Foreign Affairs*, edited by Naresh Nath Rimal, pp.128-139. Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs.
- Roberts, J. T. & Parks, B. C. 2007. *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shrestha, B. 2019. An Assessment of Disaster Loss and Damage in Nepal. *The Geographic Base*. Vol. 6: 42-51.
- Statista. 2020. Primary Energy Consumption Worldwide in 2020, by Country. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263455/primary-energy-consumption-of-selected-countries/>
- Statista. 2021a. China's Share of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Adjusted for Purchasing Power

- Parity (PPP) from 2010 to 2020 with Forecasts until 2026. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270439/chinas-share-of-global-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>
- Statista. 2021b. India: Share of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) from 2016 to 2026. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271328/indias-share-of-global-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>
- Statista. 2021c. Nepal: Share of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) from 2016 to 2026. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/425710/nepal-share-of-global-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>
- The World Bank. 2020. GDP Per Capita (Current US\$). Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CN>
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR). 2013. Climate Risk Management for Agriculture Sector in Nepal. New York: United Nations.
- UNFCCC. N.D. About the Secretariat. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/about-us/about-the-secretariat>
- UNFCCC. 2015. Key Aspects of Paris Agreement. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement>
- UNORC [United Nations Office of Resident Coordinator]. 2021. Nepal: Heavy Rains and Flooding. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-heavy-rains-and-flooding-situation-report-no-48-22-october-2021>
- Volger, J. 2011. 'Environmental Issues'. In *The Globalization of the World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by J. Baylis, S. Smith and P. Owens, 348-62. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Victor, D. G. 2011. *Global Warming Gridlock: Creating More Effective Strategies for Protecting the Planet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, M. 2005. The Third World and Global Environmental Negotiations: Interests, Institutions, and Ideas. *Global Environmental Politics*. Vol. 5 (3): 48-69.
- Thapa, G.J. Wikramanayake, E. & Forest, J. 2015. *Climate-change Impacts on the Biodiversity of the Terai Arc Landscape and the Chitwan-Annapurna Landscape*. Kathmandu: WWF Nepal.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Pandey, C.L., Dahal, N. (2022) "Rethinking Climate Diplomacy Gains Strategic Benefits to Nepal"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44005>



# Understanding Nepal's Geopolitical Dynamics: Connected History Disconnected Future

---

Chandra Dev Bhatta<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*The debate on geopolitics has gained momentum at various layers of society in recent years. Yet, there is paucity in clarity as to what geopolitics entails and how Nepal has become geopolitically important. There are, however, multiple opinions, where the tendency has been to project geography as the main tenet of geopolitics. This may partially be true given the changes brought about by the new technology-driven political economy. Likewise, there is a tendency to associate every success and failure in the domestic politics/development with geopolitics, while other undercurrents are not taken into consideration even though they might have implications for keeping the society and state together in the long-term. What is still important for the states like Nepal is the role of powerful countries both in the neighborhood and beyond. Geopolitics certainly is not new, but its manifestations may differ, and this article looks into them and their possible consequences for Nepal. In this regard shall also carefully considers how foreign policy should be articulated when geopolitics is entrenched. The article largely builds on an analytical approach based on certain facts/events to understand and explain the geopolitical underpinnings.*

*Key words: Foreign policy, connected history, civilizational geopolitics, development*

The debate on geopolitics has gained momentum at various layers of society in recent years. Discussions on *bhurajñiti* (Nepali equivalent to geopolitics) are underway from small tea shops to the university department(s), and from newsrooms to the board rooms. Such discussions often are based both on rumors and facts. The discussion on geopolitics is centered around how geopolitically powerful states under various pretexts such as development, democracy, and social transformation are putting their own agendas and making other states pawns in the broader geopolitical games. Often such discussions become concealed to the point where politics itself becomes a product of rumors. Yet a majority are of the view that Nepal's internal political, social, and developmental policies are not only defined but also implemented by them. There certainly may be some grain of truth in the beliefs but what we should not also forget is their contribution towards Nepal's infrastructural development. What we are not clear about is how much of geopolitics could have been involved regarding development, democracy,

---

<sup>1</sup> He is a Kathmandu-based political analyst who also writes on the issues of geopolitics and regional political dynamics.

and social transformation. This is, for sure, not easy to answer at least in the case of Nepal. Nevertheless, what could be true, though, is that the geopolitical momentum has increased in other parts of the world as well. Covid-19 scaled up both its momentum and intensity.

The influence of geopolitics in Nepal's internal political, economic, and social dynamics is, however, not new. They were raised some 250 years ago by Prithvi Narayan Shah. His "Yam doctrine" is the case in point. Apart from that, the central Himalayan region has always been important since time immemorial both from a spiritual and strategic point of view (Bhatta, 2019). Over time, some of the Himalayan states have withered away. Their connected history (Subramaniam, 2022) has either been dismantled or has become irrelevant. Remaining of the independent states in the region, including Nepal, are on the verge of becoming flash points in the wake of the new geopolitical dynamics. Yet one may still ask a question what geopolitical importance do countries like Nepal possess? In that regard every state will have their own share on geopolitics, what may differ, though, is their capacity to maneuver in a given geopolitical situation. Any position on the state of geopolitics and its consequences, however, can only be developed when actors, agencies, and issues involved are well understood. For this, the nature of relations among major states/powers needs to be taken into consideration from the geopolitical vantage point. In this regard, how the relations between and among the emerging powers – India, China, and the resident powers – US and its allies (Mahbubani 2020a)– in the region are evolving and the major factors that define such relations need to be carefully studied. That will be helpful to understand the consequences for Nepal as well. Against this background, this article investigates – the Alpha (Papic 2020) and Omega of geopolitics – and how have they changed or are changing over time and the direction they will take in the future. It also considers how foreign policy should be framed in a situation where geopolitics is deeply entrenched.

## Background

Chanakya's Arthashastra provides an excellent analysis of *Bhurajñiti*– although the word is not mentioned – but the essence of geopolitics has been succinctly explained<sup>2</sup>. Yet with regard to the modern-day geopolitics there are at least two scholars: Alfred Thayer Mahan and Harford Mackinder (Papic 2020,146) who define geopolitics succinctly and convincingly. Scholar(s) have reached a consensus to explain that geopolitics is the interactions or interface between geography and politics over space and time (Starr 2015). That is how geography of a state shapes its politics or how politics, in turn, should be conducted in certain geographical contexts, where time is crucial. The consensus among various scholars is that geography is the fundamental unit of analysis (Mackinder 1904and AlfredMahan<sup>3</sup>), and for that the size and location of the country becomes important. Taking cue from them, it become true to the extent when geography defines limits and maximizes opportunities of the nation-states in the international politics. But there are also other who argue geopolitics is not only about geographic determinism (Owens,

<sup>2</sup> The exact meaning of Arthashastra is: the livelihood of human being is called artha, the land that gives livelihood is also called artha, and the shastra that protects both is called Arthashastra. The Arthashastra, therefore, is overall statecraft.

<sup>3</sup> See at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/mahan> (accessed on 26 Feb, 2022).

2015). Also, geopolitics is not static in the sense that one may witness frequent clustering of powers at the global, regional, and local level. What makes it dynamic, however, is the interaction among people on the one hand, and technology and economic development on the other. The dynamism can have impact not only on the geopolitical landscape – the political geography – but also in the areas of political economy and societal structure.

The nexus between society and space is seen as a basic element of the geopolitical imagination and the nation-state as the fundamental “territorial trap” of that imagination (Agnew 1994). From the beginning of the 20th century, when the term geopolitics was first used by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén (Engelbrekt 2018), the range of explanations and geopolitical priority have kept on changing from the first European war (World War I) to the 9/11 attacks. Geopolitics also has become more event oriented in recent years. Most of the scholarship on geopolitics stems from the Western hemisphere (ibid)<sup>4</sup> for obvious reasons and is power centric in nature and is influenced by acquiring and accumulating power, wealth, and land – which is akin to imperialist ambitions – than anything else. From 1492 when the doctrine of discovery was signed in Europe for the exploration and conquest of the New World (Basu 2017). Geopolitics appears to have taken various routes / methods and has reached to the point where we are now.

Three most important geopolitical scholars Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford John Mackinder, and Nicholas John Spykman emphasize that control is main instrument to implement geopolitical objectives vis-à-vis various of its other schools – land, sea, ecology, and polity (ibid). While Mahan believed that those who control “sea power” would control world, Mackinder came up with the “Heartland” theory. For him Eurasian region is the heartland and anyone controlling that part would eventually control everything<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, Spykman, was of the view that controlling the Rim land was adequate to control the world (ibid). Most of these theories were developed in certain geography, geoeconomics, and cultural context, that too, during certain periods to serve their own purposes. Yet they are still valid, even though the situation has fundamentally changed. Mere control overland, sea, and rim land alone is not sufficient and there has been noticeable shift in this regard. Technology has brought changes which were never imagined, because of which the nation-state – the building block of geopolitics – is on the verge of being replaced by the “networked” state<sup>6</sup>. In the network state, individuals become important, not necessarily the territory, as they can be used for multiple purposes. Developing narratives to control minds of the people and not letting countries/people to have necessary skills/technology appears to have emerged as the new field of the geopolitical battle. Given the current situation, one cannot rule out the likelihood

<sup>4</sup> The words/concept like globalism, geopolitics, and multilateralism gained traction in the early twentieth century are the product of imperial great-power politics and World War I. See at [https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/the-clash-of-cultures-5642/?utm\\_campaign=en\\_966\\_20220113&fbclid=IwARoEWLMYfW9rBdt1kqdw3lCsmCFM63LnRydQSDGhze-3Ovc\\_OH7qoW\\_SRFI](https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/the-clash-of-cultures-5642/?utm_campaign=en_966_20220113&fbclid=IwARoEWLMYfW9rBdt1kqdw3lCsmCFM63LnRydQSDGhze-3Ovc_OH7qoW_SRFI). (accessed Jan 26, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> In 1919, Mackinder summarized his theory thus: Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world.

<sup>6</sup> See at <https://foresight.org/salon/balaji-s-srinivasan-the-network-state/> (for detailed info about network state). Accessed on Jan 6, 2022.

of a tech war being combined with the currency war between China and its allies on one side, and the United States on the other.

Taken together, geopolitics certainly has returned but in different forms and formats. Multiple factors such as ideology, geography, civilization, and market forces dominate discourses. With this in place, what can be claimed is that new technology driven actors likes of Facebook, Twitter, UTube, TikTok, and many more, and new issues such as blockchain to the decentralized finance (The Economist, 2022) will dominate geopolitical space and decide the fate of the nation-states. While earlier geopolitical actors were either soldiers or political geographers, those in the game today come from diverse backgrounds. In this regard there is more than one geopolitical alpha (Papic 2020) that is pushing countries towards the geopolitical vortex in many ways.

## **Locating Nepal's geopolitics**

How do we locate Nepal's geopolitics? It certainly is a difficult but not necessarily and impossible question. Looking at the events occurring in the central Himalayas – the heartland – one may conclude that there are issues of geopolitical significance. The central Himalayas have always been important, but modern geopolitical rivalry only began in the 20th century – the Great Game – when the Young Husband mission was sent to checkmate Russian influence in Tibet by the British (Horpriik, 1992, 2006). And it has, once again, fallen under tremendous pressure, whose consequences are felt in Nepal as well. This time around, more than one factor might have been pushing Nepal towards the geopolitical whirlwind making difficult for it to conduct independent foreign policy.

In its modern political history, mainly after the demise of P.N. Shah, the Nepali court could not handle foreign policy prudently. The intermittent rivalry among courtiers in tandem with external conditions certainly were not favorable for Nepal. There was an ever-expanding British Raj on the one side, and China on the other and both were looking for an opportunity to have foothold in Nepal under various pretexts. Nepal (Kathmandu then), then, was some sort of entrepot not only for trade and commerce but also for Christian missionaries who were also targeting Tibet<sup>7</sup>. Yet there was no direct impact as Rajas, then, skillfully balanced its relations with India and China for centuries and safeguarded its national independence (Kissinger, 2014). The situation, however, changed, when Nepal fell to the British and was forced to sign Sugauli Treaty in 1816 which unofficially made Nepal a British protectorate and cut down its geographical size. Likewise, Betrawati Treaty signed with Tibet shrunk Nepal from the Northern side. The Great Britain, however, recognized Nepal as an independent and sovereign state through the 1923 treaty<sup>8</sup>. That treaty with British, in principle, made Nepal eligible to participate in the world order that was created in 1945. But that did not really work out.

<sup>7</sup> The Capuchin mission to Nepal and Tibet was sanctioned by the Congregation of the Propaganda in 1703. Also see Alsop, Ian, 1996, "Christians at the Malla Court: The Capuchin 'piccolo libro'" in ed. Siegfried Lienhard, Change and Continuity: Studies in the Nepalese Culture of the Kathmandu Valley, (containing the papers read during the International Conference-Seminar of Nepalese Studies, which was held in Stockholm from June 9th to 12th, 1987) (Torino: CESMEO) pp 123- 135.

<sup>8</sup> Another reason was signing of Sarda Barrage treaty in 1920 also known as the Indo Nepal water treaty that was signed with British India.



Nepal's application for UN membership was flatly rejected by the Russians on the ground that Nepal was not a sovereign state and the treaty that was signed with the British does not make Nepal sovereign as it was a colonial power<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the treaty was also a kind of a slap in the face of that state which was among the oldest not in the Vedic sense of the term (Nepal has been mentioned in the Atharva Veda) but also in the chronology of state formation. In fact, in return for services provided to the empire, Britain was kind enough not only to grant sovereignty to most of states located in this part of the world (the word South Asia was not coined then) including Nepal but also oversaw the disintegration of the Bharatvarsha/Jambu Dweep also known as *aryavarta* – into many parts and becomes – a sub-continent – by drawing artificial lines and providing false interpretation of history/culture<sup>10</sup> which, now have become the source of border and societal conflicts among and between the states/communities in the region. Paradoxical, as it may be, in the process most of these countries became “junior” in the chronology of the state formation. The politics of imperial state formation was such that India became independent a day after Pakistan. This cut short the uninterrupted history of Prithu's Bharat<sup>11</sup> and gave birth to India. For Nepal, despite having pronounced a non-aligned foreign policy doctrine, it could not contain outside influences on its domestic politics at least for two centuries. In contrast, successive rulers used foreign policy to preserve their own personal gains. For example, during the Rana regime, they became too close with British India and offered troops to the Britain during two European Wars of the 20th century (again not necessarily world wars) and protected the regime. Immediately after the Great Britain left the region, Ranas were also ousted from power. That was largely the influence of the democratic wave sweeping across the world from the US – a country then on the verge of becoming another leader in geopolitics – which led to the collapse of many traditional elites/regimes/systems from power<sup>12</sup>. Nepal's northern neighbor – China – was taken over by Mao Zedong and fell to communism in 1949. When two contrasting political ideologies governed both sides of Nepal's border – north and south – and that also influenced Nepal. China, to a great extent, has been motivated by Mao's brochure – The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party of December 1939 – which upholds the palm theory, one that puts China in the center (Palm) and posits other Himalayan states as its fingers<sup>13</sup>. This theory further terrified Himalayan states and – perhaps – this explains why they were either forced to have multiple treaties with India or become

<sup>9</sup> Why Russians opposed 1923 treaty has more than one reasons but they saw it part of a 'Great Game' which was under play between and among central Asian states, Tibet, British, and Russians. Yet, the treaty has been brought into discussion and hailed as the one which provided Nepal sovereignty. Perhaps, this is the solid evidence how geopolitics is still under play around certain issues. Nepal's U.N. membership application in 1949 was rejected by the Security Council due to a veto against it by the Soviet Union on September 7, 1949. This news even made it to the New York Times. The newspaper wrote: “The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal was kept out of the United Nations today by the thirty-first veto registered by the Soviet Union.” See Birat Anupam at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/5-facts-about-nepals-un-membership/> (accessed on 20 Feb, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> One such was the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT) that divided India into Aryans and Dravidians.

<sup>11</sup> Prithu is “celebrated as the first consecrated king, from whom the earth received her (Sanskrit) name Prithv. See Nagendra Kumar Singh (1997). *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*. Anmol Publications. ISBN 978-81-7488-168-7.

<sup>12</sup> Any debate on governance that followed afterwards are either in favour of democracy or against it.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the Himalayan states, then, were forced to enter into treaty with India perhaps for their own survival. Mao's Five Finger theory – Palm Theory -, then under play, was really terrifying along with ideology for all the practical reasons and many would not agree on this today.

closer to the US – the, then, rising power in a period which also coincided with an official shift of global power from London to Washington. The Panchayat rulers, tried to strike a certain level of balance in Nepal’s foreign policy but there were limits to the effort, and quite a few pitfalls. Both Rana’s and Panchayat rulers had adopted a regime centric foreign policy for their own survival during the troubled times – for the Ranas it was a period when European imperialism was at its zenith, and it was the peak of the Cold War for the Panchayat rulers.

The democratic era from 1990 saw a flurry of democratic activities with political parties of various colors conducting foreign policy in erratically mainly to suit their partisan interests. This was a period of party centric-foreign policy (Bhatta and Yadav 2021). After the political change of 2006, foreign policy either became leader oriented or Nepal had to reorient not only foreign policy but also the politics, time and again, as per the need of others –both in the neighborhood and beyond. While considering these various phases, it appears that Nepal’s foreign policy is not necessarily practical for enhancing the position of the state and society and is instead more influenced by a power centric approach of the leaders. In the process whatever changes have occurred about foreign policy have been cosmetic as they have failed to understand more than one dimension of issues transpiring both in the neighborhood and beyond. One may notice some sort of mismatch between change and continuity in Nepal’s foreign policy orientation. What certainly has been missing, is the notion of having an independent foreign policy.

## **Alpha and Omega of geopolitics**

Nepal may have little significance in the world politics of its own, but it certainly provides considerable strategic leverage for others. Its location between the two rising, competing, and conflicting powers of Asia – China and India – makes it important for Western powers to strike a strategic balance in the region (Ayadi, 2021). This situation existed even before Prithvi Narayan Shah came into power and has not changed much even today. Three factors, at least, make Nepal’s position geopolitically vulnerable. First, its geographic location, second, its dependency on the outside-world for development and democracy building, and third, is the consequences of the re-emergence of Asia as the center of global geopolitics<sup>14</sup>. However, two most important factors need to be carefully assessed whilst understanding the current geopolitical dynamics. First is the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001, which was also considered to be an attack on the symbols of western liberalism and capitalism which prospered after 1990s. This attack has falsified the End of History thesis of Francis Fukuyama (although it was already disapproved when Samuel P Huntington, his guru, wrote Clash of Civilization). The 9/11 attack has compelled US and its allies to reorient development and security policies and the Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC), was the product of this thinking so that countries would not fall either in the trap of terrorism or go against the liberal values, to say the least, for which (re)democratization was made mandatory for many

<sup>14</sup> The rising economy, demographic dividend, emerging markets, and centre of civilisations as the major religions of the world have their roots in Asia For any sort of market from evangelical to the economic activities Asia can be the centre. These factors can certainly have impact in that regard. What Adam Smith calls the Wealth of Nation can truly be found in Asia.

countries. Another event, which is equally important, is the unprecedented rise of China both economically and politically. These certainly are two major factors shaping the post-2001 global geopolitical discourse.

The spectacular rise of China has forced the US to develop policies and create lobbies that can contribute to contain China. The competition between China and the US became more visible when in 2013 Xi Jinping launched the One-Belt-One Road (OBOR) that was later to be renamed as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – as its signature project. This was later joined by many countries including Nepal. In response to these endeavors, the US took further steps and two events in that regard have played key roles to take geopolitics to the situation where it is now. First, the “pivot Asia” policy of the Obama administration in 2011 and second, the Trump administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. In the process, the Asia-Pacific region has been renamed as the Indo-Pacific, which certainly elevates US policy in the region (from trans-Atlantic to trans-Pacific) and persuades India significantly in the extant geopolitical rivalry between China on one side and the West on the other. Further, the formation of economic and security related alignments under Free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific Region (FOIP) by the West has its own consequences in the region. It was also the time, when the Indo-Pacific strategy came more aggressively and tried to channel developmental endeavors under the security framework. There were also reports where the MCC was shown as an important part of Indo-Pacific strategy<sup>15</sup>. In addition, the US has floated competing security frameworks where economic liberalism through geoeconomics and political realism are mixed with geopolitics making it difficult for many countries, including Nepal, to differentiate one from the other. What followed is interesting, both China and the US are coming up with competing initiatives under various formats either to develop new alliances or to checkmate each other’s influence in the region. For example, in recent years to counter China’s BRI framework, G7 countries, for their part, came up with the Build Back Better World (B3W) in 2021. Moreover, the earlier regional security frameworks such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has been revived and even projected as Asian NATO<sup>16</sup>. In response, China also appears to be rallying countries behind it in many ways to consolidate its own position vis-à-vis the West’s security and intelligence arrangements in the region. The formation of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – primarily a regional security organization focusing on the central Asian’s region but – was formed somewhat in line with the NATO format but its sole objective is counter and

<sup>15</sup> See Roshan Nepal “MCC Important Initiative Under Indo-Pacific Strategy” at <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/millennium-challenge-corporation-compact-programme-important-initiative-under-indo-pacific-strategy> (accessed on 20 Feb, 2022). Also, while the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnership, and Promoting a Networked Region (June 2019) of the Department of Defense did not refer to MCC, the Department of State in its report entitled A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision clearly mentioned that MCC supports the economic pillar of the USIPS at Dr. Naresh Kumar available at [https://www.icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls\\_id=6519&lid=4480](https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=6519&lid=4480) (accessed 20 Feb, 2022). Full details available at The Department of State, A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision, November 04, 2019, Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>. This, however, has been removed in the recent document(s). See new Indo-Pacific strategy at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf> (accessed on Feb 26, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> The NATO analogy has been flatly rejected by India. See “Don’t slip into the lazy analogy of referring Quad as Asian NATO” - Jaishankar at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/dont-slip-into-the-lazy-analogy-of-referring-quad-as-asian-nato-jaishankar/articleshow/89700696.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 20 Feb, 2022).

minimize western influence in Central Asia. Yet, both embody geopolitical interests regarding their approaches in central Asia. Additionally, China has also developed other parallel institutions not necessarily to mitigate the western influence in the region but to promote its own model of engagement<sup>17</sup>. The formation of the Boao Forum for Asia is another mechanism that works in line with the World Economic Forum. China was also instrumental in forming the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – putting it in the Centre of Asia's trade. Earlier, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was floated, as part of a strategic pivot to Asia by the former US President Obama but was withdrawn by the Trump administration in 2017<sup>18</sup>. What is apparent is that the US is still in the trial and error<sup>19</sup> phase about its new strategy to counter and contain China in the region. The classic example is that despite having QUAD, there was another trilateral security pact between Australia, UK, and the US (AUKUS) developed in 2021 September<sup>20</sup>. Not only were these instruments developed, but there was also a kind of academic rabble rousing going around to build new narratives. While some Western scholars came up with China collapse theory (Chang, 2001 and Shambaugh, 2015), others underlined its peaceful rise (Herrick, Gai, and Subramaniam, 2016). Amidst this, what is more visible, is the shift in the traditional geopolitical order of the region in which China is setting new norms as well as becoming a kind of a norm modifier. While the west came up with the pivot Asia approach, China, has focused on the entire globe through its BRI framework.

This shift in power structure has been seen as a challenge by the West which only reinforces power struggle between the resident and the re-emerging power sometime even reaching closer to what is called a Thucydides Trap (Chan, 2020 and Allison, 2017). Yet China doesn't necessarily buy this trap theory as its civilization is neither built on Alpha approach nor does it have the intention to displace the existing world order. Yet the formation of alignment and realignment have become more frequent making difficult to discern who is friend and who is foe in this geopolitical battleground. The resident and the re-emerging powers also appear to have adopted their own objectives in this new power configuration in the region. For example, the US wanted to maintain status quo in Asia in general and South Asia in particular<sup>21</sup>. Resurgent China, for its part, has not only developed its modus operandi of engagement in South Asia but it is also seeking its fair share in global governance (not necessarily changing the order as said earlier) for which it has also been using soft power to convince others as how the global governance would look like when it comes to the power. China certainly has been consolidating

<sup>17</sup> China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation – which is quite active in Nepal's Terai region is another examples that provides alternative to USAID and DFID with regard to development. See for detail at [https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/nepals-tarai-plains-have-a-chinese-dream-3957?fbclid=IwAR3\\_e3tQnoVTS7-mzvKPTotJitz2UdA3zz4NjDJG4tlY3ubqATMupbieVz8](https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/nepals-tarai-plains-have-a-chinese-dream-3957?fbclid=IwAR3_e3tQnoVTS7-mzvKPTotJitz2UdA3zz4NjDJG4tlY3ubqATMupbieVz8) (accessed on Jan 10, 2022). There is also Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) of which Nepal is also the member.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp> (accessed on Jan 12, 2022) for detail.

<sup>19</sup> In this regard Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi has called the Indo-Pacific an 'attention-grabbing idea' that 'will dissipate like ocean foam' (see [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/projekt\\_papiere/BCAS\\_2019\\_Medcalf\\_Indo-Pacific\\_Long\\_Game.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/projekt_papiere/BCAS_2019_Medcalf_Indo-Pacific_Long_Game.pdf) for detail.)

<sup>20</sup> See Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/can-quad-and-aucus-synergise/>. (accessed on 26 Feb, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> This is also evident from the fact that those who have controlled Asia in the past became the great empires/and superpowers. Perhaps, this may be the reason why the world politics is always revolving between East and the West. No other regions are that important in that regard.

its position in more than one way. For example, to woe smaller states in South Asia, China came up with the Health Silk Road policy during the Covid-19 crisis. Recently, it has also exhibited a trident method (*trishul*) of engagement in the region – local, national, and regional levels<sup>22</sup> and is footing the sub-national regional frameworks of its own kind. Apart from that, and alongside initiating debate on democracy in Chinese way, it has also floated a China-led Global Development Initiative (GDI) to support development, strengthen international development cooperation and promote post-pandemic global economic recovery in the region<sup>23</sup>.

Three regions, South Asia, Central Asia, and South China Sea have become important in this power struggle. These are also other places where major powers are coalescing. The consequences of this geopolitical competition in the region are being felt by all the states in one way or the other irrespective of their size and level of development. Yet India –which is another power in the remaking of Asia is worth discussing precisely because it is Nepal's immediate neighbor with whom engagements are highest at all levels and will certainly have consequences as well. To say the least, in this geopolitical whirlwind, it appears that India is in the doldrums. Its relations in the neighborhood are not moving in the right direction. Despite skirmishes in the borders, India's economic engagement with China<sup>24</sup> is very significant. Yet India is forced to enter various security pacts with the West – mainly the US to counter China and has signed foundational pacts for deep military cooperation with the US<sup>25</sup>. India imports a major chunk of military hardware from Russia. In this geopolitical rivalry between China and the US, and their parallel engagement in South Asia puts India in a difficult situation. It appears to have positioned itself as a junior partner in the US Camp. While China, like the erstwhile USSR did during much of the Cold War period, has become prominent power in the region. When two powerful countries of Asia are divided, it certainly will have consequences for the much-touted Asian Century (Mahbubani, 2020b). Yet, there are scholars who argue that world is entering into G"Zero" international order (Bremer, 2012) where every nation and alliance stands for itself/themselves. Considering these dynamics, what can certainly be argued is that once again – the region – has been divided in two camps but this certainly is not a new phenomenon. Back in 1950s and during the Cold war, there was a similar situation while the modus operandi was different. It was largely manifested in the form of modernization of both governance and development

<sup>22</sup> See Mahendra P Lama at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/the-chinese-trishul-in-south-asia/story-qUKiiJB66Dx-6QtD6aQtTJ.html> (accessed on 10.01.2022).

<sup>23</sup> See Kamal Dev Bhattarai at <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/have-nepal-china-ties-soured-under-the-deuba-government-4144> (accessed on 2nd February, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Despite many ups and down in the border, the trade volume between India and China stood at USD 100 billion. See for detail at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/2021-a-year-of-record-trade-amid-frozen-india-china-ties-over-ladakh-chill/articleshow/88468514.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on Jan 14, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> See at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/beca-india-us-trade-agreements-rajnath-singh-mike-pompeo-6906637/> (accessed on Jan 6, 2022). Troika of agreements: Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement which, along with the two agreements signed earlier – the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) – completes foundational pact.

## **Indo-Pacific as a new theatre**

The growing Asianization of the international economy is leading toward gradual Asianization of international politics (Kurecic, 2017) as well. There are many layers of dramas and many players in this theatre ( Medcalf, 2021) and this may bring, at least, four powers India, China, the US (including its allies), and Russia either in direct competition, conflict, or realigning themselves in the region and elsewhere (Bhatta and Yadav, 2021).The growing geopolitical and geo-economic competition as well as rivalry between the emerging contender state(s) and resident powers (Mahbubani, 2020), will bring further challenges for the region. What may then be witnessed is the new Cold War (old Cold War was Euro centric) and the swath from Iran, Central Asia to Myanmar emerging as the geopolitical chessboard. This could pose threat to the territorial sovereignty, economic prosperity, and civilizational continuity of the region. While the first Cold War led to the collapse of USSR, the new Cold War that is brewing in the region, too, will have consequences which is not yet clear.

In this rivalry, Nepal may become a geopolitical flash point serving strategic interests of those powers. Nepal, for its part, has its own compulsions wherein it must engage with all those countries, however, it certainly will not be easy. Yet Nepal has finalized a trade and transit agreement with China and signed the BRI framework. China has also included Nepal as a dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Nepal also is the member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. All these certainly have diversified Nepal's relations in more than one way to escape from the constraints of a landlocked geography (Kaplan, 2012). However, there are also challenges regarding consolidating democracy and enhancing development. While Nepal's political actors are divided along geopolitical lines based on their ideology – at least for public consumption – people are aligned with the West. At least one family from each and every village of Nepal --may be even more -- today resides in the US and other anglophone countries. Nepal's economic and banking system is tied up with India and the larger employment market is in the Gulf region. Likewise, Nepal's cultural geography is closer to the neighbors. But the geopolitical dynamics are evolving differently: while we have had strategic relations with China, our development partners and governance system, has largely come from the Western perspectives<sup>26</sup>. This perhaps could be the reason, among others, why there have been many mismatches between the two projects BRI of China and Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC) of the US. The policy confusion at home has forced the international partners to reposition themselves putting Nepal in a paradoxical situation. Neither can it say no to the MCC, nor can it ignore BRI as both will have consequences for Nepal as the political parties have divided foreign policy along ideological lines. Also, neither China nor India would like to see Nepal tagging completely along the US line (Bhatta and Menge, 2021). For the US, being Nepal's development partner for more than 70 years and a growing Nepali diaspora in the US and for its own geopolitical calculations, definitely does not want Nepal to fall into the Chinese fold. Internal political

---

<sup>26</sup> Nepal Army frequently engages with American, Indian, and Chinese Army and Nepal has expressed to take relations with China at the strategic level.



crisis is inevitable if Nepal fails to strike a right balance between the two. Any tilt to either India or China would upset its internal strategic balance and create a security dilemma for them owing to open border with India and pro-Tibet stirs against China<sup>27</sup>.

## Connected history-disconnected future?

In this geopolitical vortex, how the connected history further unfolds in the region requires further study. Already, the changing geopolitical dynamics and dimensions are creating their own momentum and constituencies. They are, however, not new, their form may be. To understand, how connected history is becoming disconnected (at least at the people's level), one must go back to the state formation process in South Asia. At the outset, what one can argue is that the modern state formation process in South Asia has brought more animosities than the camaraderie in the region<sup>28</sup> even though the majority of South Asian population share common civilizational roots. From Himalayas (Lord Shiva's abode) to the *Kshir Sagar* or Hind Mahasagar (Lord Vishnu's resting place), and from Kampuchia (Akash Bhairav) to Kasthanadap, and Kashmir to Kailash and from Hingla Devi to Kamakhya – the region has been connected in more than one way and have also created unique social interactions. For example, the *kuldevata* of the Chand Thakuris's living in the Pithoragarh and Almora districts of Uttarakhand lies in the Patan, Baitadi. Yet this connected history somehow has shrunk while these types of connections are becoming more important in today's highly globalized world both regarding power balance and geopolitical maneuvering. The future power balance and geopolitics would largely hinge on these factors as well. In fact, what was historic and pre-historic is increasingly becoming relevant in modern times. The cross-border connections and the relations between the states is determined by more than one factors. The adoption of Westphalian model of governance in tandem with globalization factors, however, have brought more problems than the solutions to the region. This has created conceptual ambiguity as who they are: nation-states, state-nations or civilizational states? Geopolitical dynamics at play does not also provide conditions that can allow South Asian states to work together. Among many other factors, inactiveness or near failure of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could well be associated with this factor (Bhatta, 2018).

State formation in South Asia is challenging as issues related to that have not yet settled down. In contrast, things are becoming more complicated, in this age of technology, unsung melodies are often more alluring than the sung ones where information war plays a key role<sup>29</sup>. During that war, it is not about whose army wins but whose story wins, and whose narratives prevail (Nye 2014). While developing new narratives, various methods are being

<sup>27</sup> During Xi's visit to Nepal in 2019, he surprised everyone when he said 'attempts to split China will end in shattered bones' (Bhatta and Yadav 2021). See "Attempt to split China will end in shattered bones: Xi Jinping in Nepal", available at [https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/any-attempt-to-split-china-will-be-crushed-prez-xi-warns-during-visit-to-nepal-119101300744\\_1.html?fbclid=IwAR2zf6xA6S2OgV8OR3kej6phnnuHn5zq6fMX6cojxYBCEHuCEhTjvC89Hvg](https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/any-attempt-to-split-china-will-be-crushed-prez-xi-warns-during-visit-to-nepal-119101300744_1.html?fbclid=IwAR2zf6xA6S2OgV8OR3kej6phnnuHn5zq6fMX6cojxYBCEHuCEhTjvC89Hvg) (accessed on 13 July, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> See M K Bhadrakumar at <https://asiatimes.com/2021/11/chinas-belt-and-road-chugging-along-in-central-asia/> (accessed on 26 Feb, 2022).



used in which existing norms and values are being continuously questioned and often (re)construct tension among various societal groups. The civilizational geopolitics (Agnew, 2004) is certainly becoming important under the pretext of social transformation. In the course of civilizational geopolitics, various parts of the world/region are categorized in people's mental maps according to the civilization to which they belong to (ibid) with potential to invoke conflict between the nation and the state (Ryser, 2012). If that occurs, which it has already in some part, it will not only disconnect the state from society but the spillover effect, for sure, may also have consequences to the relations in the neighborhood and beyond. One standard example in this regard is how co-ethnics, irrespective of their geographical locations and statehood, groups together for their ethnic rights during the time of crisis.

Central to the whole gamut of that geopolitics is constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing narratives and informing people who they are (Mamdani, 2012). Perhaps, how the past is narrated in relation to connected geography and how present is developing future connections is important to (un)keep the societies intact – both internally and externally. However, in many cases, the past has been not only problematized but also politicized for political, social, and cultural gains, and is anchored in more than one way. Yet there are those who are worried about the future. For example, in the past, diversity in Nepali society used to be expressed through celebrated differences and was not necessarily exclusive. The celebration of diversity was coming from the teachings of Hindu/Buddhist philosophies and other animistic teachings. However, the state itself has become secular and such teachings do not play important roles. This can also be said about Nepal – India relations as well. While both the countries are secular the religious symbols/connections have little space when it comes to the point of interaction at the state level. Diversity, in contrast, has been projected through manifested differences which only disassociate people from such celebration. This perhaps may be the reason, among others, why Ram is often projected as Indian and Buddha as Nepali. The new social movements (Dahal, 2004) building around gender, region, religion, and nationalism (largely on the issues related to primordial identity) are now turning into new geopolitical fault lines. In the long-run, geopolitics played around these lines would only harden the differences and risk freezing historically acquired humanistic identity (Parekh 2008:36). Such politicization of differences will not necessarily lead to national cohesion as it has potential to be exclusive as well as to reify those which collective actors want to change (Bernstein, 2005 and Fraser, 2000 and Parekh 2008). Yet, nobody really knows how to solve thorny questions of many historical, cultural, and traditions inherited from the past, at a time when past is compared with the present (Bhatta, 2021). Whatever path we take, the first step will be to acknowledge complexity of this dilemma and accept that simplistically describing past into good and bad leads nowhere (ibid).

Factors relating to the political economy should also be held responsible for the lesser interactions in the neighborhood. While all South Asian states, including Nepal, have increased their interactions outside the region, engagement in the neighborhood has decreased. In the case of Nepal and India, it has shifted from Benaras to Boston. For Nepal, its engagement with the West has increased by leaps and bounds.

Nepal's relation with India is timeless, emotional, spiritual, and presupposes the idea of statelessness. There are five such factors which makes relations with India – that is Bharat (Deepak, 2021) - so unique that the day-to-day life (from birth to death) of the people living on both sides of the border is governed by what we call, 5Gs: *Gotra, Gayatri, Gai, Ganga, and Gaya* (Bhatta and Yadav, 2021). Nepal's engagement with China has also increased in recent years but there are some limitations to that. The Chinese model may be attractive at the political party level but not definitely at the people's level.

## **The Rise of Geopolitical Alpha<sup>30</sup>**

There are many factors that can be referred to as the geopolitical Alpha. Countries like Nepal do not necessarily have larger geopolitical ambitions (Khanal, 1988). Their main concern has been to advance and achieve developmental goals for their people and strengthen democracy. Nevertheless, the problem arises when development, democracy, and social transformation become geopolitical tools. Thus, understanding geopolitical dynamics vis-à-these factors is certainly important for Nepal. For that, one must start from 1950 when development and democracy became priority for so-called First World in the Third World, including Nepal. Along with many countries, this was also the time when Nepal began its journey towards democratization and development subtly under the modernization drive. However, it also came with heavy price. In the course of modernization, many traditional institutions of governance and economic (re) generation processes were dismantled as they were portrayed as being conservative, obsolete, obstacles and unfit for development and democracy building<sup>31</sup>. What transpired in that process was that both governance and developmental activities began as “trial and error” undertakings keeping countries like Nepal in a permanent state of transition thereby putting democracy and developmental efforts always at bay. Regarding democracy, Nepal still finds itself in the categories of a states in the infant stage. From the developmental perspective, what Nepal certainly has become is the bazaar where marketisation of development has become kind of phenomenon (Bhatta 2017) than real development. Many call it “development of development”, which is driven by highly educated people, who develop policies to justify their own expertise (Mosse, 2005). Considering these factors, one may argue that sometimes development becomes more geopolitical than geopolitics itself. This may be the reason, among others, why it took nearly seven decades for Nepal to be considered for graduating from a least developed country to a middle-income country. The marketisation of development has hijacked the real issues of people and diversified dependency for everyone – state, government, and people in more than one way. While government and its machinery increasingly became dependent on donors, society, for its part, has for all practical purposes had to rely on overseas employment for livelihood (Bhatta, 2017). In fact, the modernization theory adhered during the Cold War era and neoliberal orthodoxy of post-1990s period have generated multiple crises both for development and democracy. In

<sup>30</sup> Taken from Geopolitical Alpha: An investment Framework for Predicting the Future, Marko Papic(2020).How civilizational geopolitics is increasinglybecoming Alpha and dominating geopolitics in recent years albeit in a different way.

<sup>31</sup> See “Measures for the economic development of under-developed countries : report / by a Group of Experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations” at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/708544?ln=en> (accessed on Jan 11, 2022).

this context, while democracy became procedural and ritualistic, development lost its relevance for people (Shrestha 1997) not necessarily for the development planners though. Apart from that failure to ascertain between the various paths of development (Poudel, 2021) then suing strategic interests apparently complicated everything. If strategic interests may not have been the cause, how come Nepal's development partners – both close and distant – have realized that its infrastructure needs to be strengthened? Nepal has become victim of strategic development and foreign aid that often gets tied up with geopolitics (Khadka, 1997), which simultaneously creates the developmental trap akin to *chakrabyuhua* that was mentioned in Mahabharata. This, however, began right after 1950s – when four major countries, USA, China, USSR, and India, started aiding Nepal. Foreign aid, then was largely the spillover effects of superpower rivalry --the US and the USSR – and now being played out between US and China, and India today. One certainly can argue that very little has changed, for Nepal, since then regarding development and strategic interests. The arrival of non-state actors, later, also turned out to be nuisance not only for development but also for democracy building. Their contributions in the awareness-related programs may be important but, some of them have also been found to have been advancing their own geopolitical interests by creating fault lines under the veil of social transformation.

Similarly, in recent years, civilizational factors, are emerging as new geopolitical fault lines. The roots of civilizational geopolitics lie in how particular societies are to be studied from certain methodological vantage points. In many cases, such studies have only divided societies along various lines. There are those who appreciate the history, and others who strongly feel that their history has been erased/ignored (Bhatta, 2021) by the Gorkhali rulers and this narrative has been forcefully established. The consequences of such a situation is that P.N. Shah –the unifier of Nepal –has not only been polarized but the whole unification process has been questioned by certain groups/scholars. What led to such a situation is that one single standard is used to (re)define history and society, which, yet again, does not necessarily understand reality, diversity, and plurality. Instead, they disregard the past as well as civilization for which it stands for. If that is true, the question arises, who should, then, be held responsible? Perhaps academic activism that took place in the name of developing alternative narratives wherein imaginary issues became more real than the real itself as Johnny Walker once claimed to have said about himself. Such activism can have profound impact in connecting societies within and outside. Moreover, we are also transiting from one way of life to another, under the influence of materialistic civilization premised on money and weapons. This materialistic civilization has always lived in a binary such as men vs. God, men vs. nature, men vs. society, men vs. women and now men vs. men and is exporting some societal problems, or they have the same imagination of other societies as they have about their own<sup>32</sup>. The materialistic ideas – capitalism and communism –could neither produce capital nor could they guarantee justice as Marx and many of his later followers envisioned. What certainly can happen is the binary way of life, which yet again, will turn everybody against everybody. George Orwell satirically once said, rich countries do not need anything – the wealth they have can even buy the civilization, but for those who are not so materially reach, their wealth is their civilizational and cultural values. However, under the influence

universalizing, so-called “civilizing standard”(Sripati, 2020) countries like Nepal are not only losing their cultural and civilizational capital but also getting internally divided<sup>33</sup>.

## **Conclusion: geopolitics and foreign policy?**

Countries like Nepal face a double-edged sword in geopolitics. While they already must be careful with their geographic locations, they also need to advance their relations not only in the neighborhood but also beyond, and at a time when geopolitical struggles have reached both the outer and inner spaces. Regardless of the situation, Nepal must conduct its foreign affairs more prudently and keep its house in order rather than engaging in the blame game. In this context, while its dependence to close and distant neighbors is inevitable and undeniable in many ways<sup>34</sup>, it will also have to strike a fine balance between development, democracy, and social transformation. No doubt, there are some contradictions as well. While, from the statistic approach, Nepal certainly will have to be closer with the neighbors for survival, people, for their part, do not necessarily have the same choices – their interactions with the West has increased significantly. That interaction is also changing traditional cultural connectivity which earlier was limited largely with India and China (Sen, 2018). In this context, the most pressing foreign policy issue for Nepal, is how to deal with three powers – India, China, and the West and one region, the Gulf (although the Gulf itself is also divided). The 64-thousand-dollar question, as they say, is whether Nepal can have its own independent foreign, development, and social policies? Can it turn geopolitical challenges into opportunities, or will it be forced again to adjust its foreign policy as per the requirement of its neighbors and the so-called development partners? For all practical reasons, having an independent foreign policy in this interdependent world is certainly difficult yet Nepal is positioned to have all the capacities to navigate from the existing geopolitical undercurrents and defend its interests– core, vital, peripheral, and other time-bound ones. In this regard, neither Nepal should neither be a prisoner of geography (Marshall,2015) nor should it hold the view that geopolitics is only for the big powers. In fact, what should certainly be kept in mind yet again is that in the geopolitical struggles, big powers always need small and medium-sized states on their side to advance their strategic goals. Also, it is not always the states which would be driving geopolitics in the future, in contrast, they will largely be influenced by the private companies, corporate houses, and individuals. Therefore, geopolitics has more than one dimension.

Moreover, Nepal's political history informs that outside involvement that largely began from the 1940s continues in one form or another. Many see such involvements being part of the broader geopolitical game – even though there is no strong evidence to support this. The fact, however, is that some of those involvements were also solicited. Also, not all outside assistance

<sup>32</sup> See Prof. Kapil Kapoor at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCeC9sCIPuk>

<sup>33</sup> Such an approach is also used to ethnically divide the society. The classic example is the constitutional division of people along ethnic lines not necessarily along civic lines which would have promoted civilizing standard. The current approach is dividing whole into parts.

<sup>34</sup> This can be demonstrated from the fact that remittance contributed around 29 percent to national GDP and that mostly comes from the West and the Persian Gulf.

for democracy or development is geopolitically motivated. That judging every external effort for democracy and development building from the geopolitical perspective might be closer to naivety in this globalized world where boundaries regarding those have long been eroded by the nation states themselves. In the same vein, cultural homogeneity is also disappearing, and diversity and pluralism are taking the center stage –perhaps for the first time in the human history. Yet we do not truly have the mechanism – the grammar, at least --with the way modern nation-states have been built. They are, too, statist power oriented, and for that reason, will not understand how civilizations or people from both sides of the border (in the case of Nepal-India) and beyond think about each other or how their livelihoods are connected. The commonality and emotions that exists at the societal level has not been reflected at the state level. Overall Wesphalian states are different – they are built on the legitimate monopoly on violence – in the Weberian sense of the term – not necessarily on the emotions and traditions that *Rashtra or Desha (even it was Be-dehsa)* used to carry in this part of the world.

For more than one reason, Nepal's capacity and freedom to maneuver has drastically eroded over the years. We certainly need to enhance that for which formula-based response to foreign policy largely built around ideology, concepts of balance of power/ bandwagon, non-alignment, distance, or some vision of regional order (Bastedt 2020: 356) may not be suitable. While some of them were developed in an era when politics was more adversarial in nature (Bhatta and Yadav, 2021) others were simply for internal consumption. For all practical reasons such responses, at the outset, cannot be pursued, if pursued, they can only narrowly define national interest in today's context. The international system is not only anarchial (Bull, 1977) but also hierarchal (Doshi, 2021). They may be suitable for the survival of the regime, but for the state, we certainly need to understand which direction the threats are coming from. For the state like Nepal, we should, focus more on balancing the threats rather than power. When the former is suitable for states like Nepal, power is suited for powerful states. This is where it becomes important regarding developing future alignments. While some of them could certainly be beneficial, others may come up with their own security commitments/obligations and may even pose risks as well. Hence, comparative advantage should be factored whilst doing so as it would alone enhance the bargaining capacity and allows us to reject certain things that are not congruent with national interests. We must understand the fact that there are competitive offers for developmental projects, and international relations is becoming competitive. Foreign policy and relations with the states should not be decided in the street or under duress of the crowd as has been the case since 1990 when foreign policy has been taken to the street for political benefit.

## References

- Agnew, John. (2004). *Geopolitics: Revisioning World Politics*. New Delhi. Routledge.
- Allison, Graham (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Basu, P.K. (2017). *Asia Reborn: A Continent Rises from the Ravages of Colonialism and War to a New Dynamism*. New Delhi. Rupa Publications.

- Bhatta, Chandra D. and Jonathan Menge. (2021). Introduction. In Bhatta and Menge (eds.). *Gaida's Dance with Tiger and Dragon*. Kathmandu. FES Nepal Office.
- Bhatta, Chandra D. and Lalbabu Yadav. (2021). Developmental Diplomacy in the Central Himalayas: Reflections on Nepal-China Relations., *Strategic Studies Series*, CNAS Biannual, No.11, July .
- Bhatta, Chandra D. (2021). Dialectics of 'Inclusion and Exclusion' in Nepal: A Review. Dialectics of 'Inclusion and Exclusion' in Nepal: *A Review. Journal of Political Science*, 21, 50–61.
- Bhatta, Chandra Dev (2019) "*Himalaya Sareko Shakti-Sanghrasha* (in Nepali)", (Geopolitical power struggle that has shifted towards Himalayas) available at [https://nepalmag.com.np/opinion/2019/01/31/20190131162057?fbclid=IwAR33sLKcnBmedKx3pkAxOSsm\\_rXkF3VcYV2-G8\\_9mlLoba72qQH3FiWhoh8](https://nepalmag.com.np/opinion/2019/01/31/20190131162057?fbclid=IwAR33sLKcnBmedKx3pkAxOSsm_rXkF3VcYV2-G8_9mlLoba72qQH3FiWhoh8) (accessed July 09, 2021).
- Bhatta, Chandra D. (2018). Emerging powers, soft power, and future of regional cooperation in South Asia, *Asian Journal of Political Science* 27(2):1-16. DOI: 10.1080/02185377.2018.1557062.
- Bhatta, Chandra D. (2017). *Critical Appraisal of Foreign Aid and Development in Nepal*. In Ram Prasad Gyanwali(eds.). Political Economy of Nepal. Kathmandu. Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University.
- Bremmer, Ian . (2012) *.Every Nation for Itself: What Happens When No One Leads the World*. New York. Portfolio/Penguin.
- Bernstein, M. (2005). Identity politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31, 47-74.
- Biswo, Poudel. (2021). Prospects for social Justice and Sustainable Development: Geoeconomic Perspectives. Kathmandu. FES Nepal Office.
- Bull, H. (1977). *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York. Columbia University Press.
- Chan, Steve. (2020). *Thucydides's Trap?: Historical Interpretation, Logic of Inquiry, and the Future of Sino-American Relations*. University of Michigan Press.
- Dahal, Dev Raj. (2004). *New Social Movements*. Organization, June-July 2004.
- Doshi, Rush (2021). *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order (Bridging the Gap)*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Engelbrekt, K. (2018). A brief intellectual history of geopolitical thought and its relevance to the Baltic Sea region, *Global Affairs*, Volume 4, 2018, Issue 4-5, pp.475-485.
- Fraser, N.(1995). 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age'. *New Left Review*.
- Hopkirk, Peter (2006). *Quest for Kim: In Search of Kipling's Great Game*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press.
- Hopkirk, Peter (1992). *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*. London. Kodansha International.
- Kaplan, R. (2012). *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*. New Delhi. Random House.
- Khadka, Narayan. (1997). *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy: Major Powers and Nepal*. New Delhi, Vikas Publishing.



- Khanal, Yadu Nath (1988). *Essays in Nepal's Foreign Affairs*. Kathmandu: Murari Prasad Upadhyay.
- Kissinger, Henry (2014). *World Order*, New Delhi. Penguin.
- Kurecic, P. (2017). *World Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Small States in the Multi-polar World (Fall 2017), pp. 280-294.
- Rostow, W.W. (1966). *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Paperback). Cambridge University Press.
- Mahbubani, Kishore. (2020a). *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*. New York. Public Affairs.
- Mahbubani, Kishore. (2020b). The world after covid-19: Kishore Mahbubani on the dawn of the Asian century. *The Economist*. Available at <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2020/04/20/kishore-mahbubani-on-the-dawn-of-the-asian-century>.
- Mackinder, H. J. (1904). *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, December, pp. 298–321.
- Mamdani, M. (2012). *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity (The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- Marshall, T. (2015). *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need To Know About Global Politics*. New Delhi. Scribner.
- Mosse, David. (2005). *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. Pluto Press.
- Nye, Joseph S. (2014). The Information Revolution and Soft Power. *Current History* 113(759): 19-22.
- Owen, M.T. (2015). In Defense of Classical Geopolitics, *ORBIS*, Volume 59, Issue 4. Pp. 463-478.
- Papic, Marko (2020). *Geopolitical Alpha: An Investment Framework for Predicting the Future*. New Jersey, John Wiley and Sons.
- Parekh, Bhikhu. (2008). *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rudolph, Ryser C. (2012). *Indigenous Nations and Modern States: The Political Emergence of Nations Challenging State Power*. New Delhi. Routledge.
- Sen, Tansen. (2018). *India, China and the World: A Connected History*. New Delhi. Oxford University Press.
- Shrestha, Nanda. 1997. *In the name of development: Reflection on Nepal*. University Press of America.
- Sripati, Vijayashri (2020). *Constitution-Making under UN Auspices: Fostering Dependency in Sovereign Lands*. New Delhi. Oxford University Press.
- Starr, Harvey (2015). *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 2015), pp. 139-148.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. (2022). *Connected History: Essays and arguments*. Verso.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Bhatta, C.D. (2022) Understanding Nepal's geopolitical dynamics: Connected history disconnected future

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44008>



# Geopolitical Trends and Need for Coherent Foreign and Security Policy for Nepal

---

Suresh Sharma<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Nepal faces a severe geopolitical threat because of the geostrategic position between India and China. This geographical positioning and the constantly changing geopolitical trends seriously impact the country. A comprehensive and coherent foreign and security policy is needed by Nepal to address the risks and threats. Realizing the evolving geopolitical effects on Nepal and the country needs to be ready with the foreign policy and security policy harmonize and coordinate the two to promote and protect the national interest. The study aims to point out the geopolitical threats for the country and recommends the fundamentals for developing a coherent and integrated foreign policy. To justify this necessity, the study explores the relationship between foreign policy and security policy and establishes an interdependent connection between the two. The article also traces the historiography of the harmonious and integrated foreign and security policy of Nepal from the nation-building phase. It identifies the situations in which the country had deviated from the core fundamentals of the foreign and security policies. Methodologically, the article has adhered to the secondary resources and has adopted a qualitative approach to collate and analyze the information thematically.*

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, security policy, Nepal, geopolitics, coherency.

## **Introduction**

It is significant to enhance the national interest of a country abroad but is equally important to secure the interest. Maintaining strong national defense and fostering a robust diplomatic corps is important for forging a strategic relationship with like-minded countries. Many scholars have different views about foreign and security policies. The foreign policy has been defined as “policy guidelines to conduct foreign relations”, “pattern of behavior of a state in relation to the other”, “policy to achieve national objectives at the international level”, “means to an end of the state” (Aneek, 2010; Burton, 1977; Long, 2011). Similarly, the security policy is defined as a “framework to provide security to nation and citizens”, “guidelines to address security needs of the country”, “understanding threats and risks of the security environment”, “a guide to action for the government,” etc. (DCAF, 2018; Romm, 1993). The line of difference between the foreign and security policies is very thin. What is common between the two policies is the “protection and promotion of national interest”, abroad or at home (Pew Research Center, 2011).

---

<sup>1</sup> Former Spokesperson of Nepal Army, Mr. Sharma often writes on the issues related to national security and Geopolitics.

The cohesion between foreign and security policies are not only strategic aims but the different factors affecting the policies also seem to be similar (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2015). The idea of “security” is very close to foreign policy (Long, 2011). As the concept of security has broadened beyond the traditional state perspective or military domain to the non-traditional security realm, widening the horizon has interrelated the aspects of foreign policy with security policy (Kissinger, 1976). This has resulted in the need for integrating foreign and security policies. Geopolitical threats are among the most prominent among the different elements causing risks and threats to both foreign policy and security policy. Present day geopolitics has resulted in serious risks and challenges for all countries, especially for the small states.

Nepal’s geopolitical threats and challenges have significantly increased owing to its geostrategic position between India and China. The simultaneous rise of the two Asian giants in the neighborhood with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) penetrating the South Asian region disregarding India’s reluctance to participate in the initiative, has also threatened small states, including Nepal (Adhikari D. R., 2018). The maritime geopolitical risks have also been part of Nepal’s geopolitical security problems (Baral L. R., 2020). The power politics in the Indo-Pacific region has been a significant challenge to Nepal, and major powers like the United States of America (USA), China, and India are willing to influence the domestic political decisions as per their strategic interests (Baral L. R., 2017). Drawing from the experience from the other regions, it was observed that in Africa, the Indian efforts were linked to the economic rationale of expansion and the raising fears associated with the current expansion of Chinese investments (Baral B. N., 2018). Likewise, the ongoing political instability of Nepal from after the restoration of democracy in 1990 is the internal security threat where the major international powers have shown an interest (Pandey, 2016). The security of the regime has been the aim of the political elites in Nepal, and this mentality has been capitalized by the major powers in furthering their self-interests.

However, a clear definition and scope of foreign policy and security policy are lacking in Nepal. The wide gaps in the intersections of foreign and security policies have not yet been realized. The idea of an integrated foreign and security policy has not yet been imagined by the leaders, government, and bureaucrats. This study primarily focuses on examining the relationship between foreign policy and security policy and the gaps. It traces the history of the integrated strategy and foreign policy of Nepal while exploring the geopolitical risks in the neighborhood and make recommendations on investigating and integrating the two policies.

## **Relationship between foreign policy and security policy**

Although the two concepts seem to share different ideas, they are intricately related to each other. Any country’s international behavior is depicted with what it portrays, interest or significance, and risk or threat (Anton, 1994). The countries tend to act according to their choice of what they specifically think is essential (Anton, 1994). Simply, if a country is going through an economic crisis or stagnation resulting in economic insecurity, then the foreign policy of that specific country will not focus on the problems overseas but concentrate on the

problems at home (Pew Research Center, 2011). The foreign policy would be more focused on the economic interests of the country to increase investments, grants, foreign aid, and other policies (Pew Research Center, 2011). From this simple example, the relationship between foreign and security policies can be established. Therefore, according to the threat or risk perception, the security policies are created to counter those challenges, and foreign policy, as a guideline to conduct foreign relations, can be employed on furthering the interest of the country accordingly (DCAF, 2018).

The relationship between the foreign policy and security policy of a country provides an inward-looking sentiment to deal with the security issues rather than outward internationalist policies (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2015). However, this relationship between the foreign and security policies is determined by the capability of the state (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2015). If the country is a developed country, then the inward-looking relationship between two policies might not be sufficient as the threats encircling that country might also originate from the other parts of the world (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017). The poverty-stricken and underdeveloped states may cause people of that country to be involved in different traditional and non-traditional security threats (Anton, 1994). Thus, the integrated foreign and security policy of a developed country relates to the security of “self” and security from the other (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017).

Nevertheless, the integration of foreign and security policies of underdeveloped or developing countries may be inward-looking with a lesser focus on global concerns. Those states can focus on the security of the state and its citizens and ultimately contribute globally (Widjojo, 2005). In those countries, an integrated foreign and security policy focuses on a more nationalistic stance rather than being an internationalist (Widjojo, 2005).

Although developing and underdeveloped countries are focused on the inward-looking combination of security and foreign policies, one of the fundamentals of these principles become multilateralism (Pew Research Center, 2011). The coherence of foreign and security policies can be successful if it stands out for the support of multilateralism (Pew Research Center, 2011). Multilateralism provides states with an opportunity to forward their national interest in regional or global platforms (Burton, 1977). The developed and developing, or underdeveloped countries can voice their respective concerns on multilateral forums (Widjojo, 2005). One of the essential pillars of multilateralism is reciprocity, and this reciprocal behavior of the states (either developed or developing), can help them to fulfill the aim of promoting and protecting national interest (Widjojo, 2005). Although the integrated foreign and security policies of the peripheral state can be inward-looking, the unilateralist approach is not recommended; neither is military assertiveness for developed states for furthering their national interests as it is not viable in this world with rules and norms (Anton, 1994).

The relationship between foreign and security policies is determined by international politics as well as domestic politics (Raunio & Wagner, 2020). The unstable domestic regime in any country in the region can attract the attention of the major powers as the instability of international security, and global peace brings threats to them (Raunio & Wagner, 2020). Therefore, the foreign and security policies of the major powers are concentrated

on such unstable countries to establish democratic values and norms (Widjojo, 2005). In such situations, humanitarian intervention becomes one of the tools of foreign and security policies (Widjojo, 2005). The organizations and policy processes in the country also become a detrimental factor in determining the policies (Bjarnason, 2020). Further, the regime type, perception of the leaders, and the historical experience of the country can also be related to how a specific state can formulate and coordinate the foreign and security policy (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2015). The capability of the country to identify, prevent, resolve the threat or risk determines the security and foreign policy of the country (Anton, 1994).

A strong defense is required to enhance the foreign policy roles of a state (Anton, 1994). Diplomacy without national strength and security would not be very effective, but some argue that a comprehensive foreign policy will secure the defense of the country (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017). This depends on the power relations and capabilities of the country. The defense of its national interest both at home and abroad would be equally important for any great power. However, a small state that cannot strengthen its internal capacities, militarily, economically, or politically, depends on the foreign policy tools to secure itself from threats or risks (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2015). A small state will employ a non-aligned, neutral, and minimalistic foreign policy as these are the diplomatic and foreign policy tools for them to survive in this international order (Raunio & Wagner, 2020). Therefore, the relationship between foreign policy and security policy also depends upon the power relations and capacity of the country.

Thus, establishing any relations between foreign and security policies depends on the characteristics and capabilities of a particular country. As security and national interest are core to both, the integration or combination and coherency of the policies is significant.

## **Historiography of integrated essence of foreign and security policies in Nepal**

The integration of foreign and security policies is essential because of their interdependence. Many countries have an integrated foreign and security policy to ensure coherence between the two policies to protect and promote the national interest. The European Union (EU) even exercises the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017). The integrated and common policy of the EU has helped to protect the interests of the member countries jointly, facilitated an integrated approach to global conflicts, and maintained regional order (European Parliament, 2021). Therefore, there are many advantages to simultaneously practicing foreign and security policies. Nepal, from the start of its nation-building stages, has emphasized independent foreign and security policies (Adhikari D. R., 2018). The geopolitical vulnerabilities of the country have always pushed the country to adopt coherent security and foreign policy. Located between the two giants, “survival” has been the eminent course of Nepal (Rose L. E., 1971). Therefore, coherency was needed in the foreign and security policies.

Nepal, as a nation, established itself in challenging conditions. The Qing Empire in the North was aggressively expanding its territories, and British East India Company was dominant in the Indian sub-continent (Rose L. E., 1971). Both the powers were trying to spread the influence in

the region and it was an arduous task for the rulers of Nepal to promote and protect the national interest of survival (Adhikari D. R., 2018). Historically, the actual departure point of Nepal's foreign and security policy can be observed in King Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh* (The Divine Counsel) where he depicted Nepal as a "yam; between the two boulders" and cautioned the rulers and statesmen in Nepal to be cautious in dealing with both the neighbors (Baral B. N., 2020). This 'yam' theory depicts Nepal's tacit foreign and security policies. The corollary of our foreign and security policies had more ramifications in this perspective (Baral B. N., 2020). King Prithvi Narayan Shah advised maintaining a treaty of friendship with the emperor of China and emphasized the significance of a treaty of friendship with the emperor of the southern sea (Baral B. N., 2018). The king had also mentioned the geopolitical risk evolving from the rise of the British East India Company and the Qing Empire, but at the same time suggested furthering national interest through a comprehensive foreign policy (Adhikari D. R., 2018). Similarly, his other policy- "*Jai Katak Nagarnu, Jhiki Katak Garnu*" refers to cautiousness and gradualism in the security and foreign policy (Ludwig F. Stiller, 1968). This, like the yam analogy was also equally important.

Nepal had a significant amount of trade with Tibet and therefore, securing the interest of Nepal and the safety of the Nepali merchants in Tibet was necessary (Rose L. E., 1971). Nepal, from the very beginning, has always wanted a trade monopoly and tried to secure the routes to Tibet (Thapaliyal, 1998). For this reason, Nepal had even gone to war with Tibet twice before the start of the 19th century (Thapaliyal, 1998). This is another instance that depicts the integration of Nepal's security policy with its foreign policy. After the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816) and the signing of the Sugauli Treaty with the East India Company, Nepal lost a considerable part of its territory (Acharya, 1966).

Consequently, Nepal became very conscious about its survival as an independent state (Baral B. N., 2018). Till the rule of Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, Nepal was aware of the security of the country from foreigners and did not promote the participation of foreigners in domestic politics or economy (Acharya, 1966). The foreign and security policies were concentrated on securing Nepal's interest from foreigners by maintaining relations (Ludwig F. Stiller, 1999). At this point, Nepal was not bent towards expanding relations but had inward-looking policies (Ludwig F. Stiller, 1999).

During the Rana regime in Nepal (1846-1950), the foreign policy was largely British-centric (Baral B. N., 2018). It was based on the assumption of relatively greater powers of the British, compared to other states. Therefore, for the security of the country, the Rana rulers focused on this policy regardless of Nepal's own military strength (Baral B. N., 2018). Nepal has supported the British in the Sepoy Mutiny in India, First World War, War of Waziristan, and the Second World War (Hamal, 1995). This foreign policy of supporting the British in the two devastating wars can be justified through the security lens.

However, in the mid-20th century, after the independence of India in 1947 and the rise of Communism in China and threats about "liberation" of Tibet, the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty between Nepal and India limited Nepal's foreign policy to some extent (Thapaliyal,

1998). The securitization of the Himalayas by India after the takeover of Tibet by the People's Republic of China, affected Nepal (Rose L. E., 1962). Due to the limiting nature of the 1950 treaty, Nepal was threatened because it imposed curbs on Nepal's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy (Rose L. E., 1962). Thus, during the Panchayat years (1961-1990), Nepal attempted to diversify its foreign relations. It was a time when the Cold War between the USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had also escalated. To avoid any involvement in the military and ideological blocs, Nepal opted for the policy of non-alignment and was an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Dahal S. H., 2018). Through this platform, Nepal voiced its concerns over the different issues related to power politics in different parts of the world that threatened global security and peace, which could also have affected the sovereignty and independence of Nepal (Dahal S. H., 2018). In the Cold War, Nepal's security and foreign policy were directed at dealing with the geopolitical vulnerabilities due to power politics (Whelpton, 2005).

However, after the reintroduction of democracy in Nepal in 1990, due to political instability, the security of the regime for the political elites became paramount (Whelpton, 2013). Because the political elites and leaders aimed to secure control or power over the regime, the major powers were provided with space to indulge in domestic politics and even micromanage to accommodate their interests, which have threatened the country (Whelpton, 2013).

## **Visible deviations from foreign and security policies**

There have been inevitable swings in the fundamentals of Nepal's foreign policy in different periods. Primarily, Nepal experienced the deviation from the fundamentals of the foreign and security policy provided by King Prithvi Narayan Shah after the Sugauli Treaty where Nepal lost considerable territory, and the foreign involvement started in the court of Nepal when the British Residents started residing in Nepal (Baral B. N., 2018). During the Rana regime as well, although the foreign policy was British-centric and the security policy was focused on the survival of the nation, Nepal was isolated from world politics, and the military strength of the country was used for the imperial ambitions of Britain (Rose L. E., 1971). With the decline of the imperial power in the Indian sub-continent, the political elites could not change with the changes (Rose L. E., 1962). However, after 1950 the rule of King Tribhuvan was characterized by the "special relations" with India and had deviated from the fundamentals of the foreign policy (Rose L. E., 1962). The engagement of Nepal in the securitization of the frontiers by India limited the independent foreign policy of Nepal (Rose L. E., 1962). Similarly, during the Panchayat period was criticized for the lack of democratization of the foreign policy (Whelpton, 2005). Nevertheless, it was characterized by Nepal pursuing independent and non-aligned foreign policies (Whelpton, 2005).

Moreover, after the 1990s, domestic policies overshadowed the objectives of foreign policy and hindered the country from pursuing a consistent national security policy (Whelpton, 2013). The major powers, particularly India was even engaged in the micromanagement of domestic politics. Nepal experienced massive political changes like a decade-long "People's



War”, the massacre of the royal family, direct rule by King Gyanendra, the second People’s Movement, and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and declaration of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (Pandey, 2016). This period was also characterized by political instability and the inability of the Constituent Assembly to promulgate the constitution. This provided an opportunity for “opinion-making” by major powers in the internal affairs of Nepal.

At present Nepal is trapped in a diplomatic dilemma (Sharma, 2021). After the promulgation of the constitution in 2015, Nepal faced an unofficial economic blockade imposed by India, citing some reservations (Baral L. R., 2017). Nepal then attempted to search for an alternative to India and signed a transport and transit agreement with China (Sharma, 2018). It also has officially signed China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Presently, Nepal is facing the direct effect of antagonism and conflict between the major powers. The US-China and China-India rivalries and attempt to drag Nepal into the Indo-Pacific region or strategy have impacted the geopolitical risk for Nepal (Baral L. R., 2021). The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the grant it has offered Nepal has become widely debated and the inability to take strong diplomatic decisions have led to the scrutiny of Nepali foreign and security policies (Baral L. R., 2021).

Therefore, there have been instances where Nepal’s foreign policy and security policies have deviated from their fundamentals and capitalized on those opportunities used by the regional and major powers to exert influence affecting the independent foreign policy and diplomacy of the country.

## **Evolving geopolitical threats for Nepal**

The world has constantly been changing alongside a multitude of threats such as a global pandemic, social changes, Ukraine and Afghan crises, developments in the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea, the emergence of QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), AUKUS (bilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), BRI, and the military coup in Myanmar, among others. These global changes have significantly affected the interlink between global political relationships and the internal political economy (Brown, 2021). With the global pandemic as a risk, international politics will be influenced in one way or another. The Russian forces encircling Ukraine from three sides in reaction to the country’s decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has brought two major powers to the brink of war. With the growth of a realist or an inward-looking mentality among the countries during the pandemic, and increasing geopolitical cyber-attacks and threats, the states may have to employ drastic and unpredictable ways to pursue and protect the national interests (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020).

As Carl von Clausewitz argued, “war is the continuation of politics by other means”. The aphorism will hold true because future warfare is going to be determined by geopolitics (Brown, 2021). The US polarization and retrenchment, Asia’s reassessment, and Russia’s concern over the expansion of NATO, the rise of China through BRI, a changing Europe, and

conflicts in the Islamic and South Asian countries are among the reasons for the changing geopolitics (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). Geopolitics is not only changing, and it has reached an unsettling phase (Bjarnason, 2020). International politics has moved beyond the conventional military challenges (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). The pattern of global migration is changing as the refugee crisis and the flux of illegal migrants in developing or developed countries are increasing (Dalby, 2000). Also, the reconfiguration of the investment and trade patterns by the developed countries and organizations is in constant change (Brown, 2021). Proxy wars have been increasing in the different parts of the world, and the alliance dynamics are also shifting (Brown, 2021).

The primary locus of power is shifting and changing the international structure (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). The growing nationalist agendas redressing historically perceived national humiliation have driven countries like China and Russia (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). The rise of the individuals as the power centers in the world, above the states, has also questioned the direction of geopolitics (Gomart, 2016). The wave of populism in different parts of the world has misled citizens and invoked or justified nationalistic drives of specific individuals or governments (Gomart, 2016). The rise of the non-state actors from international terrorist organizations into the power to the multi-national companies gaining influence in the state policies have significantly affected the geopolitical situation of the world (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). The miscalculation of some of the major powers about the geopolitical strategies of other countries has disturbed the rule-based international order (World Economic Forum, 2021). International law is at risk because of the geopolitical competition between the countries (World Economic Forum, 2021). Also, the decreasing influence of international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and others has brought tensions in the world (Thompson, Pronk, & Manen, 2021).

Geopolitical threats have increased in the South Asian region because of the constant changes. There has been the rise of India as the fastest growing economy in the world with its increasing economic and strategic ambitions (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). India has reached the Pacific Ocean from the Indian Ocean and has shifted its interest to Africa and other parts of the world or beyond South Asia (Madan, 2021). The ongoing India-Pakistan rivalry has always affected the geopolitics of the region (Madan, 2021). Additionally, the India-China border conflicts and antagonism on other issues have increased the tensions for other states in South Asia (Pal, 2021). Further, the USA has increased its interest in the region and its partnership with India with the aim to counter China (Pal, 2021). It is also trying to influence the small states of South Asia (Pal, 2021).

These changes are affecting the small states negatively. The changing geopolitics has increased uncertainty for small states, and this uncertain future can be a substantial geopolitical risk as they benefit from the predictability of the rule-based international order (Cohen, Han, & Rhoades, 2020). Small states are have also been impacted by non-traditional security threats more than the great powers (Madan, 2021). They have become the central regions of instability because of geopolitical threats. The tensions between the neighbors can also increase the risk for the small states.

Nepal, as a small power in South Asia, will be increasingly affected by geopolitical changes. The tensions between India and China have induced a huge amount of uncertainty about the geopolitical future in the region (Pal, 2021). This has pushed Nepal into a diplomatic dilemma or uncertainty. The US-China rivalry has also impacted the foreign policy and security policy decisions and alternatives for the country (Madan, 2021). These rivalries have posed a severe geopolitical threat for the country. The geopolitical risk is likely to impact internal affairs, the economy, and other sectors. The geo-economic threat is also significantly high for a country like Nepal (Baral L. R., 2021).

Projects under the BRI are believed to bring economic prosperity and changes to the country; however, the MCC has been a major debate for Nepal. For Nepal, it has also increased the geo-economic risks associated with the economic relations between the countries (Baral L. R., 2021). The non-traditional security risks for Nepal are huge. Major power politics in the Indo-Pacific region and the Asia-Pacific strategy have added geopolitical consequences for Nepal. The Indian and American partnership aimed to curb the rise of China has ultimately increased the geopolitical risk for the country (Pal, 2021). The instability in the region with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan has increased the security challenges for the country as well (Pal, 2021). Nepal's policies and infrastructure are not well-equipped to face non-traditional security challenges (Madan, 2021). The uncertainties discussed above affect the country variously and therefore, it is essential for Nepal to develop comprehensive and coherent foreign and security policies.

## **Coherent and integrated foreign and security policies**

Considering the long history of coherent foreign and national security in Nepal, with some deviations from the fundamentals as well, it is now time to focus on a more coherent and integrated foreign and security policy approach. Nepal has formally chalked out the foreign and security policies and it is now time for these to be put to work coherently. The government also needs to focus on a comprehensive plan to guide the functions of these policies considering the increasing geopolitical challenges. This paper recommends some policy guidelines to the Government of Nepal relating to the development of coherency and integration in the foreign and security policies. The recommendations are as follows:

- Setting a bottom-line for both the foreign and security policies is essential in full understanding of the changing pattern of regional and global politics to validate the strategic interests. This can help the concerned authority to clear the uncertainties produced by the changing geopolitics and its impact on geo-economics.
- The comprehension of national capabilities, constraints or limitations is important for Nepal. Therefore, a definite defense policy should supplement the foreign and security policy.
- Increasing the soft power capabilities of the country is vital in order to increase the influence and dignity of the country.
- Nepal's firm foreign and security policy must transform the country's weak political economy; thus, Nepal should focus on economic diplomacy to counter the economic insecurities of the country;

- The national security policy should be beyond the state-centric idea focusing on conventional security issues. Instead, the integrated policies should focus on the non-traditional security threats categorically to deal with them specifically.
- Nepal should realize its potential strengths by redrawing innovative strategies to quickly impact our future by being aware of the power and alliance dynamics.
- It is the right time to focus on redefining the national interest accounting for the changing and rising military tensions in the neighborhood, economic disruptions, and the changing international relations.
- A “strategic autonomy” should be developed to manage the dilemma created by geopolitical rivalries.
- The concerned authorities should concentrate on increasing national resilience by focusing on self-reliance rather than being consumed by dependency and consumerism. It is crucial for the country to strategically tap the opportunities in the reconfigured trade and investment order. Nepal should be careful about its interdependence converting into an asymmetric dependence on one country.
- Nepal should actively participate in international organizations and regional or multilateral platforms to advocate the importance of the rule-based international order in the situation of eroding global norms and values.
- Nepal should create a mechanism for analyzing and investigating the increasingly aggressive geo-economic agendas of the major powers.
- The country’s security policy and diplomacy should be informed about the increasing nationalistic drives in the neighborhood and inside the country to counter the effects of those populist drives.
- In harmonizing the foreign and security policies, Nepal should be aware of the rights of individuals, businesses, and civil society.
- Nepal should develop the diplomatic capacity of the country to establish bilateral or multilateral talks between neighbors to create consensus on specific issues of mutual interest.

## **Conclusion**

The commonality between a country’s foreign policy and security policy is the protection and promotion of the national interest of the country. The two policies are intricately related to each other. The idea of threat and interest guides the relationship between the two. Different geopolitical issues and traditional or non-traditional matters threaten a country. When a country is insecure, the geopolitical vulnerabilities increase, and the major powers aim to exert influence and control over that country. The foreign policy can guide the country to regulate its relationship with other major powers or countries, and similarly, the security policy guides a state in dealing with matters threatening the national interest of that country. Thus, it is essential for any state to focus on harmonizing and integrating foreign and security policies.

The coherency and interdependency of the foreign policy and security policy can be traced to the nation-building period of Nepal. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, focused on integrating the aspects of the two policies and counseled the rulers and politicians through the *Divya Upadesh*. This coherency continued till the Anglo-Nepal War in 1814 when Nepal lost territory to the British it has continued to concentrate on the security threats and geopolitical developments to formulate the foreign policy. Therefore, with continuity and changes, Nepal has been successfully harmonizing the foreign policy with the security policy. Nepal now has formulated both foreign and security policies and so it is time for the country to integrate the operation of both for sustaining in this evolving geopolitical environment.

Geopolitics has constantly been changing. The renewal and continuation of rivalries among the countries with the involvement of new actors have shifted the pattern of the geopolitical trends. This had increased the geopolitical risks for many countries. Nepal, because of its geostrategic position between the two Asian giants, faces severe implications. Considering its geostrategic position and the possible effect of geopolitics and geo-economics could have made it important for the country to formulate a coherent and integrated foreign and security policy. For this, setting a bottom line, understanding the national capabilities, increase of soft power capabilities, economic diplomacy, rethinking the national interests, and focusing on strategic autonomy and self-reliance strategies are recommended.

## References

- Acharya, B. R. (1966). *Nepal ko Samkshipta Brittanta*. Kathmandu: Pramod Shamsher and Nir Bikram 'Pyasi'.
- Adhikari, D. R. (2018, July). A Small State Between Two Major Powers: Nepal's Foreign Policy Since 1816. *Journal of International Affairs*, II(1), 43-74.
- Adhikari, K. (2018, September 25). *Nepal's Military Diplomacy*. Retrieved from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/nepals-military-diplomacy>
- Aneek, C. (2010). *International Relations Today: Concepts and Applications*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley Pvt. Ltd.
- Anton, G. (1994). The Concept of National Security in the Contemporary World. *International Journal on World Peace*, 11(3), 37-53. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20751984>
- Baral, B. N. (2018). Changing Dynamics of Nepalese Foreign Policy: Patterns and Trends. *Journal of Political Science*, XVIII, 25-46.
- Baral, B. N. (2020). Ditya Upadesh: Pragmatic Guidelines to Nepalese Diplomacy. *Journal of Political Science*, XX.
- Baral, L. R. (2017). *Nepal Trauma of Political Development and stability Essays on Nepal and South Asia*. New Delhi: Android Publisher.

- Baral, L. R. (2020, February 6). *Foreign Policy: Aspirations and Realities*. Retrieved from The Kathmandu Post: <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2020/09/06/foreign-policy-aspirations-and-realities>
- Baral, L. R. (2021, June 3). *Nepal's Foreign Policy Failures*. Retrieved from The Kathmandu Post: <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2021/06/23/nepal-s-foreign-policy-failure>
- Bjarnason, B. (2020). *Nordic Foreign and Security Policy*. Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF).CO).
- Brown, R. (2021, March 15). WTW. Retrieved from 2021: <https://www.wtwco.com/en-GB/Insights/2021/03/how-will-geopolitical-risks-evolve-in-2021>
- Burton, J. (1977). *International Relations*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Cohen, R. S., Han, E., & Rhoades, A. L. (2020). *Geopolitical Trends and the Future of Warfare*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Dahal, R. K. (2018). The need of Change in Contemporary Nepalese Foreign Policy. *Journal of Political Science, XVIII*, 82-113.
- Dahal, S. H. (2018). *China-Nepal-India Triangle: The Dark Side of Indo-Nepal Relations*. USA: Xlibris.
- Dalby, S. (2000). *Geopolitical Change and Contemporary Security Studies: Contextualizing the Human Security Agenda*. Institute of International Relations, The University of British Columbia.
- DCAF. (2018). *National Security Policies*. Geneva: Geneva Convention for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
- Dijkstra, H., & Vanhoonacker, S. (2017). The Common Foreign and Security Policy. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.155>.
- European Parliament. (2021). *Fact Sheets on the European Union*. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Gomart, T. (2016). *The Return of Geopolitical Risk: Russia, China and the United States*. Institute of International Relations.
- Hamal, L. B. (1995). *Military History of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Sharda Pustak Mandir.
- Khanal, G. (2019, March 26). *Foreign Policy Dilemma*. Retrieved from The Kathmandu Post: <https://kathmandupost.com/opinion/2019/03/26/foreign-policy-dilemma>
- Kissinger, H. A. (1976). Documentation: Foreign Policy and National Security. *International Security*, 1(1), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538582>, 182-191.
- Long, D. (2011). Interdisciplinarity and the Study of International Relations. In H. V. Aalto P. (Ed.), *International Studies. Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series* (pp. 31-65). London: Palgrave macmillan. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230342934\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230342934_2)
- Ludwig F. Stiller, S. (1968). *Prithvinarayan Shah in the light of dibya upadesh*. Kathmandu: Himalaya Book Centre.
- Ludwig F. Stiller, S. (1999). *Nepal: Growth of a Nation*. Kathmandu: Modern Printing Press.
- Madan, T. (2021). *Major Power Rivalry in South Asia*. New Delhi: Council on Foreign Relations .
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). *Report on Nepal's Foreign Affairs (2019-2020)*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.



- Pal, D. (2021). *China's Influence in South Asia: Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries*. New Delhi: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Pandey, R. N. (2016). *Kutneeti ra Rajneeti*. Kathmandu: Sangrila Books.
- Papadimitriou, P., & Pistikou, V. (2015). Economic Diplomacy in National Security. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 19, 129-145.
- Pew Research Center. (2011). *Foreign Policy and National Security*. Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- Raunio, T., & Wagner, W. (2020). The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 515-531.
- Romm, J. J. (1993). *Defining National Security: the Non-Military Aspect*. Retrieved from Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/1993-06-01/defining-national-security-nonmilitary-aspects>
- Rose, L. E. (1962). The Himalayan Border States: 'Buffers' in Transition. *Asian Survey*, 116-122.
- Rose, L. E. (1971). *Nepal: Strategy For Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Segar, M. (2018). *Geopolitical Power Shifts*. Cologne: World Economic Forum. Retrieved from <https://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2018/geopolitical-powershift/>
- Sharma, S. (2018, September 9). *The Common Disquiet*. Retrieved from My Republica: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/the-common-disquiet>.
- Sharma, S. (2021, September 6). *Legitimate Interest*. Retrieved from Kathmandu Pati: <https://english.kathmandupati.com/nepal/10112/>
- Thapaliyal, S. (1998). *Mutual Security: The Case of India-Nepal*. New Delhi: Lancer Publishers.
- Thompson, J., Pronk, D., & Manen, H. v. (2021). *Geopolitical Genesis*. The Hague Center for Strategic Studies.
- Whelpton, J. (2005). *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whelpton, J. (2013). Political Violence in Nepal from Unification to Janandolan I: The Background to 'People's War'. In M. Lecomte-Tilouine, *Revolution in Nepal: An Anthropological and Historical approach to the People's War* (pp. 27-74). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Widjojo, A. (2005). Democracy, National Security and Foreign Policy. *NDU/PACOM Symposium: Asia-Pacific Democracies: Advancing Prosperity and Security*. Hawaii: NDU/PACOM.
- World Economic Forum. (2021). *The Global Risks Report 2021*. Cologne: World Economic Forum.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Sharma, S. (2022) Geopolitical Trends and Need for Coherent Foreign and Security Policy for Nepal

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44020>



# Blending Foreign Policy with Nepal's Geostrategic Location

---

Gopal Khanal<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Over the course of a century, the Western world's power hegemony has gradually shifted to Asia. China is emerging as a superpower with technological advancement, cashless transactions, 5G development, and one of the most powerful military forces. China's power in Asia has added worries to the United States of America. The purpose of this research is to emphasize Nepal's geostrategic location and its impact on foreign policy. Nepal is located between the two rising economies in the world, China, and India, who have had conflicting and competitive relations, and therefore requires to delicately balance its relations given the sensitive geopolitical location. But it doesn't mean Nepal should compromise her sovereignty and territorial integrity while maintaining geopolitical balance. Similarly, India and China need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nepal. This has been a major challenge for Nepal to design its foreign policy based on sound geopolitical theories. Although literature on Nepal's geostrategic importance is limited, this paper explores the impact of its geographic location on foreign policy in the changing global order.*

**Keywords:** *Geopolitics, balanced relationship, equal proximity, non-alignment, sovereign equality, Heartland thesis.*

## **Introduction**

Geography encompasses not just lands and plants, but also people, settlements, social traditions, human migration, and economic activity. Such geographical features have had an impact on foreign policy and international relations. Boundaries have long been a key component of political geography. They have usually been studied at the state level because international political borders are the most visible examples of the link between politics and geography. Political geography is often brought into discourse with geopolitics. Romanczuk (2009) says "it is primarily geopolitics that leads to the adoption of geographical determinism, which treats factors that result from the shape and character of the territory as absolute features- timeless and unchanging" (p. 84). The factors that influence and determine the foreign policy of a country are its determinants. There are several internal and external determinants of foreign policy. According to Rizwan (2009),

---

<sup>1</sup> Foreign policy analyst who has also authored a book "Bhurajnitii". Mr. Khanal often writes and speaks on the issues of geopolitical importance in Nepal's foreign affairs.

Internal determinants of the foreign policy include territory, geographical factors, culture and history, economic factors, technology, national capability, social structure, public mood, political system, leadership, political accountability, press, and bureaucracy. The external determinants of the foreign policy include international organizations and institutions, perception of other cultures, standing at the international level, and groupings. (p.1-11)

The geographical location of Nepal and its domestic and external problems are inextricably intertwined. Nepal is mainly situated in the Himalayas, but also includes parts of the Indo-Gangetic Plain, bordering Tibet of China to the north, and India in the south, east and west. It is narrowly separated from Bangladesh by the Silguri Corridor and from Bhutan by the Indian state of Sikkim. Nepal's geopolitical location is undeniably important. The geopolitical position of Nepal has been described metaphorically as being 'a yam between two bounders' - India and China. Khadka (1992) says, "Nepal's situation indicates how geopolitical factors have been, at certain times, a positive element in evolving policies and strategies for countering perceived threats from neighboring countries" (p. 134).

As a neighbor to China and India – two powers with nuclear capability that have often had conflicts – Nepal's geopolitical relevance has grown as the global power balance shifts to the east. Geographical location is significant because it includes a state's ability to protect itself. According to Dahal (1998), "as a portion of the Asian landmass, Nepal has a critical position in the Himalayas - between the central and South Asian areas" (p. 27). The global diplomatic system has taken on a new structure, which has been named the "Asian Century". The center of the gravity of the world economy and politics is returning to Asia. The United States and European nations have shifted their attention to Asia through various aid programs and development projects. India's "neighborhood first" policy has been interpreted as an attempt to rebuild India's "traditional sphere of influence" in South Asia, while China's periphery diplomacy has been interpreted as an attempt to break that sphere. When China and India compete in their neighborhood and the Indian Ocean, the United States has concentrated its accumulated might to contain China's rise. With such a geopolitical location and rising geopolitical complications in Asia and South Asia, Nepal must devise ways to establish a conducive foreign policy to preserve its national interests. This study is divided into two sections. The first section examines the shifting dynamics of geopolitics with a focus on critical and current geopolitical theories, while the second part examines Nepal's geographical constraints and prospects as it shares international boundaries with two of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies. The second part covers Nepal's geopolitical evolution and its impact on foreign policy.

## **From the "Heartland" to "Geography's Revenge"**

Before delving into Robert Kaplan and Tim Marshall's contemporary geopolitical views, it's important to understand how geopolitical theories have evolved. Geopolitical theories should not be seen in absolute terms; instead, they should be examined in relation to one another. It is because the emergence and spread of geopolitical ideologies are all linked to the passage

of time. There were four primary ideas of geopolitics, excluding the current views of Kaplan and Marshal. In 1904, Sir Halford Mackinder introduced the Heartland theory. It supports the concept of world dominance. Mackinder begins and sums up his thinking with this oft-quoted grand and simplistic dictum "who rules East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, who rules the World-Island commands the World." (Fettweis, 2000, p.38). This theory was introduced while witnessing Hitler's despotic regime. The Nazi Party's whole focus was to capture the heartland and rule the world. This theory of Mackinder does not apply in the current geopolitical study of Nepal. Further, Mackinder's heartland has shifted to the Indian Ocean. Before the Heartland Theory was introduced, there were two theories of geopolitics. The Organic State Theory and The Sea Power Theory. The Organic State Theory was theorized in 1897 by Friedrich Ratzel, a 19th-century German geographer and ethnographer. The name "organic theory" comes from Ratzel's assertion that political entities, such as countries, behave in a way not too dissimilar from that of living organisms. According to Kaplan (2012), the organic theory states that political entities continually seek nourishment in the form of gaining territories to survive in the same way that a living organism seeks nourishment from food to survive. Essentially, the analogy is that food for an organism is territory for a country, and the more territory that it conquers the more that the particular political entity can sustain and preserve itself.

Nepal has never tried to expand its territories and has instead shrunk from Kangada (west) to Tista (east) to its present boundaries. The unification drive of King Prithvi Narayan Shah can be argued to be a manifestation of the Organic State Theory. However, it was solely for the purpose of uniting the domestic Baisi and Chaubishi territorial kingdoms inside Nepal. The Sea Power Theory, introduced by Alfred Thayer Mahan, interprets the importance of sea power, which Nepal has never been experienced as a land-linked nation. In 1942, Nichols J. Spykman introduced The Rimland Theory, which countered Mackinder's Heartland Theory. Kaplan (2012) highlights the concept of Rimland thesis. "Spykman stated that Eurasia's rimland, the coastal areas, is the key to controlling the World Island. The rimland contains the Heartland" (p.89). If Indian Ocean is considered as heartland, the peripheral landmass is rimland, including China, India, and other Asian countries. These geopolitical theories do not apply to Nepal, even though the Indian Ocean is dominated by China and India's strategic allies, and Nepal may experience waves of violence.

All these theories intended to extend and dominate territories of other countries and serve as a backdrop for understanding the current geopolitical upheaval. In recent years, geopolitics has undergone significant changes. Today's geopolitics uses both hard and soft power to affect states, but it seems less interested in territorial expansion. The advent of technology, the emergence of the world's fastest-growing soft powers, and the notion of influencing the globe through economic aid has all altered the geopolitical dynamics. Geography is always significant, and it has played a major role in shaping the fate of nations from South America to South Asia. How have past and present human conflicts been shaped by geography or geographical configurations? How has geography been one of the most potent movers of

international events throughout history? Robert Kaplan responds to these questions in *The Revenge of Geography*. In his book *Prisoners of Geography*, Tim Marshall depicts how geography influences the decisions of international leaders. While recognizing and incorporating the theories of the late 19th and early 20th centuries of Mackinder and Mahan, Kaplan and Marshall share a commonality that has influenced current geopolitics.

According to Kaplan (2009), technology, population and other natural resources have changed the importance of nations along with the geographical locations. He elaborates this comparing the Middle East and Eurasia. “A century’s worth of technological advancement and population explosion has rendered the most greater Middle East not volatile but dramatically more relevant, and where Eurasia is most prone to fall apart now is in the greater Middle East’s several shatter zone” (p. 96-105).

*The Revenge of Geography* is a sagacious account of how geography has shaped the world we know and what this means for the future. Kaplan’s wedding of historical and present-day analysis on a region-by-region basis makes for a well-researched, entertaining, and informative reading. Kaplan (2009) sums up, “it is the revenge of geography that marked the culmination of the second cycle in the Post-Cold War era, to follow the defeat of geography through air power and the triumph of humanitarian interventionism that marked the end of the first cycle” (p. 28). Geography informs, rather than determines. Geography, therefore, is like the distribution of economic and military power, a major constraint on and instigator of the actions of states. Geography is an instigator of the actions of states and returns again and again to naive determinism. “Africa is currently poor because its long coastline lacks many good natural harbors,” Johnston (2013) argues, “Geography constitutes the very facts about international affairs that are so basic we take them for granted” (p. 30).

In *Prisoners of Geography*, Tim Marshall highlights the importance of geography. He says, the landscape imprisons their leaders, giving them fewer choices and less room to maneuver than they might think. The land on which we live has always shaped us. It has shaped the wars, the power, politics, and social development of the people that now inhabit every part of the earth. Technology may seem to overcome the distances between us in both mental and physical space, but it is easy to forget that the land where we live, work, and raise our children is hugely important. Marshall (2016) argues airpower has changed the rules, as in a different way has the internet. But geography, and the history of how nations have established themselves within that geography, remain crucial to our understanding of the world today and our future. Accordingly,

Geography has always been a prison of sorts - one that defines what a nation is or can be, and one from which our world leaders have often struggle to break free. Of course, geography does not dictate the course of all events. (p. 288)

According to him, China and India are separated by the Himalayas but they may eventually come into conflict with each other, and then geography will determine the nature of the fight. Nepal’s opportunities and challenges both lie in its geographical location. If geography is revenge as claimed by Kaplan and if geography is prison argued by Marshall, Nepal can explore opportunities and face challenges too.



### Heartland shifting towards the Asia Pacific

The geographic explanation of world politics starts with Europe, and all geopolitical theories are founded on Europe's desire to expand its empire throughout the world. But Nepal was never colonized, thus, European expansion does not apply to Nepal. The European empires, on the other hand, had thawed. Eurasia was Mackinder's stronghold, and European powers had struggled for control of that strategic continent to rule the world. The heartland of the world is no longer Eurasia, and it has relocated to Asia Pacific. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean, the South China Marine, and the East China Sea have all become important sea areas. World powers have concentrated their attention on the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea in order to control these waters and hence rule the world. The United States has increased its military presence and drills in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, which have been interpreted as an indication of increased military engagement. The Asia Pacific Strategy (APS) of the Obama administration has made significant progress, and it has been aggressively relaunched as the Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS), which is more military-oriented. Despite assertions that it wants to build a free and peaceful Indo-Pacific region, the US Indo-Pacific policy tries to slow China's rise.

Similarly, the US launched the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) with India, Australia, and Japan in 2007 to counter China, while another military pact, AUKUS, between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, was announced on September 15, 2021. "The quadrilateral alliance is a clear example of an offensive containment strategy aimed against China" (Sangroula, 2018, p. 44). The Indo Pacific Strategy is deemed as a counter-strategy to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious flagship program of China, announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013.

Nepal signed the BRI in 2017 but it has not become a member of the IPS. Nepal's declared foreign policy would not allow it to be a member of any alliance or program, which is more of a military nature. The US's request to Nepal to be a part of the IPS is obviously strategically motivated. However, Nepal has been offered a grant of US\$ 500 million from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of the United States, which has been awaiting approval by Nepal's parliament. Due to its geopolitical location and the emergence of a new global order that targets Nepal's rising neighbors, Nepal is presently in a difficult situation. The China-US rivalry has been manifested through such development work not only in Asia or South Asia, but also in Nepal.

Kaplan (2012) concedes that China would eventually guide the world by,

... building for a quarter of humanity a new civilization, neither quite Eastern nor quite Western. The fact that China is blessed by geography is something so basic and obvious that it tends to be overlooked in all the discussions about its economic dynamism and national assertiveness over recent decades. (p. 189)

China is not only blessed by geography, but it also has been the inventor of advanced technology. Technology has not defeated geography, but it has shrunken the globe making it possible to have business relationships with the northern neighbor even though the coastal

locations lie almost 3300 km away from Nepal's northern border. Asia has been increasing its influence in the world, largely because of China's exceptional economic growth. A study of the global economy's center of gravity, which indicates the average location of economic activity across geographies, says that in 1980 that center of gravity was the mid-Atlantic, by 2008 it had moved to the east of Helsinki, and by 2050, it is predicted to be located between India and China (Quah, 2011). Nepal's policy of equal proximity to both its neighbors, India and China, allows two growing economies to support Nepal's economic efforts. Nepal has guaranteed both of its neighbors that its territory will not be used against them.

As the two fastest growing economies of the world, China and India have the potential to prove themselves as Asian powers though both the countries share rivalries and cooperation simultaneously, which has largely obstructed regional development. They still have unsettled border and territorial disputes. These ongoing disputes will make the creation of an Asia-led international order unlikely. Thus, unless these internal issues are resolved, the region cannot achieve an Asia-led or China-led international order, which is vital for the realization of the "Asian Century."

Disputes have both continued and intensified between China and other Asian countries in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The disputes - which are reshaping the politics of Asia - are not about ideas or ideologies; rather, they are about naked control of precious space in the map --cartographic space occupying crucial sea lines of communication and containing significant energy deposits. (Kaplan, 2012, p. 348). China's President Xi Jinping's policy of "community of common destiny" is the motivating force behind China's future foreign policy. Over the past five years, new policies have been combined with new institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and new initiatives like the BRI, to build what Xi Jinping refers to as a "community of common destiny" (Sangroula, 2018, p.30).

Nepal's geographical location creates a geostrategic context that is vital for India's security and stability in its heartland, the Gangetic belt, where a large portion of the country's human and resource base is concentrated. Nepal, on the other hand, has long been regarded by China as a link in its concentric inner Asian defensive system, and it is still vital to the security of China's underbelly, Tibet, where a considerable number of anti-Chinese groups have covered interests. As a result, the global power balance is moving towards Asia, and Nepal is naturally becoming the focal point of proxy games of powerful nations. On one hand, Nepal has been in a difficult geopolitical situation because of India and China's disputed status, which is exacerbated by the US and its allies. On the other hand, Nepal has adopted a foreign policy of equal proximity to both of its neighbors and is attempting to maintain that non-aligned posture.

## **From a "yam" to a "land-linked" nation**

Nepal's identity has changed from the country created by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769 with the creation of the democratic republic by the major political parties in 2015. Although there appears to be no change in the geopolitical opinions of its two neighbors, Nepal has overcome many geographical barriers to establish connectivity with the neighborhood. It is landlocked

in terms of geography, but if transit and transportation services are made available under the agreements in place, Nepal can become a truly land-linked country. How did Nepal go from being a land-locked country to a land-linked country? Understanding this requires a look at the evolution of geopolitics and the importance of geography in foreign policy formulation. Nepal's foreign policy, which was initially formed by King Prithvi Narayan Shah and centered on the country's geostrategic location, has seen many ups-and-downs, but the core aspect has remained the same. The fundamental cause for Nepal's unification was geopolitical, with the goal of integrating and protecting the country's territories. The aim of the unification was not to gain power.

According to Sangroula (2015), "the main aim or ideals underlying the Gorkha kingdom's unification push was to merge Nepal's territory into a modern state so that it could protect its sovereignty and independence against prospective invasion by colonial powers" (p 7). Only India and China were important to King Prithvi Narayan Shah; he did not value Americans or Europeans. He also criticized the European missionaries and clergy who came to Nepal to proselytize and spread Christianity. Realizing the precarious situation of Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah described Nepal as being a yam between two boulders, where China was the defender of the status quo while British India was the challenger. "He also stressed economic and cultural nationalism - preventing the entry of both the foreign traders and Christian missionaries" (Dahal, 1998, p. 47).

Jung Bahadur Rana, who came to power in 1846, did not heed to maintain a balanced geopolitical relationship with the north and south, instead he steadfastly became too close to British India. According to Rose (1971), "Jung Bahadur was aware that British power had dominated the entire region at the time, and China's power was fading. As a result, he pursued a policy centered on Britain and India" (p. 106).

Khanal (1996) says,

Rana's foreign policy of isolationism tailored to the elemental need of survival of the country. Isolationism, which somewhat, uncharacteristic of the general course of Nepal's history was a product of the uneasy compromise between this traumatic experience and the harsh international reality of the nineteenth century. (p. 62)

In the early 1950s, a democratic movement overthrew the Rana aristocracy. King Tribhuvan was restored as the country's executive from a titular head soon after the Rana aristocracy was deposed. Since his surrender to India, King Tribhuvan was unable to comprehend Nepal's geopolitical sensitivity. During his tenure, democracy began to emerge, although it was the result of a compromise between Nepal and India. During King Tribhuvan's reign, Nepali geopolitics became unbalanced and overly reliant on the south. Some have called it Nepal's tragedy, while others have maintained that obtaining democracy was a watershed. Rose & Dayal (1969) say, "Nepal had no foreign policy during the period of 1951 to 1955, Delhi used to represent Nepal in international forum" (p. 60). King Tribhuvan/s reign was a period where Nepal and India had a special relationship, which Indian strategists have often narrated. Muni (2016) writes:

When Nepal and India signed the treaty of Peace and Friendship in April 1950, Indian Prime Minister Nehru presented this treaty as evidence of "Special Relationship" between Nepal and India. The two countries were described as having had a "special relation" with each other. (p.136).

But Nepal has always been critical of the special relationship. King Mahendra (1955-1972) recognized Nepal's geopolitical importance and diversified Nepal's contacts with its neighbors and overseas. "Nepal maintained diplomatic relations with many countries and got the membership of United Nations. Nepal became the member of Afro-Asian community and participated in Bandung conference" (Acharya, 2070 BS, p. 126). During King Mahendra's reign, China agreed to construct the Kodari Road, the first road linking Nepal to Tibet. Upon King Mahendra's accession to the throne, diplomatic relations with China quickly gained a new significance. "It was in that period that Nepal's historical role as a channel of communication between the civilizations of south and East Asia began to be emphasized by both the Nepali officials and intellectuals, often in extravagantly exaggerated terms" (Rose, 1971, p. 218). King Birendra deployed a policy of non-alignment considering the geopolitical susceptibility. (Rose 1971) says,

...the slogan of non-alignment which had been adopted in 1956 'equal friendship for all' was gradually reinterpreted to mean equal friendship with India and China. This led eventually to a declaration of non-alignment in the Sino-Indian dispute - that is, formal neutralization of Nepal. (p. 282).

Non-alignment was the right policy during the time of cold war. It was aptly suited to Nepal since the two neighbors shared both commonality and rivalry. King Birendra's proposal was geopolitically a very balanced and sensible approach. Khanal (1996) argues, '

Peace Zone proposal which came to be endorsed as a result of active diplomacy, individually; by a large and important section of international community including permanent members of the Security Council has projected Nepal firmly as nation concerned about peace including the United States of America during the time of President Ronald Reagan. (p. 67).

Geopolitics played a significant role in shaping domestic politics during the 1990 revolution that established the twin-pillar paradigm of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. Similarly, geopolitics also had a key role in the second people's movement (2006), which toppled the monarchy and installed a republican government in the country. According to Khanal (2019), "the second Delhi accord, also known as the 12-point deal, was reached in New Delhi between Nepal's Seven Party Alliances (SPA) and the warring Maoists." India played a critical role in the entire process. In an interview with Al-Jazeera Television, India's senior minister Pranab Mukharjee admitted that the deal was mediated by India," (p. 97-102). The period after the election of a government under the new 2015 Constitution has been a watershed in Nepal's foreign policy and relations. KP Sharma Oli was elected as the first Prime Minister under the new constitution by parliament in 2016, and was reelected to the office in the elections held in 2017/2018. The signing of a Trade and Transit Agreement with China was a historic departure in foreign policy. Nepal and China signed

the agreement on trade and transit in Beijing in 2016, (Joint Statement, Nepal-China, 2016). When President Xi visited Nepal in 2019, he made a committed to transforming Nepal into a land-linked country from a land-locked country. (Joint Statement, Nepal-China, 2019)

Nepal had previously relied on India for transportation and transit. Nepal's transport and transit with China were diversified by this agreement. Nepal should not rely solely on India to obtain goods, especially from third countries. Nepal, which was previously reliant on a single country for transit, has now become a land-linked country thanks to the transport and transit deal with China. Various other agreements were also signed during this time. The major ones related to opening new pathways to the northern border and building transmission lines, which could have a long-term influence on bilateral relations between Nepal and China. Beginning with the implementation of accords signed in 2016, the government has expanded its connections with China and several protocols have already been signed. Nepal and China have agreed to build railways and both sides have acknowledged their delight at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Railway Connectivity Cooperation. They hailed it as the most significant move in bilateral cooperation history, predicting that it will usher in a new era of cross-border connected-ness.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal's foreign policy has gone through numerous ups and downs since the days of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, but the core element has remained unchanged. As the world's power balance is shifting towards Asia, Nepal's geopolitical location has also begun to draw international attention. Nepal has been thrust into the spotlight because of the evolving global political order, which may present additional opportunities as well as challenges. King Prithvi Narayan Shah had maintained a healthy relationship with both immediate neighbors. Nepal's foreign policy was largely governed by rulers' interests rather than the interest of the nation and people. King Prithvi Narayan Shah was an exception. The Ranas were deeply inclined towards British India who ensured that the country was administered without interruption. In broadening Nepal's ties with China, King Mahendra took a risk. A non-aligned foreign policy was proposed by King Birendra, but it could not be executed in practice. Despite domestic and external problems, Nepal has made progress in keeping up with the times. Nepal has turned its focus to economic development following the completion of the establishment of a federal system of governance. The path to reaching the aim of a "Happy Nepali, Prosperous Nepal" is provided by the 2015 constitution. A neighborhood policy has been implemented. India and China are not only Nepal's neighbors but are also emerging global and regional powers. Unfortunately, the two countries, with the largest populations in the world, have also been both adversaries and allies at different times. Nepal has been prioritized by the US and other regional players to expand their influence or exert control over other forces. As a result, when dealing with geopolitical sensitivity, Nepal must approach with caution and balance. Nepal's foreign policy and ties are highly influenced by its geographical location. If Nepal's geopolitical situation is maneuvered wisely, it can be

leveraged to its benefit. Otherwise, the same geography could prove to be a curse. Nepal has maintained a balanced relationship with both China and India in terms of economic development and has invited them to invest in Nepal's development initiatives. Nepal has also responded to their legitimate concerns. China and India should reciprocate by offering economic and other assistance to help it fulfill its development aspirations.

## References

- Acharya, J. (2070 B.S.). *Nepalko Rastriya Ra Pararashtra Niti.VicharPrabha2* (2). Prajatantrik Vichar Samaj.
- Dahal, D. (1998). Geopolitics of Nepal, survival strategies of a small nation from the political economy of small states. In Aditya A. (Ed.), *The Political Economy of Small States*, 25-53. Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies (NEFAS), FES, Nepal
- Fettweis, C. J. (2000). Sir Halford Mackinder, geopolitics, and policymaking in the 21st century. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 30(2), 3.
- Gaddis, J. L. (1986). *The Cold War: A new history*. Penguin.
- <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/>
- Hyam, R. (1999). The primacy of geopolitics: the dynamics of British imperial policy, 1763–1963.
- Johnston, R. (2013). *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27(2), 27-52.
- The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate. Robert D. Kaplan. New York: Random House, 2012, xxii and 403pp., maps, notes, and index. 28.00cloth (ISBN978-1-4000-6983-5), 20.42 eBook (ISBN 978-0-679-60483-9).
- Kaplan, R. D. (2013). *The Revenge of Geography*. Random House.
- Kaplan, R. D. (2009). The revenge of geography. *Foreign Policy*, (172), 96-105.
- Khadka, N. (1992). Geopolitics and Development: A Nepalese Perspective. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 19 (3), 134-157.
- Khanal, G. (2019). Foreign policy of Nepal: Continuity and change. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 2(1), 97-102.
- Khanal, Y. (1996). *Nepal after democratic restoration*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Mardell, J. (2017). The Community of Common Destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era. *The Diplomat*.
- Marshall, T. (2016). *Prisoners of geography: ten maps that explain everything about the world* (Vol. 1). Simon and Schuster.
- Muni, S., D. (2016). *Foreign policy of Nepal*. Adroit Publishers.
- Nepal-China Joint statement, 23 March, 2016, <https://mofa.gov.np/joint-press-statement/>
- Nepal-China Joint statement, 13 October 2019. <https://mofa.gov.np/joint-statement-between-nepal-and-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>
- Osterud O, (1988). The uses and abuses of Geopolitics. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(2), 95-125.
- Quah, D. (2011). The global economy's shifting center of gravity. *Global Policy*, 2(1), 3-9.



- Rizwan, A. (2018). An introduction to foreign policy: Definition, nature, and determinants. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Review*, 5 (3), 12-23.
- Romanczuk, M. (2019). Geopolitical determinants in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. *Polish Political Science Studies*, 64 (4), 80-96.
- Rose, L. E., & Dayal, R. (1969). Can a Ministate find to happiness in a world dominated by Protagonist Power? The Nepal Case. *Annals of the American Academy of political Science*, 386.
- Sangroula, Y. (2018). *South Asia China Geo-economics*. Lex & Juris Publication.
- Sangroula, Y., & Karki, R. (Eds.). (2015). *Geo-strategic Challenges to Nepal's Foreign Policy and Way Forward*. Kathmandu School of Law.
- Shaha, R. (1992). *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Khanal G. (2022) "Blending Foreign Policy with Nepal's Geostrategic Location"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44021>



# Digital Diplomacy and its Prospect for Nepal

---

Madhavji Shrestha<sup>1</sup>

---

## **Abstract**

*Change in any domain ushers in new dawn. The fast-paced advancement of the information, communication, and technological sectors has affected several traditional areas. One area that has been highly impacted is the domain of diplomacy. The digital imprints in diplomacy have shifted the diplomatic activities to a virtual platform. However, there have been difficulties in defining the idea of “digital diplomacy”. This study points out the efforts of the scholars and researchers towards defining the domain of digital diplomacy. Therefore, the primary aim of the article is to explore different facets of digital diplomacy. It explains how the digitization process began in diplomacy and whether digitization has displaced or complemented the traditional forms of diplomacy. The study has highlighted the supremacy of human beings over the new technologies in diplomacy. It deals with the policy goals of digital diplomacy and emphasizes the United Nations’ attempt to enhance the same. Finally, the study has explored digital diplomacy of Nepal and makes policy recommendations for enhancing digital diplomacy in Nepal. The study has used secondary resources, including books, journals, and online media platforms. The information and ideas are put in array for the coherent presentation of the study with the adoption of analytical process.*

**Keywords:** Digital Diplomacy, Policy Goals, Nepal, United Nations.

## **Introduction**

In relation to international relations, diplomacy is a technique by which states accomplish their relationships with one another and try to accomplish their national interest (Adesina, 2017). The digital age or the information and communication technologies (ICTs) has threatened to change the traditional way of diplomacy (Hocking, 2015). Using these new technologies, sharing information and interaction online has been an advantage for government officials and diplomats (Sotiriu, 2015). Digital diplomacy and its consequences on international relations raises the debate on contradictory opinions on the effect of the Internet, amongst “cyber-utopians” – believers of the idea that social revolutions may be the creation of the digital revolution – and the “cyber-realists” – who do not repudiate the prominence of the Internet but make the argument that social change is the creation of human activity, much of it happening in offline environments (Manor, 2019).

---

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shrestha, former joint secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Government of Nepal, is currently associated with IFA.

The digitization of diplomacy has progressed with development in the ICT sector. This has been a very common form of diplomacy in the international relations domain. The digitization of diplomacy made the elite form common to the individual citizen where the public opinion and emotions are involved. By far, this method has been considered one of the progressive and successful for performing public diplomacy (Bjola, 2018). Digital diplomacy has advanced rapidly following the development of the online and social media platforms. Basically, the use of Google, Facebook (recently branded as Meta), Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Weibo, and many other social media platforms have facilitated the global practice of digital diplomacy not only by government officials but also individual leaders who use digital media to reach out to the international public.

Although the conduct of digital diplomacy by advanced countries is on a steady increase, the impact of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) since 2020 has induced the diplomats of all ranks to get along with its continued application (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). The physical and social barriers have been eased through the digital forms of diplomacy when all the international activities including international trade, commerce, high-level visits, and meetings had come to a halt (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). Because of the convenience that the digitization of diplomacy has brought to the diplomatic world, practitioners have begun asking whether the technology is going to aid the traditional diplomacy, or it is going to replace it (Parajuli, 2021). However, many argue that the traditional form of diplomacy is not going to be replaced nor will the digital form of diplomacy reign supreme, instead a hybrid form of diplomacy of use of both conventional and digital forms will be practiced (KC, 2020).

The situations and circumstances arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, made digital diplomacy popular among both the great powers as well as the small states (KC, 2020). Virtual meetings of world leaders have been possible, and the digital platform has been very useful for the government institutions in the repatriation of their citizens and the people in need. The digital form was used not only for disseminating information but also in communication, administration, and facilitation between the authority and the people (Jaiswal, Sinha, & PV, 2021). The improved facilities and fast innovations of information technology during the global complexity have created an optimal environment for its uninterrupted use (Jaiswal, Sinha, & PV, 2021). The march of this form of diplomacy is unstoppable as it is being applied with pragmatic approaches.

## **Difficulty in defining digital diplomacy**

No one can point out the actual starting point of digital diplomacy which makes the historicity of the field very complex (Bjola & Pamment, 2016). The digitization of diplomacy evolved along with the evolution of ICTs. The scholarly realm of diplomacy has not been able to define what actually digital diplomacy is nor has it been able to reach a specific conclusion in defining the concept (Bjola & Pamment, 2016) However, several attempts have been made by researchers working in the area of digital diplomacy.

A clear definition of the idea is needed of the evolving discipline not only in diplomacy but also in international relations for accessing the resources and measuring the impact of the idea to the discipline (Archetti, 2012). Some diplo-linguistic scholars have attempted to emphasize on the linguistic construction of digital diplomacy where several identities are imparted to this form so that it has tried to disseminate different meanings to the public (Bjola & Pamment, 2016). Because of the linguistic impact on the digital diplomacy, the identity of the idea is still ambiguous, and the impact on the discipline is harder than ever to measure. The linguistic discourses such as the use of “e” or “cyber” or “digital” have been used to limit the digital form of diplomacy (Cooper & Shaw, 2009). These linguistic identities have attempted to categorize the digital diplomacy where “e” denoted the commercial form of digital diplomacy, “cyber” gets attributed to security issues, and “digital” is referred to the use to different technological forms in conducting public diplomacy and other forms of traditional diplomacy in a convenient manner (Hanson, 2011). However, the study is generally concerned with digital diplomacy which is gaining an increased relevance and used for diplomacy (Galvez, 2017). It differs from the limited actualization through net and virtual diplomacy in terms of nuance and subtlety.

In the context of its pragmatic use at present, digital diplomacy has gained a wider acceptance despite the conspicuous absence of all agreed definitions. Adhering to the linguistic turn in discipline of international relations, the use of different metaphors or adjectives has created difficulty for the scholars and practitioners equally. The “new” form of diplomacy, diplomacy 2.0, neo-diplomacy, virtual diplomacy and other identities have made the situation complex (Manor, 2019). Many have focused on digital diplomacy as “the use of social network sites by Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) for gathering and disseminating information”, whereas they differentiate the idea of ‘diplomacy 2.0’ as “follower centric” and implies “ongoing engagement between MFAs and their followers, the adoption of an architecture of listening among MFAs” for contribution to the development of MFA and embassy websites, special web platforms and nation-branding campaigns and crowd sourcing” (Manor, 2019). Some scholars regard digital diplomacy as being a convenient tool for public diplomacy (Bjola & Pamment, 2016; Archetti, 2012). These adherents view digital diplomacy as the use of the ICT devices in facilitating the efficiency of diplomacy in a wide range of activities, actions, and opportunities. Nevertheless, whatever the school of thoughts the researchers and practitioners represent, in this open environment the difficulty of defining what digital diplomacy is still difficult; it is open to continuous change through global debate. These views have a limited and narrow conception on what digital diplomacy is (Adesina, 2017). They describe the digital form of diplomacy as a nexus between digital technology and conventional diplomacy.

In the quest of defining the digital form of diplomacy, some scholars adhere to the idea of Joseph Nye on “soft power” where the digital diplomacy is attributed to the cultural form of diplomacy (Gilboa, 2016; Burson-Marsteller, 2016; Rashica, 2018). These adherents believe that digital diplomacy is undertaken by governments to disseminate the country’s soft powers capabilities (Verrekia, 2017). Whereas a positive attitude towards digital diplomacy perceives

it as a new space or node or link through which the state and non-state actors collaborate and contribute accordingly (Bjola & Pamment, 2016). It has been taken as a new foreign policy tool or diplomatic attribute to create a “hyper connected networked, super-speed media-centric, volatile world” (Verrekia, 2017).

However, a clear and concise definition of digital diplomacy is required for proper functioning of the digital apparatus in the diplomatic realm (Bjola, 2016). The comprehensive and coherent idea can only provide the domain with opportunities and prevent it from vulnerabilities (Bjola, 2016). As modern information technology advances, an international convention is, for sure, needed to agree on a globally agreeable definition (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). That will fairly facilitate work for adopting digital diplomacy in bilateral dealings and multilateral forums. There will be no reverse of its forward journey given its increasing diplomatic application (Bjola, 2016).

For the first time, the nucleus of digital diplomacy appeared in 1984, when Allen C. Hansen in his “Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age” observed public diplomacy exerted by the United States Information Agency (USIA) by analyzing public diplomacy in a “Computerized World” (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). Since then, its journey has begun to take its shape. On February 5, 1994, the exchange of the first official messages via emails between the U.S. President Bill Clinton and the Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt took place, and that was the dawn of a new era of electronic diplomacy that has grown to the current application of digital diplomacy (Archetti, 2012). President Clinton had said, “I share your enthusiasm for the potential of emerging communications technologies” (Archetti, 2012). This exchange of electronic communication was a landmark toward building a global information superhighway (Archetti, 2012). Clinton’s message was a response to the earlier message from the then Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt who had said, “Sweden-as you know-is one of leading countries in the world in the field of communications, and it is only appropriate that we should be among the first to use the internet also for political contacts and communications around the globe” (Archetti, 2012). That landmark exchange of messages through electronic devices paved the pathway for its development from which there has not been no looking back from using the new technologies (Bjola, 2018). The event has also played an important role in steering the development as it has happened at the highest levels of political leaderships of the United States and Sweden (Archetti, 2012).

Indeed, it was a quantum leap forward in introducing a new means of communication. In the years that followed the exchange of electronic messages between globally well-known politicians, including those on social media like LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, impacting lives and diplomatic communication across the globe (Camilleri, 2011). In 2007, a new practice of virtual diplomacy entered diplomatic dealings (Duncombe, 2019). In 2009, it was the turn of the then Mexican Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan to the United States who, for the first time, used Twitter for diplomatic communication (Archetti, 2012). He personally wrote “Great to be the first Ambassador to the United States with a personal Twitter account, a good way to talk directly to America about Mexico” (Archetti, 2012). A new dawn in actual



action thus appeared globally with positive developments taking place in the developed world, especially in the United States. Without great events, nothing new can be easily adopted. President John F Kennedy had very aptly pointed out, “Every great age is marked by innovation and daring by the ability to meet unprecedented problems with intelligent solutions” (Archetti, 2012).

It is also appropriate to quote Tom Fletcher, a former British Ambassador who observed, “Technological progress and the resolution of series of conflict allowed humans to advance from feudal to industrial society. The next wave of technological disruption will be faster and greater than anything we have ever experienced. But we can and must be ready for it”. (Archetti, 2012)

This observation indicates the need for preparedness to adapt with the transforming situations. Once more, the former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt optimally commented; “I think it [digital diplomacy] will give us possibilities to work together for a better world and that it is not a small thing in itself” (Adesina, 2017).

In the beginning, the U.S State Department had undertaken a lead role in initiating digital diplomacy. Hillary Clinton who served as the Secretary of State during the first term of the U.S. President Barack Obama did manage to utilize the new popular trend as an instrument of statecraft (Bjola, 2016). In her own words, Clinton wished to run a 21st century statecraft platform that would “reach beyond traditional government-to-government relations and engage directly with people around the world.” (Verrekia, 2017). Her dedication to prioritizing digital diplomacy is demonstrated by the fact that the State Department had provided twenty-five different nodes at its headquarters in Washington which were set up to focus on digital diplomacy, with more than 1000 employees using it in their work at home and abroad (Bjola, 2016).

In South Asian region, India led the way with its Ministry of External Affairs posting its first tweet in 2010. But after the unprecedented spread of the coronavirus, its use has been embraced and extended worldwide due to the compelling situational circumstances created by various obstacles, including lesser in-person contacts between diplomats (Parajuli, 2021). It is obvious that it has travelled an entrenched trajectory and will make its journey more adaptive and more amiable than before as foreign offices around the globe manage diplomatic and administrative activities sustained by the rapid progress of information technology with innovation springing up, supported by incessant research activities (Galvez, 2017).

Most are institutional accounts, but a few Heads of State do tweet personally, such as President Ilves of Estonia who is known for engaging with other Twitter users, and European Council President Charles Michel (@eucopresident), while Indian Prime Minister @NarendraModi is well-known for his photos with other political leaders (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). Trump’s tweets (@realDonaldTrump) were characterized by their persuasive, rather than informative or deductive arguments (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). Pope Francis, with nearly 29 million followers, is a firm believer in the use of new media while warning against the dangers of polarization (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). He was the second most followed Head of State in

2016 after President Obama, joining religious leaders already in cyberspace such as the Dalai Lama, and several popular preachers, Christian and Muslim. Roman Catholic bishops in the USA have been encouraged to blog, tweet, and preach on the “new digital continent” on social media to reach young people (Galvez, 2017). In 2016, among the UN members, 90 percent of the states used Twitter, 88 percent Facebook, 71 percent Instagram, 67 percent Google+, 40 percent LinkedIn, and 78 percent used YouTube (Pérez-Curiel, 2019). Whatever the discussion on digital diplomacy, it “is expected to infiltrate the deep fundamentals of the diplomatic DNA” (Holmes, 2013). This can endorse originality, but also rescind prevailing structures of communication, its organization, and the facets of international relations (Holmes, 2013).

### **Supremacy of *Homo Sapiens* amidst the rise of new-tech power**

The application of digital diplomacy is the latest development ushered in by governments as part of ultra-modern-day-statecraft in their dealings with the external world (Adesina, 2017). Technology and internet have come to occupy an inalienable space in diplomatic sphere. However, it is certain that the traditional practice of diplomacy is still universally adopted and put in actual practice (Sandre, 2015). Meanwhile, there also are questions on the value of diplomacy itself. The practice of diplomacy as handed down from the ancient times will remain there as the conduct of diplomacy is needed for humans. Many have been skeptic about the technological advancements surpassing the need of human beings in the diplomatic activities (Pérez-Curiel, 2019). People should not forget that it is humans themselves who apply digital diplomacy as they are the real masters in action. The enormous capacity of human intelligence and its instinctive and productive value could never be put aside (Hanson, 2011). Humans are supreme beings who create and use everything as they wish and manage (Hanson, 2011). However, some argue that the closed world of *démarches*, summits, and diplomatic dinners is no longer sufficient to project our values and interests and requires more than human interactions (Hocking, 2015).

Nevertheless, the emotions and etiquettes remain an integral part of diplomacy which can never be fulfilled through the digital form (Bjola, 2016). He added that digital diplomacy has always the risk of “Emotional commodification”. The attribute of smile, handshakes, and personal behavior play an essential role in the diplomatic negotiations. The negotiating aspect of diplomacy can never be overcome through the digital method (Bjola, 2016). From a different standpoint, digital diplomacy is also related to the emotional aspects. Emotional commodification and careful magnification of emotional content in online discourse, has become a steady pattern of engagement on social media platforms as it assists digital influencers to control the choice and course of the online discussion (Manor, 2019). He added, that emotional commodification has negative inferences for digital diplomacy. As the connection between emotions and social media becomes stronger and more erudite, the query of how digital diplomats can acclimatize to an emotionally charged form of social communication can no longer be overlooked (Mororzov, 2011). Therefore, for the emotional aspect, the supremacy of the human seems evident despite the rise of the ICTs (Newberg, 2017).

Recent studies have shown that up to 15 percent of Twitter accounts of government and political leaders are in fact robots rather than people, and this number is bound to increase in the future (Newberg, 2017). The “dark side” of digital technologies, deception, propaganda, and strategies, and it has been demonstrated to be dangerous ground for the proliferation of robots (Morozov, 2011). Robo-trolling, usage of procedures for content advancement and/or commotion, is now part of the digital scenery (Newberg, 2017). Digital diplomats may not consequently be able to avert artificial intelligence (AI) from disrupting their relationship-building activities, but may encompass some of its negative complications (Pérez-Curiel, 2019). The objective to counter Robo-trolling would be supporting media literacy and source censure, reassuring institutional pliability, and endorsing a clear and coherent strategic narrative capable of comprising the risk from erratic counter-messaging (Rashica, 2018). The presence of real human beings is very important for this as well.

### **Policy goals for digital diplomacy**

As with the definition of the digital diplomacy, its aims and objectives are also contested. Digital foreign policy is guided by digital diplomacy. The practitioners are engaged in a novel set of digital policies when enhancing the foreign policy goals through the digital media. These are dealt alongside the technology policy domain (Bjola, 2016, 2018). Other than dealing with the technology, the policy goals of the digital diplomacy are oriented into the realms of security, human rights, development imperatives, economy, legal and socio-cultural aspects (Bjola, 2016).

Regarding technological policy goals, digital diplomacy is oriented towards building a safe and efficient technological infrastructure (Adesina, 2017). The policy related to AI is an important facet while dealing with policy goals (Gilboa, 2016). Another area of policy goals through digital diplomacy is interested in is block-chains, cloud computing, critical internet resources, maintaining digital standards, managing emerging technologies, and importantly the telecommunications infrastructure (Gilboa, 2016). In the economic policy domain, the digital diplomacy goals are oriented towards consumer right protection (Bjola, 2021). Presently, the crypto currencies are being popular (Bjola, 2021). Therefore, the policy aim of the digital diplomacy is also focused on regulating these new digital currencies as well (Bjola, 2021). The area of e-commerce and trade remains the important and perpetual area of digital diplomacy on which the policy objectives remain very important (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Digital diplomacy should also be focused on future work as well. Further, the economic policy goals through digital diplomacy also cover the area of digital taxation (Adesina, 2017).

The policy goals of digital diplomacy also remain within the human rights domain (Hanson, 2011). The digital platforms have made awareness against the human rights violations possible. In child rights, for example, the state and non-state actors play an essential role through internet (Hocking, 2015). The freedom of expression and freedom of press remains sensitive issues in digital diplomacy (Grincheva, 2012). Similarly, gender issues, human

rights principles, privacy and protection of data, and rights of persons with disabilities are also important policy domains (Galvez, 2017). The legal and regulatory domains also are important areas policy goals for digital diplomacy. The digital platform has provided the states and non-states actors with alternative dispute resolution methods. It has also inserted the diplomatic domain into a new concept of digital governance (Camilleri, 2011). The intellectual property rights, the areas of digital jurisdiction, and liability of intermediaries are equally important (Duncombe, 2019).

Important policy goals in the digital diplomacy also include the socio-cultural aspects through the life of the people. In this domain, includes policies related to content, cultural diversity, digital identities, multilingualism, multiculturalism, online education and other interdisciplinary approaches (Bjola, 2021).

## **Digital Policy and the United Nations**

The UN Secretary General's Roadmap for digital cooperation is important considering the surging digitization and its contributions to human and institutional capacity building (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). The Roadmap for Digital Cooperation was forwarded by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on 11 June 2020 (Vacarelu, 2021) and it highlighted the UN High-Level Plan on Digital Cooperation. The roadmap builds on the report of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation (Panel) was entitled "The Age of Digital Interdependence". Its report published in June 2019 provides five sets of recommendations.

- Build an inclusive digital economy and society
- Develop human and institutional capacity
- Protect human rights and human agency
- Promote digital trust and security, and
- Foster global digital cooperation (UNGA, 2020).

The recommendations are worthy of practical application. However, the developing and less developed countries with weaker technological capacity have been slow to apply them as recommended. The United Nations itself needs to move forward to assist them with necessary financial technological support through its agencies. This will be one way to implement recommendations.

The United Nations is focused on in creating an inclusive digital economy and society through global connectivity (UNGA, 2020). It has considered the importance of realizing the full potential of digital technologies, including digital inclusion. The UN is aware of the digital gaps and how it has further widened the gaps in the areas of gender, development, and other aspects (UNGA, 2020). Thus, the UN has concentrated in building the digital capacity for real and sustained progress. It also encourages member countries for greater coherence and coordination in capacity building efforts.

The UN also seeks to securing digital human rights from all (UNGA, 2020) and operates with the belief that digital technologies have provided states and human beings with alternative and effective methods of advocacy in defending human rights, but they can also be used to suppress, limit and violate them. Therefore, realizing the opportunities and challenges provided by the digital platform, it is determined to ensuring digital human rights to all. The areas of data protection and privacy also remain important, along with the idea of digital identity. The UN is also critical towards use of surveillance technologies including facial recognition and is aware about online harassments and violence and understands the need for content governance. The UN also supports the regulation of AI through the digital diplomacy for enhancing the notion of digital trust, security, and global digital cooperation (UNGA, 2020).

### **Need for competences**

The following steps are necessary to make digital diplomacy ready and competent:

1. Curate-listening to information and knowledge
2. Collaborate-between your organization and outside communities
3. Communicate-represent the ability and knowledge
4. Create-focus on creating online content, and
5. Critique-critical comments and discussions: engage in critical discussions and learn how to manage criticism (Adesina, 2017; Bjola, 2016).

The competences listed above are indeed minimum requirements to apply digital diplomacy convincingly. Diplomats must be exposed to and experienced with all five competences to efficiently work and serve as true diplomats in an age when digitization is making quick and impressive headway even in distant nooks and crannies of the world, whether developed or less developed (Hanson, 2011). Through digital diplomacy, people engaged in official diplomatic businesses can not only listen and publicize as they wish, but also engage and evaluate in new and interesting ways (Jaiswal, Sinha, & PV, 2021). Practically, diplomats can also expand and deepen their research, and communicate and interact directly with civil society as well as governments and influential individuals as part of public diplomacy (Jaiswal, Sinha, & PV, 2021). Digital diplomacy has practically emerged as an integrative tool to further advance their interests at any time, whether it is normal or critical (Jaiswal, Sinha, & PV, 2021). However, for this there would be need for all five competencies what is minimally required is the above five competences.

### **Benefits of digital diplomacy**

The combination of diplomacy and digital developments helps us to comprehend the 21st century environment where interacting and activity is becoming the groundwork of diplomatic exercise (Adesina, 2017). Relationships with new participants are vital in the extended international system, where the power of concepts is superior to that in the past and in which techniques and the informal guidelines of engagement, are no longer dictated by the government. Some of the areas that have been affected by the digitization of diplomacy are discussed below.

### ***Infinite information and interaction***

Digital media have provided the diplomats and individuals with infinite knowledge and information (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). This availability of the information has given them and the whole domain of diplomacy a novel vista (Sotiriu, 2015). The interaction of people has also increased significantly. The digital media platforms have been successful in assisting interaction and communication with citizens of the country and with citizens of other countries (Sotiriu, 2015). The domain of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy have benefitted immensely. Digital diplomacy also provided a huge relief and alternative for the countries to deal and interact with their citizens (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022).

### ***Policy management and negotiations***

The digital revolution has been accompanied by central changes in international negotiation (Newberg, 2017). The wider and indeed public context in which international talks take place have become more prominent during pre-negotiations because of the digitization in diplomacy (Archetti, 2012). Digital technologies are now key elements in how they [negotiations] progress and, critically, they have formed more occasions for outside guidance on state-to-state consultations (Sandre, 2015).

Digital diplomacy recognizes two practices of social media engagement in negotiations: the first is an outcome of top-down exogenous shocks, as of foremost geopolitical/geo-economic crises (Sandre, 2015). The second is related with bottom-up incremental adjustments, as observed in human rights and environmental schemas (Sandre, 2015). Social media are enormously appreciated in diplomatic spheres where the purposes are multifaceted policy management and incremental adjustment (Burson-Marsteller, 2016). Communication through social media has progressively altered the DNA of the discussions (Mororzov, 2011). The whole course of founding the plan and accumulating and checking the networks of interests has necessitated the usage of digital resources (Newberg, 2017).

### ***Consular diplomacy***

The consular challenge is one of the persistent issues of digital diplomacy, where people are challenging help from the government and services that meet equally technological standards set by society as well as the human trace that is vital to this form of diplomacy (Archetti, 2012). The slightly obsolete term 'consular affairs' no longer covers what is going on, and hints back to the image of a world that never existed, one in which consular difficulties and diplomatic affairs did not appear to interconnect (Roberts, 2007). Consular diplomacy intersects with other extents of events of MOFAs such as economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, and development aid that can extremely disturb general bilateral relations (Roberts, 2007).

Not only have demands for consular services increased, but the provision of the same has also become an indicator of the efficiency. Faced with progressively technologically enabled citizens, government fiascos to reply instantaneously to crises, and to satisfy public and media expectations of support for nationals is now a test of diplomatic efficacy and one that governments are intensely sensitive to (Hanson, 2011). One of the top pressures expected by consular services is to keep up with quickly developing technology. The terror of technology



failures also positions high in any consular crisis and emergency management situation. Several governments offer 24/7 services and communicate through digital networks such as call centers and social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Direct communication with citizens-turned-customers is now positioned on the numerous choices offered by smart phones (Hocking, 2015).

The protection of citizens abroad requires ICT expertise that exceeds the capacities of small technological players like foreign ministries of small countries. But digital literacy so far cannot be taken for granted within many MoFAs, and they necessitate digitally erudite consular management action that is different from other arenas of diplomatic action (Bjola, 2016). There are also principled matters, privacy concerns and a variety of other materials that come with the digitization of consular diplomacy. That takes us to the extensive scope and numerous effects of technological changes on diplomacy, which has continually been and will continue to remain a challenge.

### ***The relationship between foreign ministries and embassies***

The key function of ministries of foreign affairs is to distribute the roles between the “hub” of the system and its “peripheries” (Roberts, 2007). It communicates information and processes for the attainment of its goals. Digitization can serve as an additional resource for both the basics, and can aid to change the relationships amid the two parts of the subsystem and persons within (Adesina, 2017). In the 1990s, the acceptance of protected e-mail systems provided an opportunity to reallocate policy-making purposes from the center to the sidelines, and to change recognized hierarchical forms of information distribution (Adesina, 2017). In the 1990s, the notion of “virtual diplomacy” expanded representation, resulting in greater demands on post-Cold War era diplomatic systems. Technology provided part of the response as MoFAs investigated with new means of attendance in more economical forms than the traditional embassy (Archetti, 2012).

In digital diplomacy, data flows within general diplomatic structures and amongst MoFAs which have become more composite. Embassies implant themselves through social media in networks connecting embassies, their MoFAs, and other parts of government, as well as host MoFAs (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Facebook, Twitter and other digital devices may well be valuable, but consequences are reliant on circumstances and the behavior of diplomats as social proxies (Burson-Marsteller, 2016).

There are both benefits to the use of digital diplomacy, some of which are listed below:

#### ***Benefits***

1. Digital diplomacy is a pervasive and timely supplement to traditional or conventional diplomacy (Manor, 2019),
2. Social media provides opportunities, spaces for interaction, increased engagement and thus furthering the goals of diplomacy (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020),
3. Digital technologies are specifically useful for public diplomacy, consular services and communications during emergencies and disasters (Manor, 2019),

4. Digital diplomacy does not cost more, but often reduces cost,
5. Digital diplomacy matches the capabilities of small states, and
6. Digital diplomacy saves time and allows avoidance of non-essential visits.

### *Threats*

1. Instant dissemination about of information that can sometimes cause inconveniences,
2. Information leakage, hacking and anonymity of users (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020),
3. Issues of cyber governance, Internet freedom and cyber warfare and cyber security,
4. Deepening of information gap between haves and have not owing to low bandwidth.

The threats and risks can be tackled and managed if diplomats are careful and tactful in using the digital tools. Sensible and sensitive handling is therefore important for adopting digital diplomacy. Prescience of possible threats and risks and employment of timely counter measures can assist in risk management.

Digital diplomacy has been a welcome development made possible by information technology. But there also are challenges, including cyber security leakage (Newberg, 2017). Barbara Jacobson, an observer of the digital diplomacy process, has said, "The dangerous ability for information to be leaked and accounts to be hacked has caused many online users to be wary of attack." There also are other well-known examples about how data could be compromised, particularly the case of WikiLeaks where, as committed, Julian Assange had illegally published thousands of classified documents and cables of the State Department of the United States in 2010 and 2011 (Burson-Marsteller, 2016).

Another challenge is the threat of cyber-weapons that can interfere with the confidential communication and disrupt the system. Another threat is that caused by anonymous attacker groups (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). These threats have led to worries about the security of digital diplomacy.

Digital diplomacy also threatens change of the role of diplomats who could lose their monopoly of first reporting to home governments as the free and incessant flow of online information abounds across the globe (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). They are also under new pressure to distinguish all online information, to determine if they are true or false or serviceable or non-serviceable (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Handling this situation requires diplomats to be more capable and efficient. Done efficiently, diplomats can have a stronger influence on foreign policy action and diplomatic activity than ever before.

## **Gaps in digital diplomacy**

Experts have pointed out some gaps in the application of diplomacy. One is the fact that governments in general and by their nature are slower to adopt changes in the technological environment. Challenges brought about by the digital divide between developed and developing countries are also real and one issue that cannot be easily tackled.

Practical coordination and broader connectivity are crucial, both of which are lacking (Bjola, 2018). There is also a need for a more cohesive approach to bring together different

communities, and policy makers and policy executors. Another need is to develop new models of cooperation between stakeholders as offered through proposals for adopting the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) of the UN that calls for strategic action (Manor, 2019). The need for capacity-building has also been frequently echoed by experts (Vacarelu, 2021). They agree that coordination, both internally and externally, remains one of prime challenges. Strategic use of available data sets within foreign ministries and across relevant ministries to foster evidence-based rational decision-making, including the application of digital tools, such as big data analytics and machine learning, remains a goal to strive for result-producing performance (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Together, capacity building to enable diplomats for contributing to global forums and negotiations on digital issues remain high on the agenda for all countries irrespective of their varied status (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

Experts believe that IGF could transform into an effective catalyst for digital cooperation and emerge as a global center for mainstreaming beneficial practices and innovative solutions. Practically important is also a comment made by a Costa-Rican diplomat, Maricela Munoz who pointed out that authorities “tend to be present-focused rather than future-oriented, and often adopt a management by crisis approach rather than a management by anticipation style” (Rashica, 2018). This shows that opportunities to anticipate future skill required remain missed overall. As pointed out by Remco van der Beek, there are apparently training and capacity-building gaps, which need to be met with a strategic management of essential technical and human resources (Archetti, 2012).

## **Ways to overcome challenges**

The internet is still perceived as being too technical and complex to be understood properly by non-technicians. This can be overcome by diplomats provided they take the first step proactively to understand digital complexities to disentangle what stands between them and technology (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Digital complexities are now on the diplomatic agendas worldwide, and formal diplomatic training needs to include digital aspects on-the-job-training and capacity development, and its progressive versions throughout a diplomat’s career (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Re-skilling and the ability to adjust skills to a rapidly changing field are essential elements for contributing performance (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

In addition to a basic understanding of information technology and other relevant technologies, it is also necessary for diplomats to understand the relations between the technological questions and the economic, social, and human rights aspects of their work. It is crucial to grasp the inter-linkage of and interdependence between these various issues. They need to be trained to see and capitalize on these connections (Sotiriu, 2015). They need to have a basic understanding of technological questions as they relate to topics and negotiations they are working on to produce outcomes (Rashica, 2018). Diplomats posted at important multilateral outposts, like New York or Geneva or Vienna, need this basic understanding of technology since they bring together “technical aspects and the geopolitical impact” in their

negotiations and dealings (Rashica, 2018). Similarly, understanding of technological basics can help in finding common ground in negotiations and creating bridges between various positions (Pérez-Curiel, 2019). Further, Remco van der Beek has suggested that technical issues are also political issues and that diplomats can play the role of bridge-builders and act as intermediaries between the political and technical divides (Archetti, 2012).

Cyber security, e-commerce, digital inclusion, block-chain, and other similar issues are dealt under the domain of digital diplomacy, which diplomats need to be prepared to handle. Lag in any country or region can hinder the efficient and productive use of digital diplomacy (Archetti, 2012). Global cooperation with common approach leads to greater success. Lone effort, whatsoever and howsoever grand, would not be productive.

Cyber security threats have often emerged from anonymous use of phishing, malwares, ransom wares, and social engineering attacks, Trojans, amongst many others. Experts have recommended the following six approaches to keep digital function system safe:

1. To keep the system and its application updated,
2. To avoid links, programs, devices, and attachments from unknown sources,
3. To use a secure connection,
4. To back up files,
5. To work with reliable InfoSec team, and
6. To get cyber security training (Galvez, 2017; Duncombe, 2019).

In addition, users are also advised to be ever prescient and vigilant as threats and risks might occur any time and from any quarter. Foresight to stave off dangers can ensure security and facilitate uninterrupted functioning systems. Even serious threats to national security and state secrecy information from hackers can be foreseen and eventually stopped by highly trained technical experts.

## **Digital diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic**

The pandemic was an unprecedented and worrisome situation for about two years and it disrupted normal transactions. However, digital diplomacy demonstrated its unique contribution in forging diplomatic connectivity and activity across the world despite several afore-mentioned gaps (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). The following were made possible by digital diplomacy:

- Providing consular assistance to citizens stranded abroad,
- Acquiring equipment and supplies from other nations including ventilating machines and protective gear, and
- Fostering international collaborations through which scientists could jointly research for a vaccine (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

Covid-19 also created opportunities for the tech giants of the world to expand their technical research and enhance their clout, and the opportunity to amass the huge wealth (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). It also provided a way for holding summits at the regional and global levels and this trend will be difficult to dislodge. The new dimension of diplomacy has thus come to

occupy its own iconic space, showcasing its adaptability not only in critical times but also in normal times (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). The pandemic was also an opportunity for tech giants to make their ingress into diplomatic arena even at its highest level, which will remain ever embraced by the entire world in the years ahead (Vacarelu, 2021).

Notably, its increasing application has led GokhanYucal, a Turkish website specialized on digital diplomacy to recount, “Diplomacy 1.0 is represented by Kissinger, Diplomacy 2.0 would be applied by Joseph Nye, Diplomacy 3.0 is embodied by Alec Ross and Diplomacy 4.0 is exemplified by Matthias Lufkens and his twiplomacy” (Vacarelu, 2021). He defines diplomacy 4.0 as digital diplomacy + professionalism/ privatization/ individualization/ personalization/ mobilization + diplomatless diplomacy (Vacarelu, 2021). The amazing development of digital diplomacy might have surprised Lord Palmerston who had prophesized the end of diplomacy immediately upon receipt of the first telegram in 1860s (Archetti, 2012). It is most likely that digital diplomacy might indeed become a new discipline as it is now a techno-based practice, which is materially different from diplomacy as conducted through human presence on site (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

Andreas Sandre explained that there is a “new foreign policy space that technology and digital diplomacy have contributed to craft within the diplomatic realm” where nodes and links are components of networks that transcend government as we know it; where all actors interact and collaborate, “the new kind of diplomacy responds to the hyper connected networked, super-speed media-center, volatile world” (Sandre, 2015).

At present digital diplomacy uses mainly three technologies. First is video conferencing and the second Chat Bots, which or automated software particularly meant for consular services to assist with providing crucial information and services. The third is Big Data modeling which brings together diplomats, health workers, epidemiologists, and computer scientists to track the likely progression of the pandemic and focus efforts on areas that may encounter outbreaks (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

The Pathways for Prosperity Commission stated four main principles of digital cooperation for developing countries in a presentation on digital diplomacy. The first, was faster digital cooperation and creating incentives for countries to work together; second was to tailor technology governance for developing countries for ensuring better implementation in a wide range of national contexts; the third was unlocking data for inclusive development or using data to improve people’s lives; and fourth, was to be part of something better and harmonizing cross-border digital trade (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). All four principles could create an atmosphere convenient for the broader cooperation between developing countries (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020) and that can pave the way to apply digital diplomacy in desirable ways.

## **Nepal and digital diplomacy**

Nepal is aware of the importance of and need for digitization of development to keep pace with the instant, incessant flows of information and its impact on the human activity (Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, 2020). Its indispensability has grown fast as every nation, both developed and developing, has started applying digital diplomacy (KC, 2020). The government of Nepal has adopted the slogan Digital Nepal following its increasing use in the region and across the globe. About three decades ago, Nepal began diplomatic communication through emailing. In February 2015 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally adopted diplomatic tweeting by opening Twitter account and made the communication channels quicker and more efficient (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). At the moment, several actors are in play of digital diplomacy in Nepal. The Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nepali Embassies and Consulates abroad have been playing serviceable role in Nepal's digital diplomacy. In virtual platforms there are other actors representing the country and the spirit of the government. Simultaneously, other actors also might be equally active according to the situation and circumstances but the above-mentioned actors are most essential. In Nepal, the actors responsible for the digital diplomacy are using different forms of social media platforms and different ICT forms (KC, 2020). However, the scope of digital diplomacy is limited to general communication only, and the wider policy goals that can be purpose-serving through the digital diplomacy remain to be explored and braced for meeting national needs. Many of the Nepali actors are engaged in the social media platforms and have been doing digital diplomacy but are limited to messages, notices and communications, especially congratulations and condolences, via respective social media handles. Also, the other actors are limited to the same social media platforms (Parajuli, 2021).

The havoc caused by Covid-19 since early 2020 compelled states to adopt the practice of virtual conferencing to upend the obstacles and limitations imposed by the virus. One example is the video conference organized by the heads of government of SAARC countries in March 2020 to tackle the public health crises. The then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had participated in the conference initiated by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (KC, 2020). In September 2020, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli also participated in the Annual General Meeting of the UN using the same conferencing system (Parajuli, 2021). The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the ministry embraced the digital system of dispatching and receiving of messages through the frequent use of Twitter accounts (Parajuli, 2021).

However, all these practices have been carried out through an improvised management. No system supported by a technically appropriate mechanism and equipped with the trained human resources and necessary technologies has yet to be put in place to ensure a well-lubricated process for an instant and efficient functioning system for the application of digital diplomacy. The quicker the gap is addressed the better can be the outcome.

Nepal also cannot move away from the current situation in isolation. The Nepali authorities, especially those in the diplomatic domain must prefer to embrace four basic principles of digital cooperation as mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The initiative for entering cooperation must be an important step. Developing countries like Nepal needs to move forward proactively. If done affirmatively, Nepal could be able to put in place required mechanisms as prescribed by the information tech-experts, who are highly skilled with management capability with sufficient funding and resources put at their disposal.



Well-known experts of digital diplomacy of the United States and developed countries have suggested the primary need for a “MNL” approach to digital diplomacy. They explain; “M” stands for mode which insists on making a particular or specified functioning arrangement or an essential condition for the desired performance; “N” represents node which means a point, line or surface of vibrating system that is free or relatively free from the vibration motion itself and “L” is link, a connecting element or factor. All three requirements are primary for carrying forward the process and application of digital diplomacy.

Management done in a hurry would not be beneficial to any organization, where only immediate needs or concerns are addressed (KC, 2020). There will be need for requisite skills and potential for engagement and cooperation for effective management by addressing gaps of training and capacity building in anticipation (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Compatible diplomatic management supported and sustained by experienced tech hands would be helpful in marshalling the intricacy and technicality of digital diplomacy. For all that to be realized, there is need for cooperation of friendly countries, and regional and international forums, and good understanding.

In Nepal as in many less developed countries, the Internet is still treated as much tinged with the complex technicality to be operated easily by non-technical diplomatic personnel. Therefore, the need for both the action and capacity to learn new skills to adapt to a rapidly transforming environment is to be met as quickly as possible.

Reshuffling older structures and putting in place newer mechanisms manned by experts with necessary tools and resources are required to effect change management as induced by the revolution of information technology. Re-skilling both senior and junior staffs are also needed to adapt to the fast emerging digitalization. New recruits with new skills should only be accepted and given opportunity for adaptability and efficiency. If materialized meaningfully, digital diplomacy could have every chance to serve the national interest through its productive application.

### ***Policy recommendations to strengthen Nepal’s digital diplomacy***

Digital diplomacy provides immense opportunities for small countries like Nepal. Some of the policy recommendations for the Government of Nepal for enhancing digital diplomacy for its effective performance are as follows:

- The Government of Nepal should move beyond the digital form of public diplomacy, and concentrate on advocacy, lobbying, persuasion, administration, regulation, economy, security, and other aspects.
- The idea of “digital foreign policy” should be introduced in Nepal outlining the areas of concentration and importance for uplifting the image, prestige, and the national interest through digital platforms.
- The foreign policy of Nepal should focus on digital strategies and digitization of the services such as consular service, diaspora diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and others.
- Nepal should address the digital issues for connecting the gaps between different stakeholders and line ministries.

- Nepal should have a digital outlook towards the trade and development and device ways to handle that through digital diplomacy.
- Nepal should focus on capacity-building of diplomats and bureaucrats for effective digital diplomacy.
- There is need for a proactive and continued focus on areas of cyber security, cybercrime, digital inclusion, digital human rights, digital governance, and other aspects required for setting up a safe digital environment with intent to prevent cyber threats and risks.
- The nature of digitization calls for the global cooperation for the common good.
- Nepal should brace for making wake-up call to tech superpowers for facilitating international convention on digital diplomacy.
- Exchange and transfer of the ICT knowhow need to form part of international understanding between developed and less developed countries to reduce inequality

## References

- Adesina, O. S. (2017). Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1).
- Archetti, C. (2012). The impact of new media on diplomatic practice: an evolutionary model of change. *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, VII(2), 181-206.
- Bjola, C. (2016). Digital diplomacy – the state of the art. *Global Affairs*, 2(3), 297-299. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2016.1239372>
- Bjola, C. (2016, March 8). *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*. Retrieved January 14, 2020, from “Digital Diplomacy and the Bubble Effect: The NATO Scenario”: <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/digital-and-bubble-effect-nato-scenario>
- Bjola, C. (2018). Digital Diplomacy 2.0: Trends and Counter-Trends. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterio*(113). Retrieved from <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/n113/bjolai.pdf>
- Bjola, C. (2021). Digital diplomacy as world disclosure: the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00242-2>
- Bjola, C., & Pamment, J. (2016). “Digital Containment: Revisiting Containment Strategy in the Digital Age. *Global Affairs*, 131-142.
- Bjola, C., & Zaiotti, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Digital Diplomacy and International Organisations*. London: Routledge.
- Burson-Marsteller. (2016). *Twiplomacy Study 2016*. Retrieved from <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2016/>
- Camilleri, V. (2011, February 9). ‘*Diplomatic reporting in the Internet era*’, paper delivered to the conference on *Diplomatic Reporting in the Internet Era*. Retrieved from DiploFoundation eDiplomacy Papers: <http://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/general/diplomatic-reporting-internet-era>
- Cooper, A. F., & Shaw, T. M. (2009). Preface. In *The diplomacies of small states between vulnerability and resilience* (pp. xvi-xxv). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Duncombe, C. (2019). Digital Diplomacy: Emotion and Identity in the Public Realm. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 14(1-2), 102-116. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-14101016>
- Galvez, L. (2017). Public Diplomacy in the New Information Age . *DiploFoundation* .
- Gilboa, E. (2016). Digital Diplomacy. In C. M. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Diplomacy* (pp. 540-551). London: SAGE.
- Grincheva, N. (2012). Digital Diplomacy Rhetoric: International Policy Frame Transformations in Diplomatic Discourse (The case study of the UK digital diplomacy). *Encatec Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 2(2), 12-29.
- Hanson, F. (2011, January 11 ). The Digital Revolution Meets Diplomacy. *International Relations*. Retrieved January 13, 2020
- Hocking, B. (2015). *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael. Retrieved from [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital\\_Diplomacy\\_in\\_the\\_Digital%20Age\\_Clingendael\\_July2015.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital_Diplomacy_in_the_Digital%20Age_Clingendael_July2015.pdf)
- Holmes, M. (2013). What is e-Diplomacy? *European Consortium for Political Research*.
- Jaiswal, S., Sinha, S., & PV, A. (2021). *Digital India and It's Diplomacy: Usefulness, Strategies and Threats*. New Delhi.
- KC, S. (2020, April 27). *Go digital on diplomacy*. Retrieved from Republica: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/go-digital-on-diplomacy/>
- Manor, I. (2019). *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). *Report on Nepal's Foreign Affairs (2019-2020)*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Morozov, E. (2011). 'Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go'. *The Guardian* .
- Newberg, M. (2017, March 10). *As Many as 48 Million Twitter Acoounts Aren't People*. Retrieved January 15, 2020, from CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/10/nearly-48-million-twitteraccounts-could-be-bots-says-study.html>
- Parajuli, J. N. (2021). Nepal's Post-Pandemic Diplomacy. *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 1(1), 151-170.
- Pérez-Curiel, C. (2019). Political influencers. A study of Donald Trump's personal brand on Twitter and its impact on the media and users. *Communication & Society*, XXX(1), 57-75. doi:10.15581/003.32.1.57-75
- Rashica, V. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diploamcy. *SEEU Review*, XIII(1). doi:10.2478/seur-2018-0008
- Roberts, W. R. (2007). What Is Public Diplomacy? Past Practices, Present Conduct, Possible Future. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, XVIII, 36-52. doi:10.1215/10474552-2007-025
- Sandre, A. (2015). *Digital Diplomacy: Conversations on Innovation in Foreign Policy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sharma, A., & Sisodia, V. (2022). Digital diplomacy and the global pandemic. *Media Asia*, 49(1), 6-24.

- Sotiriu, S. (2015). Digital Diplomacy: Between Promises and Reality. In C. Bjola, & M. Holmes (Eds.), *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practices* (pp. 33-51). New York: Routledge.
- UNGA. (2020). *Road map for digital cooperation: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation*. New York : United Nations General Assembly.
- Vacarelu, M. (2021). Artificial Intelligence: To Strengthen or To Replace Traditional Diplomacy. In F. Roumate (Ed.), *Artificial Intelligence and Digital Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 1-24). Switzerland: Springer.
- Verrekia, B. (2017). Digital Diplomacy and Its Effect on International Relations. *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. doi:[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/2596?utm\\_source=digitalcollections.sit.edu%2Fisp\\_collection%2F2596&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2596?utm_source=digitalcollections.sit.edu%2Fisp_collection%2F2596&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Shrestha, M. (2022) "Digital Diplomacy and its Prospect for Nepal"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44023>

# Madhyama Pratipad: Nepal's Middle Path Ambition through Non-alignment

Gaurav Bhattarai<sup>1</sup>  
Manish Jung Pulami<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*The geopolitical variable alone is not sufficient to understand Nepal's entry into NAM and its relevance. While very little literature has been produced on Nepal's non-alignment, what exists is also limited to either speeches or statements delivered by Nepali leaders at the conferences on Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Still, while scanning the perspective of Non-Nepali Cold War foreign policy analysts in the literature produced on Himalayan geopolitics, it can be clearly observed that Nepal's voyage to non-alignment was driven by the Indian response to the bipolarity in Cold War. Such a perspective, however, dismisses the influence that Madhyama Pratipad (the concept of the middle path) had in the evolution of Nepal's foreign policy priorities as a unified state in 1769. Madhyama Pratipad, here, should be understood as the cultural and civilizational philosophy, which Nepal has accommodated in its world view for centuries. Hence, Nepal's shift to non-alignment was not abrupt and impulsive. Rather it was triggered by the Madhyama Pratipad, which was also realized by the founder of modern Nepal, Prithivi Narayan Shah.*

*While non-alignment and Madhyama Pratipad differ in their approaches, their objectives remain the same: balancing. While non-alignment demands balancing by not being aligned to any security bloc, Madhyama Pratipad appeals to balancing by treading a middle path. Thus, this qualitative study argues how the historical experience of balancing made it easier for the Himalayan state to adapt to the non-aligned policy and posture. Accordingly, non-alignment to Nepal is not only a survival strategy but also a historical expression of its cultural and civilizational philosophy. Therefore, any attempt to understand Nepal's foreign policy of non-alignment only from the grand narratives of geopolitics and changing dynamics in the regional and international security environment would not be sufficient to weigh the rationale and relevance of non-alignment for Nepal. Today, India's perceptible shift to multi-alignment and China's emphasis on the Xi Jinping Thought have already raised the question of the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal. The answers lie in Nepal's historical experience of balancing.*

**Keywords:** Non-Aligned Movement, Relevancy, Multi-alignment, Panchasheel, Nepal-India- China.

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD) Tribhuvan University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1471-5763>. Bhattarai's areas of expertise are Sino-Indian Relations, Foreign Policy Behavior/ Institutions, Himalayan Studies and Small States.

<sup>2</sup> PhD Student at South Asian University, New Delhi

## Introduction

*“Don’t walk in front of me... I may not follow;  
Don’t walk behind me... I may not lead;  
Walk beside me... just be my friend.”*

These lines by Nobel laureate Albert Camus may be interpreted variously but as reader-response of international relations enthusiasts, we understand it as Camus’s call for collective resistance (be my friend) against the great power ambitions (who always want to lead the global affairs and be at the front with their military might, economic supremacy and hegemonic aspiration). Whilst the autobiographical interpretation of the extracted lines also reveals Camus’s Anti-Soviet stance and a harsh critique of the United States, our inference may not appear haywire. Collective resistance against bloc politics and bipolarity is at the heart of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Nepal’s entry into NAM has generally been analyzed from two perspectives: firstly, against the bipolarity of the global Cold War and secondly, as an attempt to deal with the changing dynamics of Sino-Indian interactions following the integration of Tibet. But such generalization usually pays no heed to Nepal’s historical experience of balancing and the cultural and civilizational philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad*, which eased Kathmandu’s sojourn into the NAM in the early decades of the Cold War.

Being one of the older countries in the world, Nepal has withstood and endured numerous battles. While it led some, it lost the others. But, in all the unfavorable circumstances, the strategically located country always preferred in maintaining the balance. Thus, when NAM was being devised to resist the cold-war bipolarity, Nepal saw it as a continuity of what the Himalayan country had always practiced: balancing powerful princely states against the Chinese empire in the ancient and medieval period; balancing British East India company against the Chinese empire in the modern period; and balancing India and China after the integration of Tibet. The only difference was of scale and magnitude.

With NAM, Nepal had to balance the two superpowers during the Cold War—the United States and the Soviet Union— without disturbing the traditional balance with India and China (Khanal, 1982; Uprety, 1982). Therefore, while questions are being raised on the relevance of NAM for Nepal as both Nepal’s neighbors, despite being the founding members of NAM have expressed a sharp departure from the core value of NAM, policymakers in Kathmandu need to develop a realization regarding how the balancing act is historically rooted in Nepal’s foreign policy institutions, priorities, and behaviors. In the admiration of Nepal’s act of balancing, Henry Kissinger in his 2014 book *World Order* has stated, “For centuries Nepal skillfully managed its diplomatic posture between the ruling dynasties in China and those in India” (Kissinger, 2014, p.179). Analyzing this diplomacy of balance from the prism of *Madhyama Pratipad* can benefit Nepali policymakers in two ways: Nepal’s adherence to non-alignment could safely avoid the charge of being driven by the Indian definition of non-alignment, and it could take the ownership of the policy citing the historical experience. Secondly, Nepal’s claim could steer a new policy debate on the importance and relevance of *Madhyama Pratipad* whilst a new “cold war” is being brewed.



*Madhyama Pratipad* has roots in Buddhist philosophy (that has drawn strong attention in the diplomatic relations between India and China) which underlines the middle path as the appropriate means to overcome any kind of anguish and agony. Today, whilst the rise of China has strategized Nepal's geographical location in the context of the emergence of different strategic partnerships and alliances to contain the rise, Kathmandu's power elites have confronted numerous challenges, particularly in accommodating the divergent interests of the major powers. Nepal's uncertainty over U.S.-sponsored Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant manifested a political fiasco tormenting the decision-makers. In such an adverse condition, *Madhyama Pratipad* offers a middle ground to balance the interests of major powers in Nepal with its "soft power attractiveness" (Scott, 2016). While Beijing is globalizing Buddhism with a strategic purpose and New Delhi is using Hinduism to reinterpret Buddhism, Nepal's reclaim of *Madhyama Pratipad* to attest the relevance of non-alignment as its historical experience would yield a positive outcome (Thapa, 1982; Uprety, 1982).

After the establishment of a unified Nepal in the 18th century, Kathmandu has been balancing its Gulliverian neighbors variously. The founder of unified Nepal P.N. Shah demanded a balanced approach from policymakers by unveiling a "yam-between-two-boulders" theory. But rulers after him opted for expansionist policies, because of which Nepal lost its territories to British East Indian company (Baral, 1982). Rana rulers, however, used the policy of appeasing the British government to prolong their oligarchic regime until 1950. In its non-colonial history, Nepal balanced its relations with the Chinese emperor and British East India in such a manner that on the one hand, Kathmandu was sending its quinquennial missions to China, and on the other, it was sending men to fight for the British in the world wars. Thus, even before joining NAM, Nepal was familiar with the art of not going to the extreme or extending support to one side absolutely (Uprety, 1982). Therefore, Nepal's adoption of the non-alignment posture and policy was not influenced by the Indian version (Rose and Scholz, 1980).

Thus, the objective of this study is to reveal how Nepal's entry into the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) was not driven by the Indian worldview of Cold War politics, but rather by its own historical experience and as part of its civilizational and cultural experience with the middle path (Baral, 1982; Uprety, 1982; Khanal, 1982). This understanding can assist Nepal to rediscover the significance and relevance of NAM for the country located between the two nuclear powers, who fought a border war in 1962 while standoffs and skirmishes often characterize their unsettled territorial dispute in the Himalayan region. After all, *Madhyama Pratipad* thrives on the idea of peaceful co-existence which is the upshot of Nepal's religious and spiritual values and entwines "a modus vivendi between material progress and spiritual growth" (Uprety, 1982). The multidimensional facets of Nepal's cultural heritage, which play an important role in its worldview (Rose, 1971) have also reinforced the spirit of *Madhyama Pratipad*.

## Method

This qualitative study is driven by the cultural and civilizational philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad* to manifest the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal. The historical experiences of Nepal's act of balancing have been surveyed by delving into the Yam theory of King P.N. Shah. In the same manner, accounts on Nepal's response to the Anglo-Tibet and Sino-Tibet disputes have been analyzed to show how the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal should be understood in a historical perspective. Speeches delivered by former kings and Nepali prime ministers on the issue of the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal have been studied to validate the major claims. Information collected from secondary sources, including the documents on the foreign policy of Nepal, India, and China, academic journals related to the NAM, 1982 conference proceedings on Nepal and Non-alignment, general articles, and op-ed articles on Nepal's non-alignment policy and posture have also been examined. Reports published by study centers, think tanks and research centers on the neighborhood policy and diplomatic practices of Nepal, India, and China have been reviewed. Media sources were also reviewed for an understanding of the various issues connected with the neighborhood policy of China, India, and Nepal. The themes that emerged from the reviews have been analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of *Madhyama Pratipad*.

## Cultural philosophy and historical experience

*Madhyama Pratipad* negates the Hobbesian or Machiavellian or Kautilayan worldviews. Rather it demands a peaceful, stable, and harmonious neighborhood by not escalating the conflict by band-wagoning or forming alliances. The idea of balancing during the era of conquest and invasion doesn't match with the concept of balancing in today's globalized world, where the risk posed by both markets and nuclear powers cannot be brushed aside. Thus, to avert the situation of backlash triggered by absolute rejection and unconditional acceptance, the middle path is a prerequisite in international relations. That middle path needs to be trodden variously: through appeasement, non-alignment, equidistance, and neutrality, among others. Nepal's foreign policy has embraced them all in different periods of time. The stimulating facet of *Madhyama Pratipad* is its cultural and civilizational affinity with the Chinese and Indian ideals of "Shijie Datong" (the world as a family) and "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the entire world as a family). At present, both the ancient civilizations, Indian and Chinese, seem to have abandoned these ideals and have aspired for great power ambitions. In such a context, Nepal's claim over *Madhyama Pratipad* may not unveil the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal but may also be a wake-up call to both of its neighbors, who have not been able to renegotiate their intricate interface.

The NAM began with the Bandung Conference. In the Nepali context, the concept is a product of cultural traditions and historical experiences, where peaceful co-existence has been the essence. *Madhyama Pratipad* aims to maintain and extend it from the societal level to the national and international levels. Cultural assimilation and accommodation of diversity have advanced the spirit of co-existence in Nepal. Nepal's trans-Himalayan trade and pilgrimage

impelled the emergence of various religious faiths in Nepal, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Lamaism. The religious co-existence even led to mutual faith as indicated by the expressions like *Halahal Lokeshwar* and *Nilkantha Lokeshwar* (both embodying the trait of Sakyamuni and Shiva). Politically, it led to the doctrine of peaceful co-existence (Uprety, 1982), which is one of the sources of *Madhyama Pratipad*.

The influence of *Madhyama Pratipad* in Nepal's approach towards the Anglo-Tibetan conflict in the first decade of the 20th century is the best example to depict Nepal's historical experience of avoiding dispute through the endorsement of peaceful co-existence. While Russia's influence in Tibet had tormented the British, Lord Curzon, India's Viceroy selected Francis Younghusband to conduct a semi-military mission to Tibet. But, according to the Nepal-Tibet Treaty of 1856, Nepal was supposed "to offer assistance to Tibet if the latter is invaded by an outside power". Nepal's de facto prime minister Chandra Shumsher had understood that even the combined strength of Nepal and Tibet would not be able to prevent the British aggression, and even if Nepal dared to, it would only make the Himalayan region more vulnerable to power politics of the great power. Thus, as an attempt to avoid such an adverse situation, Nepal declined to provide military assistance to Tibet but warned Tibetans of the approaching British troops. Nepal wrote to Tibet:

The safety of your capital depends only upon your peacefully and submissively approaching the British with an open heart upon the settlement of the pending dispute. Move at once on the matter otherwise any negligence on your part would cost you your capital (Englishman, 1903).

With the entry of British forces in Lhasa in 1904, Nepal's role as a mediator between the British and Tibetans became crucially important. As such, Nepali *Vakil* in Lhasa Jit Bahadur KC and Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher in Kathmandu played an important role in the Anglo-Tibetan negotiations. Kathmandu was able to conclude the Anglo-Tibetan Convention in 1904 terminating Russian presence from Tibet as the latter pledged not to allow any foreign representatives in Lhasa or give permission to build roads or railways, telegraph, or mining rights to a foreign power (Uprety, 1982). Thus, the presence of *Madhyama Pratipad* in Nepal's approach was quite visible as it not only mediated the Anglo-Tibetan dispute but also represented the Tibetan grievances "before the Fort William in Calcutta and that helped to soften the terms of the Convention" (Uprety 1982).

Nepal's stern belief in *Madhyama Pratipad* was also visible in its response to the Sino-Tibet dispute at the beginning of the 20th century. After 1908 Beijing was beginning to develop a policy of effective control over Tibet, which in a state of fear, sought Nepal's help to reform its civil and military services, which Kathmandu rejected. But China sent 1000 Chinese soldiers to Tibet for shielding its trade markets (Foreign Secret E. Consultations, 1908). Earlier, when the Chinese *Amban* (representative) in Lhasa had asked the Nepal government to allow the recruitment of 300 Nepali *Khacharas* (Nepali half-breeds) in the Chinese troops, Nepal had rejected the proposal saying *Khacharas* were unsuitable for military service. Nepal also rejected China's demand to sell 500 magazines of rifles to arm the new Chinese soldiers prepared to deal with Tibet (Foreign Secret E. Consultations, 1910). By rejecting the

demands of both sides, Nepal sought the middle path. Nepal had also made efforts to deter the 1000 Chinese forces from entering Lhasa as the Nepali *Vakil*, Jit Bahadur organized a conference in Lhasa between Chinese representative and their Tibetan counterparts. But that effort alone was not sufficient as Tibet perceived the arrival of Chinese troops as an absolute infringement upon its authority. China had reckoned the necessity of its troops as a security concern. As soon as Chinese troops entered Lhasa, Dalai Lama fled to India and by 1910, Lhasa was under the full control of the Chinese. However, to prevent the Sino-Tibet dispute from further escalation, the Nepali *Vakil* had played an important role. An agreement was signed by the Tibetan and Chinese sides with the Nepali *Vakil* as the witness. Both the disputing parties had also agreed to supervise the number of arms under Nepali custody (Foreign Ministry Archive).

Thus, while we provide space to Nepal's geographical location in our discussion over the relevance of NAM for Nepal, it is equally important to consider Nepal's historical experiences and cultural philosophy in maintaining the balance between its two neighbors (Baral, 1982). During the Lichhavi period, the balance had tilted towards Tibet-China while in the post-Sugauli period, the tilt was more visible towards British India. But, even during the time of British colonialism in South Asia, Nepal took comfort in *Madhyama Pratipad* as indicated by its role in Anglo-Tibetan and Sino-Tibetan conflict.

## Path to globalism

By exercising the philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad* in its neighborhood, landlocked Nepal sought the path of globalism through NAM, particularly after the political change of 1950. Nepal's desire to go beyond its neighborhood, in the context of the early days of the Cold War, is reflected in King Tribhuvan's 1954 statement:

It is an undeniable fact that no nation can in the context of the modern world have an isolated existence. The age demands that all nations, big and small, must draw close and contribute to the welfare of humanity as a whole. It follows that we must develop good and friendly relations with nations of the world without attaching ourselves to any particular power group (*The Statesman*, 1954)

Exhausted by the isolationist policy that Nepal was obliged to embrace because of British colonialism in South Asia, Kathmandu preferred to tread on a globalist path after the political change of 1950. This the country discovered in the NAM. Today, while Sino-Indian geopolitical rivalry has impacted the entire South Asian region, NAM is a soothing balm to its geopolitical dilemma. Thus, its relevance cannot be denied to the strategically placed small powers, for whom multilateralism is a key to reinforcing the ethos of *Madhyama Pratipad*.

As non-alignment had its origin in the early days of the Cold War when two super powers were busy forming alliances, and new countries were emerging through the process of decolonization. NAM attracted most of the newly independent developing counties in Asia and Africa who were willing to resist the bloc politics in the Cold War. The architects of the

NAM were Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first prime minister), Josip Broz Tito (President of Yugoslavia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (President of Egypt), Sukarno (President of Indonesia), and Kwame Nkrumah (President of Ghana). Later, when its effectiveness and relevance were also emphasized by the communist leaders and freedom fighters including Fidel Castro (Cuba) and Nelson Mandela (South Africa) and by other leaders including Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Hosni Mubarak (Egypt) (Dinkel, 2019). NAM also faced the harsh criticism of becoming a hiding place for dictators. While critiquing the policies and postures of the NAM countries, it is also best to understand how the spirit of *panchasheela* (five principles of peaceful co-existence) ideologically drove the movement after the Bandung Conference in 1955, which was the second international conference that Nepal had attended. The first international conference Nepal attended was the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1947 as an attempt to escape its self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world when sea changes were taking place in international relations following the end of World War II and the establishment of the UN.

Although Nepal missed the opportunity to become the founding member of the UN despite being a sovereign and independent country, Nepal obtained the membership of the UN in 1955 to fulfill its policy of diversification by treading on the path to globalism. NAM principles, too, reverberate the fall of the traditional model and the emergence of new international relations (Bandyopadhyaya, 1977). While the Cold War contradictions led to polycentrism, the concept of *détente* on the other hand led to the rapid development of the NAM (Dinkel, 2019), which became a prominent ideology during the Cold War for the states not desiring to align with any power blocs and military alliances and rather advocating for the world peace, solidarity, cooperation, and collaboration (Wajid Ali, 2004). Today, NAM not only incorporates the Third World, but also a list of countries that are diverse in political, economic, and cultural terms; including developed countries like Singapore, war-torn countries like Afghanistan and Somalia, democratic countries like India, and communist states like North Korea and China (Wajid Ali, 2004).

In Nepal, non-alignment is the policy that all political parties and regimes have embraced despite their conflicting ideologies, which is not only because of the geopolitical obligation but also because of historical experiences. Although non-alignment as a global movement that began during the early years of the Cold War offers a platform to go beyond any kind of bipolarity – either at the regional level or international level – non-alignment as a balancing policy has always been at the heart of Nepali statecraft. Such a level of unanimity has further increased the relevance of NAM for Nepal, unlike in India, where scholars and foreign policy analysts, and political parties are divided over its relevance for New Delhi. India, today, remains a multi-aligned state (Korybko, 2021) through its effective participation in the security community led by the US, including the QUAD and the Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS); and, in the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Further, coordinating Nepal's foreign policy with that of India has become a "matter of history" (Baral, 1981) because of the repudiation of the 1950 treaty by the Nepali side and New Delhi's keenness to review it by constituting

Eminent Persons' Group (EPG), whose report, however, has still not received by the Indian government. While India finds refuge in multi-alignment to fulfill its great power ambition, Nepal's aspirations are widely driven by the spirit of South-South cooperation.

India and China, the two immediate neighbors of Nepal, played an important role in formulating the objectives and principles of the NAM. Today, both countries have transformed their bilateral relations into geopolitical rivals, not only because of their territorial disputes in the Himalayan region but because of their conflicting great power ambitions. Although India has been reluctant towards joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), more than two-thirds of the budget of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has been invested in projects in India (*The Indian Express*, 2021), China has, however, strategically revived the principles of *Panchasheel* while dealing with its neighbors and has been furthering its interest through BRI with its neighbors (Krishnan, 2014). This means, China has increased its influence in neighboring regions like South Asia and Southeast Asia (Krishnan, 2014). Today, as both the NAM countries have adopted two different paths (India strengthening its strategic partnership with the US and China emphasizing the BRI), the relevance of NAM in Nepal's foreign policy priority is being questioned.

Prior to harboring doubts and suspicions over Nepal's non-alignment, it is very important to understand three factors that have perpetually infused non-alignment in Nepal's foreign policy. First is Nepal's cultural, civilizational, and historical impulsion as triggered by the philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad* in relation to the pursuance of Nepal's policy and posture of non-alignment. Second is the unanimous ambition of the policymakers and foreign policy formulators of Nepal to pursue globalism through South-South Cooperation and the third is Nepal's location between the two Asian giants, whose relation is driven by cooperation, conflict, and competition. The last factor has received good attention while the two other factors are often brushed aside. The influence of civilizational, cultural, and historical underpinnings of *Madhyama Pratipad* on Nepal's path to globalism is, however, less considered because labeling 1950 as a departure point has become commonplace.

The ideological origin of NAM is often traced to anticolonial movements (Wajid Ali 2004; Strydom, 2007), which is not the case for Nepal, which was never colonized. To Nepal NAM offered two opportunities: a path to globalism through collective resistance and to keep a geopolitical balance in the neighborhood after the 1962 war between India and China, and beyond the neighborhood in the context of global Cold War. With the end of colonial rule and the start of the postcolonial "nation-building", the Bandung Conference aimed at inviting as many African and Asian governments as possible and uniting to make the collective voice heard in the international politics (Bandyopadhyaya, 1977). The Conference homogenized the Third World countries and made them visible internationally. After the Bandung Conference and leading to the next conference in Belgrade (1961), the number of members had countries significantly increased due to decolonization (Dinkel, 2019). The Belgrade Conference shifted the importance of NAM to counter the indirect forms of colonialism and imperialism (Dinkel, 2019) and underlined NAM as a successful attempt in averting the risk to back either USA or USSR.



Consequently, the member countries emerged as the “third force” (Wajid Ali, 2004). However, in the 1970s, the movement developed in a different manner towards institutionalization (Narayanan, 2016). Due to the absence of a charter dictating the aims and objectives of the NAM, it was confined to the speeches and pronouncements of the leaders (Strydom, 2007). As such, the member countries developed the essence of NAM according to their situation and circumstances (Dinkel, 2019) because of the non-binding principle and owing to its confinement to the exchange of ideas among states (Strydom, 2007). The decade of the 1980s was characterized by disagreements and divergences among the member countries because of the desire of the US and USSR to lure more countries towards them (Wajid Ali, 2004). The military conflicts between the non-aligned states Angola and Zaire, Algeria and Morocco, Chad and Libya, Cambodia and Vietnam, Cuba and most Latin American states, Ethiopia and Sudan, Egypt and many of the Arab States, India and Pakistan, Tanzania and Uganda, and Ghana and Togo also led to the policy divergences among the non-aligned states (Tellis, 2021). Consequently, due to its non-institutionalization, policy divergences of the member countries, and increasing geopolitical and territorial conflicts among them, along with a fissure in multilateralism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the relevance and applicability of NAM in the multipolar world is severely questioned (Dinkel, 2019). While Nepal's foreign policymakers encounter such questions and critiques, its best to respond by citing Nepal's historical and civilizational experiences in maintaining *Madhyama Pratipad* and its suitability in pursuing the path of globalism even in the time of global and regional crises. Nepal's effective presence in the non-alignment movement began with the First Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries held in Belgrade in 1961, where the Nepali delegation was led by King Mahendra. At the conference, King Mahendra had stated:

The principle of peaceful co-existence when used negatively in the sense of military non-involvement becomes one of non-alignment. Belief in the policy of non-alignment implies in our opinion rejection of the theory that the challenge of the modern world is a military challenge.

Supporting the principle of peaceful co-existence of states, King Mahendra lauded the rights of the sovereign states to keep themselves detached from any kind of military involvement. When he led the Nepali delegation to the NAM summit in Cairo and in Lusaka, King Mahendra expressed similar views and suggested measures to solve the problems of economic development faced by developing countries (Baral, 1981; Lohani, 1982). Critiquing the lack of willpower and interest on the part of the leadership of developed countries to readjust their tariff and trade policies to meet the just needs of the developing countries, King Mahendra suggested the significance of the collective unity of developing countries under the NAM framework. He had also developed a realization regarding how Nepal should reorient its foreign policy through the principle of non-alignment while dealing with its Gulliverian neighborhood (Baral, 1981). Aligning with either of the neighbors would have been a threat to Nepal's political independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty (Baral, 1981). Today, while both the neighboring countries have expressed significant departure from the NAM, decision-makers in Kathmandu should be meticulous enough to judge the

solemnity of the crisis before Nepal faces a situation where it may have to compromise its political independence and sovereignty. Therefore, referring to the historical experience and civilizational underpinnings endowed by *Madhyama Pratipad* it is more important for the foreign policy formulators and implementors for disseminating the relevance of the NAM for Nepal in the context of changing global and regional power relations.

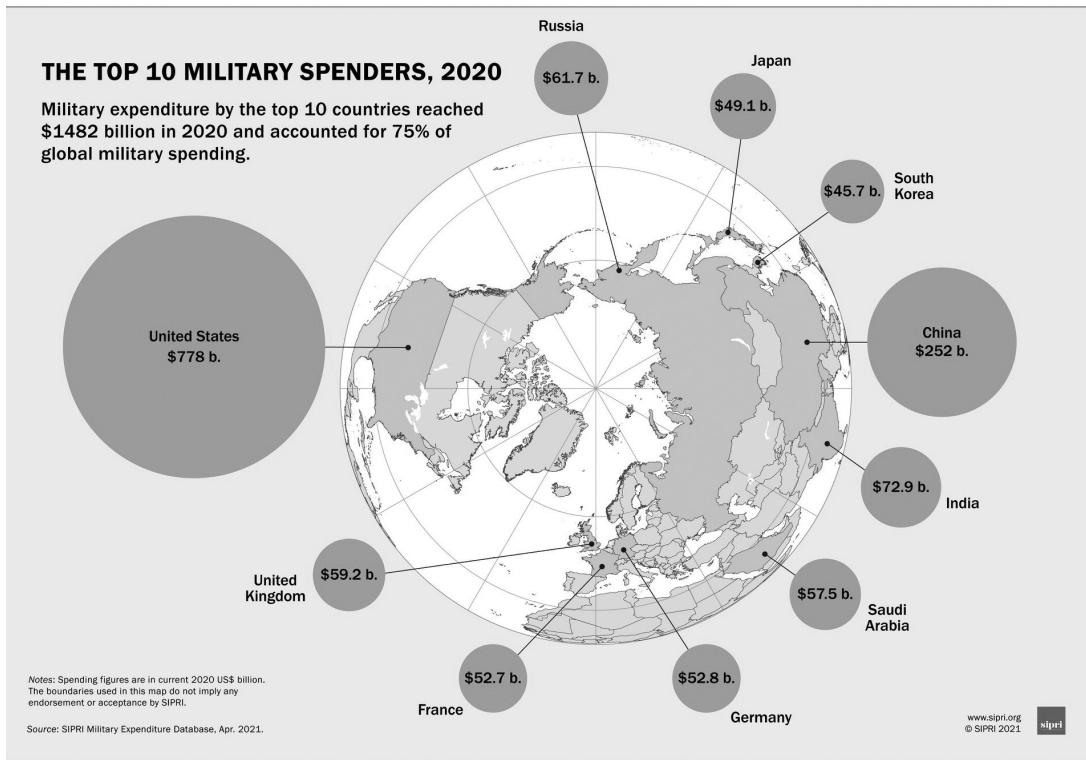
### ***Madhyama Pratipad as a strategy for small powers***

Powerful countries have power, influence, and clout to not only fulfill but also impose their interests, while small countries are unable to use their military capabilities to fulfill their interests. The best strategy available to small countries is effective balancing through the middle path or *Madhyama Pratipad*. NAM offers them the same insight. Although NAM has regional powers as members today, they have been lured by their major power ambitions and are aligned in multiple ways. Thus, their fascination with the NAM was limited to the Cold War bipolarity as an attempt to get rid of the great power competition (Keethaponcalan, 2016). Unlike the interests of the regional powers to strategically resist the bipolarity, small countries had both security and economic reasons (Lohani, 1982). Because, unlike the legally and occasionally neutral states, the non-aligned countries were able to exert pressure in international politics on different global issues. In the international arena, the NAM provided all member states a platform to secure, consolidate, and legitimize their voice on issues of international importance. The NAM, as a political posture, was opted by the small states during the Cold War; and after its end, and was very relevant for them.

The NAM principles are also used by the leaders in the small powers not only to promote cohesion among the two or more different ideological camps inside the country. It has also helped the small states to thwart the risk of proxy wars in the international arena (Maniruzzaman, 1982). While during the Cold War period, non-alignment was not only understood as not getting allied with either the United States or the USSR but also as a strategy of the small powers to avoid the consequences of being trapped in the great power rivalry (Rothstein, 1968). As the instigation of internal conflicts in the small states with outside support made them largely vulnerable, NAM emerged as an important small power strategy.

Today the vulnerabilities and uncertainties faced by the small states have multiplied in an unprecedented manner compared to threats confronted during the Cold War (Krause & Singer, 2001). Thus, small powers always look for ways to maximize scarce resources and advance themselves in countering these intricacies (Rothstein, 1968). As a response to the structural shifts in the international environment, the small powers have adopted the policy of non-alignment (Maniruzzaman, 1982) as a survival strategy. Nepal, as a small power, pursued the path of globalism to increase its economic engagement (Lohani, 1982) and minimize the geopolitical implications emanating from its neighborhood, which had benefitted small powers during the period of the Cold War (Vital, 1967). While the power politics in regional and international institutions made it compulsory for the small powers to adhere to the

policy of the non-alignment (Krause & Singer, 2001) *Madhyama Pratipad* appears more relevant and germane for strategically located countries like Nepal. Owing to the structural changes in the international system coupled with the inability of international norms to curb the hard power ambitions of the major powers, small powers feel more comfortable with the policy of non-alignment even today (Maniruzzaman, 1982). In today's world, where countries have been ever-increasing their defense expenditures and nuclear capabilities amidst the growth of strategic partnerships and alliances triggered by a geopolitical rivalry between the countries, *Madhyama Pratipad* through non-alignment appears to be the best policy choice for the small powers.



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, April 2021

While Nepal's two neighbors, India and China have found a place in the list of top ten military spenders (as shown above), the relevance of the policy of non-alignment has become more pronounced for Nepal. After all, the suitability and applicability of the policy is influenced by Nepal's geostrategic location between the two major powers of Asia (Shah, 1973). But the civilizational and cultural underpinnings attached with it cannot be denied, with the help of which Nepal aims to contribute to the world peace (Shah, 1973). Nepal sees the significance of NAM to boost its political independence and concomitantly heighten the spirit of interdependence with different countries (Baral, 1981). Thus, NAM for Nepal is not only about a path to pursue an independent foreign policy that otherwise is constrained by

its geographical location but to also foster peaceful coexistence with other countries in the world, the impetus for which is rooted in Nepal's cultural and civilizational philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad*.

Nepal's belief in NAM is triggered by the concept of equality in all international decisions which have global implications even though the social problems faced by the countries differ (Shah, 1973). To Nepal, NAM yields an ideological convergence between the countries and the people by materializing peaceful relations among them. For Nepal, the policy of non-alignment can serve as a platform to exercise sovereign equality, where not only size is equated with success. Therefore, given the geopolitical, regional, and global context, NAM remains relevant, appropriate, and significant for a country like Nepal, whose aspirations are quite different from that of its two big and powerful neighbors. Hence, even if India is multi-aligned and China is offering the narrative of *Panchasheel* to fulfill its BRI objectives, there is no point in critiquing Nepal's relentless adherence to NAM without understanding its historical experiences, cultural and civilizational philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad*, and more specifically the Yam Theory propounded by King Prithivi Narayan Shah (Baral, 1982).

India has made a perceptible shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment in order to fulfill its great power ambitions, and China has reiterated on *Panchasheel* to materialize its BRI projects in different parts of the world as a response to the "debt trap" allegations. In such a context, Nepal's non-alignment – the cornerstone of Nepal's foreign policy – should not remain confined to discourse. This is because enshrining the principles of NAM in the Constitution and Foreign Policy is not enough for the founder member of NAM. Thus, it's time to go beyond the ritual attendance at NAM summits to steer a pragmatic revitalization of the policy of non-alignment in its foreign policy by referring to the historical, cultural, and civilizational significance of *Madhyama Pratipad*. After all, Nepal adheres to the policy of non-alignment because it believes that it "brightens the prospects of peace, which is prerequisite for its security, independence, and development" (Shah, 1975).

## **India's Multi-Alignment**

Although civilizational India had accommodated the worldview of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the entire world as a family), the post-colonial, independent India couldn't revitalize it as it had to maintain a balance between the United States and the USSR throughout the Cold War. India, initially sought such a balance in non-alignment under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, at least from the time of its independence in 1947 to the 1962 war with China, and realized that it could fulfill its interest by maintaining equidistance with superpowers and avoiding military alliances (Hall, 2016). But leaders and prime ministers after Nehru made a significant departure from the Nehruvian policy by setting up a radical agenda for the developing world, arming India with advanced military weapons in response to the threats from Pakistan and China, pursuing economic self-reliance, and ultimately boosting India's strategic autonomy (Hall, 2016, p. 274).

After initiating the policy of opening-up in 1991, India encouraged foreign trade and investment, introduced the “Look East Policy” in 1994, tested five nuclear devices in 1998, and pursued entente with the USA (Bhardwaj, 2020). The Look East Policy significantly enhanced India’s relation with Southeast Asian states or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional multilateral institutions (Tellis, 2021). During the premiership of Manmohan Singh (2004-2014), there were significant changes in India’s foreign policy principles and regarding its greater integration into the global economy (Hilali, 2001). Thus, India’s shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment in this phase was characterized by continued increasing engagement with the US that was initiated by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was Singh’s predecessor. The Look East Policy was initiated by PV Narasimha Rao, and the Neighborhood Policy by I.K. Gujral (Menon, 2021).

India’s multi-alignment policy aims to respond effectively to the new transnational challenges that could not be dealt with autonomy in the 21st century (Sebastian, 2021). In this phase, India became an inaugural member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) and observer state of the SCO in 2005. India joined Brazil, Russia, and China in 2006 to form the BRIC, which was joined by South Africa in 2010 (Sebastian, 2021) and is renamed as ‘BRICS’. India also became a member of the G-20 in 2008 and organized the first meeting of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (Sebastian, 2021). Further, India’s strategic partnership with other countries deepened as an instrument of regional diplomacy. Thus, India’s multi-alignment initiatives are aimed at fulfilling its great power ambition by managing critical security threats from China and Pakistan, accessing regional and global forums, and promoting its values without unswervingly committing to the Western normative agenda (Narayanan, 2016).

Today, while India has skillfully maneuvered its foreign policy behavior in the China-led BRICS and the SCO, New Delhi has also involved itself actively in the US-led QUAD along with Japan and Australia. India’s effective presence in the QUAD Leader’s Summit, Annual BRICS Summit, and meetings of the SCO indicate its multi-aligned foreign policy. Such a shift from India’s conventional stance over non-alignment is the upshot of the influence of pragmatism on the foreign policy behavior of the Modi administration (Sebastian, 2021). Under the Modi administration, even though India has not been a part of a formal military alliance, it has become a part of the diverse network of loose and issue-specific coalitions and regional groupings led by both, India’s adversaries like China, and India’s strategic partners like the United States, attesting India’s shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment (Korybko, 2021). Moreover, India’s change in the policy of non-alignment to multi-alignment was also visible in its balanced response to the recent escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict, which was distinctive from its previous pro-Palestine stance. As part of its multi-aligned policy, New Delhi couldn’t brush aside Israel’s interest.

India’s multi-alignment in contemporary times is aimed at adapting to the new realities fashioned by the new transformation in the world order. The emergence of a multipolar world coupled with the rise of China and its growing influence in India’s backyard has obliged New Delhi to go beyond the conventional parameters (Menon, 2021). As such, Indian Prime

Minister Narendra Modi steered the Indian foreign policy going beyond the idea of traditional networks and devising new partnerships in the specific areas of agriculture, Information Technology (IT), and cyber security. New Delhi's multi-aligned policy doesn't prevent India to develop cooperation with its geopolitical rival like China (Bhardwaj, 2020). Although India and China have not been able to resolve their territorial disputes which are often aggravated by standoffs and skirmishes, they have been cooperating in both the BRICS and SCO.

On the economic front, bilateral trade has significantly increased. The import of Chinese goods to India has averaged INR. 141.90 billion from 1991 to 2021, which reached INR. 524.33 billion in July 2021 (Reserve Bank of India, 2021). Similarly, Indian exports to China have averaged at INR. 37.28 billion from 1991 to 2021 (Trading Economics, 2021), and the highest record was INR. 192.92 billion in March 2021 (Krishnan, 2021). The increase in bilateral trade was possible even after the violent clash in the Galwan valley and in the context of the boycott of Chinese goods in India. Despite the increasing antagonism between the two countries, the investment flow from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – which is led by China to finance infrastructure projects in Asia -- to finance infrastructure and connectivity projects in India has been significant. Interestingly, New Delhi is involved in the AIIB despite its reservation over the BRI. Currently, there are 16 proposed and 27 approved projects from AIIB in India (Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank, 2021). In 2021, eight projects of approximately US\$ 1,410.67 million were approved. All these projects amount to more than US\$ 5 billion, and it is reported to be about one-third of the AIIB funding (Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank, 2021).

## **Strategic *Panchasheel* and Xi Jinping Thought**

As China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has drawn severe criticism, including the allegation of “debt trap” and causing “sovereign erosion”, from the western world, Beijing has resorted to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or *Panchasheel* to shield its ambitious project, which aims to connect East with the West through the land and maritime routes. The five principles include mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The modern concept of *Panchasheel* was introduced by China and India in 1954 when they were dealing with two issues: Tibet and the Himalayan borders. Thus, instead of considering *Panchasheel* as an entirely moral and ethical stance, it was introduced to fulfill the national interest of both countries. Thus, it is not completely deprived of political realism (Dasgupta, 2016). Although India's Gujral Doctrine accommodated the spirit of *Panchasheel* in the 1990s, India today has accommodated a more pragmatic foreign policy driven by multi-alignment. Beijing has also reinvented itself to deal with the neighbors, particularly in the context of the BRI projects (Krishnan, 2014). President Xi Jinping has also emphasized the importance of *Panchasheel* in maintaining friendly ties with its neighbors (Krishnan, 2014).

China has used the principles of *Panchasheel* while dealing with or addressing any concern of its neighbors, especially the South Asia and Southeast Asia (Krishnankutty & Shukla, 2020).



Even in its dealings with India, China has reiterated the principle, time and again. While dealing with the concern of India over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the entire gamut of the BRI, China has resorted to the five principles as an attempt to assure the political leadership in New Delhi that Beijing's actions and involvement in the disputed territory of Kashmir shouldn't be understood as an act of interference (Aneja, 2017). In the future, China looks forward to India joining the BRI on this same ground (Aneja, 2017). China has also demanded to drive the negotiations followed by Galwan skirmishes through the spirit of *Panchasheel* (Krishnankutty & Shukla, 2020) to which India didn't show much interest, possibly because of the dimension of political realism attached with it.

The key economic corridors in South Asia and Southeast Asia under China-led BRI projects have received stark criticism from the western world that perceive China's move as being assertive and expansionist. Beijing has strategically exploited the importance of *Panchasheel* to reassure its neighbors, particularly the small countries that have been lured by the connectivity projects that Beijing's flagship project can bring (Aneja, 2017; Krishnankutty & Shukla, 2020). But China's growing presence in South Asia has also vexed the leadership in New Delhi (Menon, 2021). Although India has largely failed to prevent the countries in South Asia to get attracted to the BRI projects, China knows the art to successfully lure them is to constantly refer to the principle of *Panchasheel*.

While India has pursued the policy of multi-alignment to fulfill its national interest, China has revitalized the five principles of peaceful coexistence in a strategic manner. Both, China, and Nepal have emphasized the principle of *Panchasheel* in their bilateral relations, with the help of which the two countries have been coordinating their relations in different international forums (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Although China has not been able to enter diplomatic relations with Bhutan because of the latter's strategic partnership with India, it has advanced the principle of *Panchasheel* in expediting the China-Bhutan boundary negotiation (Siqi, Xin, & Yunyi, 2021). The MoU was signed between the two countries by adhering to the principles of equality, peaceful coexistence, and win-win results (Siqi, Xin, & Yunyi, 2021). In its bilateral relations with Pakistan, too, China has emphasized mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual support, and mutual assistance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2021). But, New Delhi sees China's reiteration of *Panchasheel* for building bilateral ties with its South Asian neighbors as a strategic encirclement of India. The policymakers in Beijing perceive it as being a prerequisite for a peaceful and stable neighborhood. How should Nepal proceed in such an adverse situation where two Asian giants have not been able to renegotiate their differences, and are more driven by the two conflicting approaches? Should Nepal see NAM in only geopolitical terms or in cultural and civilizational terms to use it to reclaim and reinvent the relevancy of non-alignment in a new way when both of its neighbors have pursued divergent approaches to fulfill their interests?

Besides the principle of *Panchasheel*, Xi's China has also unveiled a new official political doctrine for China, the Xi Jinping Thought, as an attempt to consolidate and strengthen power at the national and international levels. The Xi Jinping Thought promotes the

supremacy of the Communist Party and reiterates that a powerful and unified China can be attained only if the Communist Party is firmly in control of China. The 19th Convention of the Communist Party of China in 2017 accepted Xi Jinping Thought as its guiding principle. It was unanimously passed by the 2,287 delegates to the party congress. The Xi Jinping Thought states that:

The Communist Party of China shall uphold its absolute leadership over the People's Liberation Army and other people's armed forces; implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military; strengthen the development of the People's Liberation Army by enhancing its political loyalty, strengthening it through reform and technology, and running it in accordance with the law; build people's forces that obey the Party's command, can fight and win, and maintain excellent conduct; ensure that the People's Liberation Army accomplishes its missions and tasks in the new era; foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation; uphold justice while pursuing shared interests; work to build a community with a shared future for mankind; follow the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and pursue the Belt and Road Initiative.

Among the 10 clauses, the first five focus on the military, while the next four on society, and the last one on foreign policy. More precisely, it echoes the concerns of President Xi on Two Centennial Goals. Elucidating the importance of two centenary goals of the CPC during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Xi identified it as the foundation stone for achieving the "Chinese Dream." The two centennial goals are: a.) to build "a moderately prosperous society in all respects" by 2021 and to celebrate the CPC's centenary; and b.) To "build a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious" by 2049 and to celebrate the centenary of the People's Republic of China. Certain strategies have been devised to achieve these goals. One of the strategies is the Xi Jinping Thought, which is aimed to develop China as a powerful, prosperous, and socially harmonious country, and to establish socialism with Chinese characteristics in China.

Since the beginning of the communist movement in Nepal, the Himalayan country has experimented with different kinds of communist ideologies. At times, the communist parties have merged and there have also been times when they have split. When China had introduced the Xi Jinping Thought, Nepal witnessed the merger of two powerful communist parties—Maoist Centre and Unified Marxists-Leninists (UML). The new unified communist party was perceptively attracted to China's political and development models. The unified party has already split, not because of political differences but because of conflicting interests. In such a situation, the Xi Jinping Thought alone may not be able to bring all the communist parties together in Nepal, despite China's positive image among all the political parties.

From September 24 to 25, 2019, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and the Communist Party of China jointly organized a symposium in Kathmandu, where the two sides shared their experiences. While the Chinese side shared the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with

Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the Nepali side shared the objectives of forming the NCP by merging the two communist parties, for the overall development of Nepal. It was organized by the NCP's School, Organization, and international departments, and the CPC's Central Party School, Organization Department, and International Liaison Department. There are also instances when such meetings have impacted Nepal's foreign policy of non-alignment (Bhattarai, 2020).

On June 19, 2020, when another virtual meeting was organized between the communist parties of Nepal and China, Indian media went on cynically portraying Nepal's relations with China as anti-Indian. The meeting had taken place when relations between India and China had worsened because of border skirmishes, and a violent clash along the disputed border in Ladakh, and at the time while Nepal's had its own border dispute with India. It not only made India cast doubt over Nepal's non-alignment, but also provided an opportunity for Indian media to endorse the Indian army chief's remarks: "Nepal is acting on the behest of someone".

Although the meeting was scheduled long before the clash between Indian and Chinese troops on June 15, 2020, the timing was not appropriate, and thus drew widespread criticism. Therefore, while mulling over the benefits of the Xi Jinping thought for Nepal's development and socio-economic transformation, it is also equally important to pay heed to the geopolitical implications it could invite for a country located between China and India (Bhattarai, 2020). Learning from the experiences and practices of the communist movement in China may benefit the Nepali communist movement. But it is equally important to be aware of the geopolitical implications of embracing them. Most importantly, in the process of learning, Nepal shouldn't compromise its foreign policy of non-alignment, which is also the constitutional provision on Nepal's foreign relations (Bhattarai, 2020). After all, non-alignment is all about "protecting the weak from the strong" and struggling for "peace, independence, equality, justice, and dignity of all men and nations" (Thapa, 1982). But, confining non-alignment only to the discourse or understanding it only as a philosophy or as a means of intellectual contentment is not sufficient because it must be relevant to the experience of each country and practically meaningful in the everyday conduct of its external relations (Khanal, 1982). To do that, it is best to take refuge in Nepal's civilizational world view of *Madhyama Pratipad*, which prevents extreme proximity to one side against the other and remains vigilant about the interferences (Khanal, 1982).

## Conclusion

Nepal's non-alignment faces an unprecedented challenge as India takes the path towards multi-alignment, and China revitalizes *Panchasheel* to fulfill its BRI ambitions and introduces Xi Jinping Thought to consolidate its power and influence domestically and internationally. But this does not mean non-alignment is no more relevant for Nepal. Rather, its suitability and relevance have largely increased. This study has discussed how the relevance of non-alignment for Nepal shouldn't be understood only in geopolitical terms, but more in the cultural, civilizational, and historical significance of *Madhyama Pratipad*. Distinguishing

non-alignment as a global movement and non-alignment as the balancing policy of the Nepali state, this study has reiterated the need to seek the contemporary relevance of non-alignment for Nepal not only in the changing power relations at the global and regional fronts, but more in Nepal's historical acts of balancing and its civilizational world view of *Madhyama Pratipad* which advocates world peace and regional harmony through the avoidance of conflict.

While the geopolitical tensions and territorial disputes between two neighbors have pushed Nepal to recalibrate its foreign policy and diplomatic practices, the antagonistic cooperation between India and China has made the situation more complex and critical for Nepal. In such an adverse condition, Nepal's non-alignment has been mauled as a mere ritual and its effectiveness is being questioned. To reinforce the relevance and effectiveness of NAM for Nepal, this study has demonstrated that geopolitical citations alone are not enough but requires reclamation of the principle of *Madhyama Pratipad* from the historical experiences to argue in favor of non-alignment as the core guiding principle of foreign policy.

*Madhyama Pratipad* offers Nepal's non-alignment a strategic vision in the context of India's multi-alignment and China's Xi Jinping Thought and may provide policymakers in Kathmandu an approach to accommodate the conflicting interests of the major powers in Nepal. The same concept of the middle path was also espoused by P.N Shah in *Divya Upadesh*. Through the Yam theory, the king had demonstrated Nepal's geostrategic location by comparing the country to a yam between two boulders – British East India Company and Imperial China. For centuries, Nepal survived and sustained amidst the geopolitical vulnerabilities induced by its geostrategic location. But, today, Nepal's geostrategic importance not only invites India and China but also other global powers like the United States and other major powers. Thus, it is best to redefine NAM not only in geopolitical terms but more in civilizational and cultural terms, and in doing so, the philosophy of *Madhyama Pratipad* needs to be applied beyond the neighborhood. By compounding the act of balancing with the spirit of accommodation, *Madhyama Pratipad* offers Nepal the best policy option to increase its soft power capabilities and manage the strategic competition and rivalry of major powers without injuring its own economic and development aspirations. As such, in the words of Albert Camus, Nepal may not have to “follow those who walk in front” pursuing their great power ambitions and instead can walk just “beside of them, being their friend”.

## References

- Aneja, A. (2017, May 14). *Xi Jinping evokes Panchsheel as India skips Belt and Road meet*. Retrieved November 5, 2021, from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/all-countries-should-respect-each-others-sovereignty-xi/article18451019.ece>
- Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank. (2021). *Our Projects*. Retrieved October 24, 2021, from Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank: [https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/list/year/All/member/India/sector/All/financing\\_type/All/status/Approved](https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/list/year/All/member/India/sector/All/financing_type/All/status/Approved)

- Bandyopadhyaya, J. (1977). The Non-Aligned Movement and International Relations. *India Quarterly*, 33(2), 137-164.
- Baral, L. S.(1981). Nepal and Non-Alignment. *International Studies*, 257-272.
- Baral, L.R. (1982). Nepal in the Non-aligned Movement. In Govind R. Agrawal and Jai P. Rana (Eds.) *Nepal and Non-Alignment*. Center for Economic Development and Administration
- Bhardwaj, A. (2020). Modi's Multi-alignment and Nehru's Non-alignment. *Strategic Affairs*, 55(4).
- Bhattarai, G. (2020). What Does Sino-Indian Dispute Mean for Nepal. *E-International Relations*
- Dargupta, C. (2016). "A Brief Hisotry of Panchsheel". *Economic and Political Weekly*
- Dinkel, J. (2019). *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)*. Leiden: Brill Publishing House.
- Englishman (1903). " The Tibetan Question". No. 18
- Foreign Ministry Archives Nepal (FMAN). A Copy of Tibetan- Chinese Agreement dated 6th day of the 11th month of Water Mouse Year (December 14, 1912). See, E 10 Poka No.3
- Foreign Secret E. Consultations. (1908). No. 144, September 1908 NAI
- Foreign Secret E. Consultations. (1910). Memorandum of Papers Forwarded to India Office with Foreign Secret Weekly Letter. No. 43 M. October 21, 1904
- Hall, I. (2016). Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi. *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 105(3), 271-286.
- Hilali, A. Z. (2001). India's Strategic Thinking and Its National Security Policy. *Asian Survey*, 41(5), 737-764.
- Jürgen Dinkel. (2019). *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)*. Leiden: Brill Publication.
- Keethaponcalan, S. I. (2016). Reshaping the Non-Aligned Movement: challenges and vision. Bandung: *Journal of the Global South*, 3(4). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40728-016-0032-3>
- Khanal, Y.N. (1982). *Nepal and Non-Alignment*. In Govinda R. Agrwal and Jai P.Rana( Eds).Nepal and Non-alignment. Centre for Economic Development and Administration, July 1-2
- Kissinger, H. (2014). *World Order*. Penguin Books
- Korybko, A. (2021, May 1). *India's Multi-Alignment Strategy Requires Recalibration and Clarification*. Retrieved from The Wire: <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/indias-multi-alignment-strategy-us-russia-china-pakistan-quad-rcep>
- Krause, V., & Singer, J. D. (2001). Minor Powers, Alliances, and Armed Conflict: Some Preliminary Patterns. In E. Reiter, & H. Gärtner (Eds.), *Small States and Alliances* (pp. 15-25). New York: Physica-Verlag Heidelberg.
- Krishnan, A. (2014, June 24). *In China's new diplomacy, a revival of 'Panchsheel'*. Retrieved from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/In-China%E2%80%99s-new-diplomacy-a-revival-of-%E2%80%98Panchsheel%E2%80%99/article11625142.ece>

- Krishnan, A. (2021, October 13). *India's Trade with China set to exceed \$100 billion in 2021*. Retrieved October 14, 2021, from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/business/indias-trade-with-china-set-to-exceed-100-billion-in-2021/article36991136.ece>
- Krishnankutty, P., & Shukla, S. (2020, June 16). *1954 Panchsheel pact to Galwan Valley 'violence' – India-China relations in last 7 decades*. Retrieved November 10, 2020, from The Print: <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/1954-panchsheel-pact-to-galwan-valley-violence-india-china-relations-in-last-7-decades/442810/>
- Lohani, M. (1982). *Nepal and Non-Alignment: Its Economic Dimensions*. In Govind R. Agrawal and Jai P. Rana (Eds.). *Nepal and Non-Alignment*
- Maniruzzaman, T. (1982). *The Security of Small States in the Third World*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Menon, S. (2021). *India and Asian Geopolitics*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). *Nepal's Foreign Policy-2077*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). *Report on Nepal's Foreign Affairs (2019-2020)*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC. (2021, July 25). *Joint Press Release of the 3rd Round of China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue*. Retrieved November 07, 2021, from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1895072.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1895072.shtml)
- Narayanan, M. K. (2016, January 5). *Non-alignment to multi-alignment*. Retrieved from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indian-diplomacy-non-alignment-to-multi-alignment/article13982580.ece>
- Reserve Bank of India. (2021, July 15). *State of Economy*. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from Reserve Bank of India: [https://m.rbi.org.in/scripts/BS\\_ViewBulletin.aspx?Id=20377](https://m.rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_ViewBulletin.aspx?Id=20377)
- Rose, L. E. (1971). *Nepal Strategy for Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Rose, L.E., & Scholz, J.T.(1980). *Nepal, Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*. Westview Press, pp.121-123
- Rothstein, R. L. (1968). *Alliances and Small Powers*. New York: Colombia University Press.
- Scott, D. (2016). *Buddhism in Current China-India Diplomacy*. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. Sage Publications. HYPERLINK “<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F186810261604500305>” <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261604500305>
- Sebastian, B. (2021, June 9). *India's multi-alignment: the origins, the past, and the present*. Retrieved from Modern Diplomacy: <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2021/06/09/indias-multi-alignment-the-origins-the-past-and-the-present/>
- Shah, B. B. (1973). Address by His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev to Fourth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations. In *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages* (p. 38). Kathmandu: Ministry of Communication.
- Shah, B.B. (1975). Speech Delivered during the Coronation Ceremony on Feb 25, 1975
- Siqi, C., Xin, L., & Yunyi, B. (2021, October 15). *MoU on China-Bhutan boundary talks 'breaks deadlock*



- caused by India, paves way for diplomatic ties*'. Retrieved October 17, 2021, from Global Times: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1236425.shtml>
- Strydom, H. (2007). The Non-Aligned Movement and the Reform of International Relations. In *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* (pp. 1-46). *The Statesman*. (1954, June 18). King Tribhuvan's Speech.
- Tellis, A. J. (2021). *Non-Allied Forever: India's Grand Strategy According to Subrahmanyam Jaishankar*. New Delhi: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Thapa, S.B. (1982). Inaugural Statement at the Seminar on "Nepal and Non-alignment". Centre for Economic Development and Administration, July 1-2
- The Indian Express. (2021, February 20). *AIIB to provide \$5 billion for projects in India in next 2 years*: DJ Pandian. Retrieved from The Indian Express: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/aiib-to-provide-5-billion-for-projects-in-india-in-next-2-years-dj-pandian-7196340/>
- Trading Economics. (2021, September). *India Imports from China*. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from Trading Economics: <https://tradingeconomics.com/india/imports-from-china>
- Uprety, P. (1982). Nepali Non-Alignment: A Historical Perspective of "Positive Neutralism" In Govind R. Agrawal(Eds), *Nepali Non-Alignment: A Historical Perspective of "Positive Neutralism"*
- Vital, D. (1967). *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Wajid Ali, H. M. (2004). *India and the Non-Aligned Movement*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors.

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Bhattarai, G. Pulami. M. J. (2022) "MadhyamaPratipad:Nepal's Middle Path Ambition through Non-alignment"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44024>



# Rishikesh Shaha: A Historical Perspective

---

Jayaraj Acharya\*

---

## Background

We must reflect upon the historical background of Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy, particularly at the United Nations (UN), to properly understand Rishikesh Sahah (1925-2002) as a diplomat and politician. Shaha's main contribution of public interest is related mainly to his role as Nepal's permanent representative at the United Nations.

During the Rana period, Nepal had the policy of keeping the country isolated from the rest of the world for fear of meddling by the British. Janga Bahadur, the first Rana Prime Minister, had himself led the troops to assist the British colonialists in India to quell the police munity of 1857 and firmly expressed his assurance that there was no need for them to enter Nepal for any reason as they could benefit from Nepal without the need to colonize the country. Both the Ranas and the British colonial rulers in India had a common interest in keeping Nepal isolated from others but in close contact with British India for their own reasons.

It is said that Nepal lost a total of about 60,000 soldiers in World War I and II. But, even as a sovereign independent state, Nepal did not participate in the San Francisco conference in 1945 to draft the Charter of the United Nations although it could have legitimately participated and become one of the founding members of the world organization. It was a missed opportunity.

## Nepal at the UN

In view of the new international situation after the Second World War, particularly the impending independence of India in 1947, Nepal applied for the membership of the UN in 1947, which it was unable to secure owing to the Cold War politics. According to Shaha, Nepal's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1956-1960),

“In 1947, even the question of Nepal's admission to the United Nations became a part of the greater Cold War issue which completely dominated the thinking of great powers at the time. However, in December 1955, eight years after she first applied for membership, Nepal was admitted to the United Nations with twelve other countries as a result of the so-called ‘package deal’. Even the Soviet Union, which had doomed Nepal's previous membership application

---

\* Former Permanent Representative to the United Nations From 1991 to 1994.

by veto in the Security Council, made it clear that she had had no objection individually to the admission of Nepal. Her objection had been that other similarly qualified countries were not allowed membership.” (Shaha, 1978:148).<sup>1</sup>

Nepal had three main objectives for membership in the world organization. Firstly, Nepal wanted to leave the era of isolationism that kept the country almost unknown to the international community for a century despite its active involvement in the two world wars. Secondly, Nepal wanted to project its image as an independent sovereign nation especially in the context where it looked as if it was a part of India during the British colonial rule. So, Nepal, and its nationalistic and proud people, wanted to dispel any doubt about its independence. Thirdly, Nepal wanted to play a role in its own modest capacity to build its image as a responsible member of international community through the UN, which it did.

**Shaha’s Education and career.** Rishikesh Shaha was born in a noble family on 26 May, 1925 as the first son of Raja Tarak Bahadur Shaha and Madan Dibyeshwari Shaha (daughter



*Photo Credit, The White House Photo*

*Rishikesh Shaha, the first Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN and first resident Ambassador to the United States, with President John F Kennedy at the White House*

<sup>1</sup> Nepal was admitted as member of the UN together with Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Libya, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sri Lanka (Ceylon at that time)– all on the same date (14 December 1955).

of Pratap Shamsher Rana) in Tansen, a hill city in Palpa district. Tarak Bahadur was a descendant of a Raja or chieftain of a principality of Bhirkot (now a village in Syangja district) in central Nepal. Educated in Kathmandu and Calcutta, Shaha had a bachelor's degree and was rewarded with a job as an aide to his father-in-law Pratap Shamsher Rana, the Bada Hakim (Chief Administrator) of that region.

Shaha's family was well-off thanks to its relationship with the ruling Ranas that helped him get a good education in Darjeeling, India. After completing high school, Shaha returned to Kathmandu in 1939 and pursued an intermediate degree in humanities at Tri-Chandra College, Kathmandu, and later obtained a B. A. degree from Calcutta, India. He obtained his M. A. degree in English from Patna University in 1945 and began teaching English and Nepali at Tri-Chandra College. He was married to Siddhanta Rana in 1946 and his only son Shri Prakash was born in 1948.

Shaha discontinued teaching and was appointed as the Chief Inspector of Schools, which he also left to begin his political career as a founding member of Nepali Democratic Congress. He was also one of the founding members of Nepal Council of World Affairs in 1948. Shaha was nominated as the leader of opposition in the First Advisory Council (a nominated legislature formed by King Tribhuvan) in 1950-1952. He served as General Secretary of Nepali Democratic Congress in 1953-1955.

**Ambassador to USA and the UN.** Shaha was appointed as the first resident ambassador to the United States and the permanent representative to the UN by King Mahendra in October 1956. He served in the capacity until December 1960. Just as Shaha began his tenure at the UN activities in 1956 he was required to engage on issues such as the Suez Crisis and the Soviet action in Hungary. Probably, nothing can be a more vivid and honest description of Nepal's initial exposure to, and its position on the serious issues of the day at the UN than the autobiographical reminiscence of Rishikesh Shaha himself. His meeting with Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld was scheduled at 2:30 p.m. the same day of his arrival in New York. Shaha (1997:3-5) wrote:

The secretary general received me informally in his office on the 38th floor of the UN Building and told me that I could not have arrived at more exciting time! He sent for the UN chief of protocol and the formality of submitting my credentials was soon dispensed with. Immediately after this, we went to attend the Security Council meeting which had been called to deal with the Suez flare-up triggered by the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt.

Great Britain and France, two of the major world powers and permanent members of the Security Council, clearly seemed to be on the defensive. Arab countries, which had sought permission to be heard at the Security Council meeting, took turns in castigating Israel (for providing the pretext for intervention), Britain and France for intervention. Britain and France pleaded that they had only resorted to armed intervention to prevent the two warring sides – Egypt and Israel – from fighting each other, and claimed that by their bold action they merely sought to promote the UN goal of stopping war and promoting peace. The pleas of Great Britain and France did not seem to cut ice with either of the superpowers.

That very evening, a major issue related to the holding of the immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of the invading troops under the UN supervision came up for a vote. I had the privilege of seeing the US and USSR representatives raising their hands on the same side of the issue, a memorable sight, which even the old-timers at the UN had seldom before witnessed.

Because Great Britain and France had used their veto, the Security Council became paralyzed. With the failure of the Security Council to take action in the urgent matter, Secretary General Hammarskjold elected to convene the first emergency special session of the General Assembly. Under the procedure provided for by the famous “Uniting for Peace Resolution”, adopted in 1950, during the Korean crisis, matter for war and peace could be referred to the General Assembly for action if the Security Council could not reach a decision on them. The secretary general’s initiative received a good deal of criticism but was entirely justified by the concrete results it produced in the end.”

The purpose of quoting such a long passage from Shaha is to show not only how quick, efficient, and principled the action taken by its illustrious Secretary General was, but also how Nepal’s fresh new Ambassador was, upon arrival, exposed to very serious and historically significant issues and had to take a decision of vote on them. To explain this point further and reinforce its implication Shaha (1997:6-7) wrote:

“The first emergency special session of the UN General Assembly convened the next day to consider the Suez crisis. It was followed by a second emergency session called to deal with the armed Soviet intervention in Hungary. We had to cope simultaneously with the two emergency special sessions. And there we were a two-man Nepali delegation with no previous experience with the work of the UN or in that of any diplomatic mission; with no office, no secretaries no typists and no means of communicating with our government except through letters and telegrams. All that I can say now is that we survived the ordeal. We made our statements on behalf of the government of Nepal like representatives of other like-minded governments did condemning the Anglo-French-Israeli armed intervention in Egypt and the Soviet armed intervention in Hungary. But I got into trouble with both my home government and my Indian friends when I chose to vote for the U. S. resolution condemning Soviet armed intervention in Hungary. Although India abstained from the vote, Burma and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) went along with me in voting for the U. S. resolution. My explanation of my vote gained publicity for Nepal, and the other powers saw that even India could not always take Nepal for granted. My statement was brief and merely explained that our vote was guided by the consideration that what had happened in Hungary might happen to other countries, including my own.”

Shaha had begun his statement on the Hungary issues in the following way:

“We know that the United Nations remains yet to be perfected as an instrument of protecting legitimate freedom and the interests of the small nations against being encroached upon by the





mighty and the rich. But however imperfect an instrument the United Nations may be, for this purpose it is the only one to which small nations like mine can have recourse in their times of their trial and distress. The price that Hungary had to pay for the profession of her neutrality and freedom had yet, in another way, a special significance and meaning to a country like mine that believes in a policy of non-alignment and no military pacts of any kind and seeks to pursue an independent foreign policy of judging every international issue on its merit, without committing itself beforehand to any course of action for or against anyone.” (8 December, 1959.)

This statement had articulated the most notable points of Nepal’s foreign policy: (1) Nepal’s faith in the UN, (2) freedom and security of small nations like Nepal, and (3) non-alignment and its meaning, namely, “judging every international issue on its merit, without committing itself beforehand to any course of action for or against anyone.” What is notable is that Shaha was espousing the policy of non-alignment in 1959, well before the first summit of the group of countries that was held in 1961.

The two long excerpts from Shaha clearly indicate that those early votes on very serious international issues had most reasonably set the tone of Nepal’s diplomatic behavior at the UN for the days to come. Thus, Nepal had established its independent and impartial image that earned it high respect from the international community. This was further proven by the fact that Shaha was asked to chair the international commission appointed by the UN General Assembly in 1961 to investigate the circumstances of the death of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. Shaha (1997:7) wrote,

“I am glad that for the duration of my active association with the UN from 1956 through 1960 it continued its vigorous and dynamic role in world politics under a very able and dedicated secretary general who had a rare combination of qualities: the practical skill and efficiency of an administrator; the moral courage of a philosopher; the restraint and a vision of a statesman; and the imagination of a poet.”

Shaha was widely recognized for having done a good job at the UN. The TIME magazine on its 24 October, 1960 issue wrote the following:

“The year 1960 may come to be known as the year neutralism became respectable.... The Big Five of neutralism – Tito of Yugoslavia, Nehru of India, Nkruma of Ghana, Nasser of Egypt, and Sukarno of Indonesia – are magnetic, colorful, and messianic personalities, but too much so. The most effective work has been done by second-echelon diplomats: men like Burma’s U Thant, Nepal’s Rishikesh Shaha and Tunisia’s Mongi Slim.”

Shaha has also recounted some of his experience after he was stabbed by hoodlums in New York’s Central Park, and had to be hospitalized for two weeks. According to him, the incident had put him on the front page of New York Times. He jokingly said, “I got more publicity from this incident than any other activity at the UN.” US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles flew to New York to visit Shaha in the hospital and, of course, the Mayor of the city, Robert Wagner also came to see him and apologized for the unfortunate incident.

Shaha’s another memorable experience was his spirited exchange with Nikita Khrushchev who had banged the desk of his UN seat with his shoe. It was not an act that behoved of a

leader of such a great nation as the Soviet Union, nor was it appropriate to the decorum of the meeting of an august world body such as the UN (Shaha, 1997:15-21). Shaha had spoken against the unruly behavior. On serious questions such as the three Secretary Generals at the UN, as proposed by the Soviet Union, Shaha expressed Nepal's reservation saying it was an impractical proposition. Khrushchev did not like Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold but Shaha defended him as no one else could have done a better job in the given situation.

On the question of decolonization, Khrushchev wanted to present a resolution in his name, but Shaha told him that there was no system of passing a resolution at the UN in the name of a 'person' although the idea of defoliation was welcomed by everyone if it came on behalf of a 'state'. He was furious with Shaha but B. P. Koirala later told Khrushchev that whatever the Nepali diplomat was saying was according to the policy of the Government of Nepal.

**Subsequent political and academic activities.** When King Mahendra took over all powers from the government, imprisoned all political leaders, dissolved the parliament and banned political parties on 15 December, 1960, Shaha was asked to return and was appointed as Minister of Finance. Later in May 1962 he was appointed as Chairman of the Royal Commission to draft a constitution along the lines approved by the King. He had also served briefly as minister of foreign affairs from July 1, 1962 for about three months. In September 1962 he visited New Delhi and spent two weeks meeting with Prime Minister Nehru and other leaders of India to try to ease tensions in Nepal-India relations at the wake of King Mahendra's dissolution of elected parliament and the subsequent raids in the Tarai districts by Nepali Congress volunteers.

Upon his return from India, Shaha was relieved of his position as foreign minister. Next, he was appointed as special ambassador with ministerial rank and sent to the UN General Assembly as the leader of Nepali delegation in 1962. On this trip, he also went to Washington D. C. to meet with President Kennedy and his special assistant McGeorge Bundy and requested them to urge moderation on Prime Minister Nehru.

As Shaha was returning to Kathmandu via New Delhi, the Sino-Indian border clash had already taken place (October 20-November 21, 1962). In this new context, he found that his Indian friends were very eager to offer assurances that King Mahendra wanted from India. Nepal was passing through a difficult situation in its relations with its immediate neighbors at that time. So, Shaha visited China, starting on 22 November. There, he was told by Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Marshal Chen Yi that "China wanted Nepal to be friendly with India without being hostile to China." Thereafter, Shaha was appointed as member of the Raj Sabha (Royal Council) on 2 April, 1963 by King Mahendra. He resigned from the position and was appointed as Chairman of the Raj Sabha Sthayi Parishad (Standing Committee of Royal Council) for the period 1963-1964.

Thereafter, with no government responsibilities, Shaha took to academic work for a year and was a Senior Fellow at East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii in 1965-1966. He wrote the first draft of his book, *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect* there. Shaha participated in the Conference of South and South-East Asian experts on International Law held in Hong

Kong in 1964 and 1967. He also participated in the regional conference of the International Commission of Jurists in September 1968 in Bangalore.

Shaha returned to active politics and contested in the election to the Rashtriya Panchayat (National Assembly) from the Graduates' Constituency in 1967 and served as a member until 1971. Even as a member of the National Assembly, he was imprisoned under the Security Act during 1969-70 for his statements in favor of freedom of speech and peaceful assembly as fundamental human rights of the people. He had pleaded for his own defense at the Supreme Court. His statement in the Court was published as a booklet entitled सार्वजनिक सुरक्षा कानून र बन्दीप्रत्यक्षीकरण. Upon release, he took to the academic world again and was a visiting professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1971.

Shaha was Chairman of Nepal Council of World Affairs (NCWA) in 1973, of which he was a founding member since 1948. He was also Chairman of Amnesty International Nepal Chapter in 1973-76. At the time he was also Founding Chairman of Nepal Wildlife Conservation Trust. In 1974, however, he was arrested and imprisoned on treason charges. Upon release, he served as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D. C. in 1975, when he refined his draft of *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect*, the first edition of which was published in 1975 and the second in 1978.

Shaha continued to be active in politics. Even though King Birendra had organized a national referendum in 1980 and the results had favored the continuation of the party-less Panchayat system, Shaha founded in 1982 an organization named Rastriya Lokatantrik Samajvadi Sammelan that was like a political forum, and called for the restoration of (multi-party) democracy in the country. He was arrested on charge of organizing a political party by the Bagmati Zonal Court, and again under the Security Act and released in May 1989. When the multi-party democracy was finally restored in 1990 following nation-wide protests, Shaha formed a 71-Member National Task Force to make the general elections independent and impartial on April 1, 1991. He was also chair of Human Rights Organization, Nepal (HURON).

Shaha was decorated with Gorkha Dakshin Bahu I and Trishakti Patta I by King Mahendra. Having traveled to many countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America on diplomatic missions and for research, Shaha participated in many regional and international conferences as well.

**Shaha's publications.** Rishikesh Shaha was a scholar and prolific writer on history, politics, and foreign relations of Nepal. Some of his publications are listed below.

- *Nepal and the World*, Kathmandu: Nepali Congress, with the foreword by B. P. Koirala. 1955.
- *Heroes and Builders of Nepal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- पद्मपुष्पाञ्जली (विश्वकविताका नमुना); काठमाडौं: श्रीमती सिद्धान्त शाह, वि. सं. २०२१।
- सार्वजनिक सुरक्षा कानून र बन्दीप्रत्यक्षीकरण, काठमाडौं: लेखक स्वयम्, सन् १९६९।
- *Notes on Hunting and Wildlife Conservation in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Mrs. Siddhanta Shaha, 1970; 2nd ed. New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 2001.
- इकबाल र नजरूल: एक परिचय, काठमाडौं: पाकिस्तानको दूतावासद्वारा प्रकाशित, सन् १९७१।
- *Introduction to Nepal*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, First ed. 1975; 2nd ed. 2001.

- *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. First ed. 1975; 2nd ed. 1978.
- *Essays in the Practice of Government in Nepal*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982.
- *Three Decades and Two Kings: Eclipse of Nepal's Partyless Monarchic Rule*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited. 1990.
- *Politics in Nepal: Referendum Stalemate and Triumph of People Power*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1990.
- *Modern Nepal* (2 Vols.), New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1990, (Reprinted 1996).
- *Human Rights and Parliamentary Practices in Nepal: DREFDEN Paper III*, Kathmandu: Development Research for a Democratic Nepal (DREFDEN). 1995.
- *New Directions in Nepal-Indian Relations*, New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 1995.
- *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1997.
- *Looking back at my own Career: Autobiography*, Kathmandu: Pilgrims Books House, 1997.

Besides, Shaha published dozens of articles in newspapers and journals in Nepal, India, and USA. He also participated in many international organizations and delivered lectures at various forums. However, his role in the United Nations was probably the most important highlight of his diplomatic career.

### Select Bibliography

- Acharya, Jayaraj. *Nepal's Foreign Policy: A Reflection*, Kathmandu: Sopan Publications.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . 2059 V. S. (2001 AD). *Yadunath Khanal: Jivani ra Vichar* (in Nepali) (*Yadunath Khanal Life and Thought*), Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan.
- Hamal, Yagya Bahadur, 2003. *Ecology of Nepal's Foreign Policy*, Kathmandu: Mrs. Rita Hamal.
- Khanal, Yadu Nath. 1996. *Nepal after Democratic Restoration*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Lohani, Mohan and Dambar Bir Thapa, (eds.) 1996. *Nepal and the United Nations: 1956-1996*, Kathmandu: United Nations Association of Nepal.
- Mishra, Navin. 1990. *Nepal and the United Nations*. Patna: Janaki Prakashan.
- Rose, Leo E. 1970. *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, New Delhi: Oxford University press.
- Shaha, Rishikesh. 1978. *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . 1997. *Looking Back at My Own Career: Autobiography*, New Delhi: Book Faith India.
- Shrestha, Sita. 1974. *Nepal and the United Nations*, New Delhi: Sindhu Publications Ltd.
- United Nations. 1995. *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, New York: United Nations Department of Public Information.
- United Nations Association of Nepal. 1970. *Nepal and United Nations*. Kathmandu: United Nations Association of Nepal.

#### Access this article online

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Acharya. J. (2022) "RishikeshShah: A Historical Perspective"

Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1

DOI: <https://doi.org/110.3126/jofa.v2i01.44025>

# WHY IS NEPAL POLITICALLY SO UNSTABLE?

## Deconstructing the Instability Conundrum through Cross-Country Comparison

---

*Anand Aditya*

---

*History is the record of the crimes and follies of mankind.*

*Eric Hobsbawm<sup>1</sup>*

*If you allow anyone to stoke up a boiler until the stem-pressure rises beyond danger-point, the real responsibility for any resultant explosion will lie with you.*

*B. H. Liddell Hart<sup>2</sup>*

*Stability... has commonly resulted not from a quest for peace but from a generally accepted legitimacy..., (meaning) an international agreement about the nature of workable arrangements and about permissible aims and methods of foreign policy.*

*H. Kissinger 1964<sup>3</sup>*

### 1. SETTING

Why is Nepal always unstable?

Can instability be foreseen?

And, is it possible to stabilize a political order?

These were some of the curiosities Silwal's volume<sup>4</sup> raised in this observer's mind when Ukraine's fratricidal war and its troubling similarity with the turmoil unleashed by the melodrama of the Millennium Challenge Corporation in our sharply divided nation is not only evoking the fears of a second Cold War in Nepal's neighborhood, but for many people, the rumblings of a third World War, too, are now neither too far, nor too faint to hear.

As a malady familiar to the layfolk and the learned alike, instability is not of mere academic interest. In Nepal's context, the ignorance, or rather the sheer inability to attend to the problem, has often aborted both democratization and development, derailing quite a few plans and policies of crucial natural significance. The scope that a cross-country approach to the hermeneutics of political instability that a cross-country approach could unfold remains almost a *terra nova*.

If one objective behind this study is therefore to understand what political instability is, whether it is a conundrum as the General claims, another one is to see where Nepal stands compared to other countries of the world, for which purpose a political stability index is proposed as a composite of ten variables, adopting the empirical approach in a comparative frame.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hobsbawm 1995, 584.

<sup>2</sup> Hart 1970/2014.

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger 1949, 818.

<sup>4</sup> Silwal 2021.

Comparison was chosen as a method here not only because it brings order into the diversity of information available, throwing up new possibilities for exploring, but also because it facilitates prediction.<sup>5</sup> As an engine of knowledge, international comparison increases tenfold the possibility of explaining political phenomena, say Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy.<sup>6</sup>

Divided into seven parts, the first section of the exercise introduces the theme undertaking a review of General Silwal's volume. Section 2 tries to explain political instability prior to a summary review of the literature in Section 3. The next section (4th) deals with the dilemmas arising in the course of making decisions in situations of political instability setting forth hypotheses. The fifth section formulates a Political Instability Index as a proxy indicator before appraising Nepal's case in Section 6 that also suggests measures to stabilize its politics. Section seven then rounds up the discussion.

### **1.1 Conundrum or Syndrome?**

The dominant discourse on political instability remains focused on the theme as a consequence of causes whose relationship to each other as also to political instability as a dependent variable, that is, the effect, has often been explored, but the impact it brings on the political order of the day or later, as an independent and intervening variable, remains inadequately explored. As far as Nepal is concerned, political instability is a virgin area approached only peripherally or sporadically. Given the scarcity of material available, it will be hard to ignore the utility of General Silwal's volume, or the background the author brings to bear on the issue.

As a senior professional soldier of Nepal Army and as a ringside witness to five successive phases of Nepal's political transition—Panchayat, the Twin Pillar Days, Maoist Insurgency, absolute Monarchy, and Federal Republic—the author writes on the issues with an authenticity missing from many others sans his experience of three decades and a half of training.

By choosing a theme for his volume which now is of concern virtually to everyone here, but whose murky depths few have dared to delve into, the General tries to push the issue to the center of the nation's debate, forwarding stability as a conundrum that, however, is likely to raise no few eyebrows.

A "syndrome" says the Webster's Dictionary, is "a group of symptoms that together are characteristic of a specific disorder," "a group of related or coincident things, events,"... "the pattern of symptoms that indicate a particular social condition," (and) "a predictable pattern of behavior that tends to occur under certain circumstances."<sup>7</sup>

The Oxford Dictionary lists out a similar set of features to define syndrome as "a way of behaving that is typical of a particular type of... social problem" (and) "a set of physical conditions that show you have a particular disease or medical problem."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Burnham et al. 2004, 68-70.

<sup>6</sup> Dogan and Pelassy 1984, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. (New York: Random House, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Ed., A.S. Hornby, Oxford University Press, 2015.



A conundrum, the same two dictionaries define as a riddle, something puzzling or enigmatic. As far as political instability is concerned, however, it is neither an enigma nor a puzzle beyond comprehension. It, rather, is a political malady diagnosed and explained by scholars from Claude Ake and David E. Apter to Edward Shils and Thomas J. Volgy. The real issue thus is not explication of the malady, but the tendency to procrastinate the problem. Definition-wise, political instability can be regarded as the pathological state of a political system which fits the term *syndrome* rather than *conundrum*; instead of remaining a mysterious malady, it exhibits features structurally discernible in the behavior of states like Nepal in a particular order. In Nepal's case, it has been congenital – almost since the day the state was born, the problem started; *geophysical* in base; *multi-form* in shape; *chronic* timewise; *progressive* in nature; *cumulative* in impact; and *metastatic* in its mode of evolution. The last three characteristics also render the malady pervasive, and often so disruptive and so wide ranging that, left unaddressed for long, it has now become a regional, even universal issue. Except for a few fortunate states, most of the states on the world's map are already in its firm grip.

In his maiden debut, certainly not everything the author dishes out is entirely new; much of the material in the text is based on the past political history of this land that could taste bland to anyone familiar with it, yet the author also invigorates his analysis with fresh materials to illuminate various aspects of the episodes to show how they have made Nepal's politics fragile and unstable.

But so much has already been written about Nepal's politics at home as well as abroad that a heavy burden falls on the shoulders of those who venture to strike a new path or believe they have something new to say. Wading into the drama of the high politics of this land as it lurched from one phase of political instability to another, the reader will find a rich vein of expositions and evidence marshaled by the author to boost up his arguments that make it a handy reference to consult and critique.

Offering **Prithivian Trinity**, a combination of three elements—Leadership, Peasants, and the Military—as the Foundation of Nepal's national unity, power, security, and stability, the General argues, the failure to apply the principle to deter external interference and aggression has made Nepal the most unstable country in the region.<sup>9</sup> Despite the inconsistency in the use of pronominal terms for concepts like 'state' and 'nation'<sup>10</sup> Silwal keeps the terms *Security* (Surakshya), and *Defense* (Pratirakshya) apart which often get mixed up in everyday parlance.<sup>11</sup> A set of figures and tables also elucidate the ideas used in the book.<sup>12</sup> All this apart, the four premises the author forwards and of particular relevance to our discussion are:

One: External players *always* (stress added) backed the opposition powers during all political changes.<sup>13</sup>

Two: External political support hardly came for the system's stability.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Silwal 2021, 142, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 306, 327.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 47, footnote 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 85, 89, 93, 200, 203.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 37.

Three: The Rana regime shifted its focus from the security of the state to the security of the regime.<sup>15</sup>

Four: A state facing a traditional external military challenge is likely to have a stable civil-military relationship (CMR) and a state facing a traditional internal military challenge an unstable CMR.<sup>16</sup>

Arguments can be made to support as well as to refute the first three statements, depending upon the interpretation one makes of stability (short-term or long-term), the player's intent, and the context. Britain, for instance, sent its delegation in 1950 to support the Rana regime, on the eve of the Nepali Congress uprising in 1950. One motive behind the Nehru government's support for the movement for democracy in 1950 was to forestall possible destabilization in the Himalayan region after the communist takeover of China in 1949.<sup>17</sup> And, in a longer time frame, the security of the ruling Rana regime was also in a certain sense stabilizing the state in a fast changing security environment of the subcontinent where Nepal's political order remained probably the most enduring one, albeit it also jeopardized Nepal's democracy and development for a whole century.

That the author refers to instability or its cognate terms nineteen times in the seven-paragraphed preface indicates the importance he gives to the issue in order to affirm that instability is the main hurdle in advancing the nation's interests. He examines the 'conundrum' through five lenses – a conceptual frame, political culture, civil-military relations, the state's response to internal insurgency and external interference, organized into five chapters apart from two others – introduction as a background and the last one as a summary of the discussion in terms of change, continuity, and prospects.

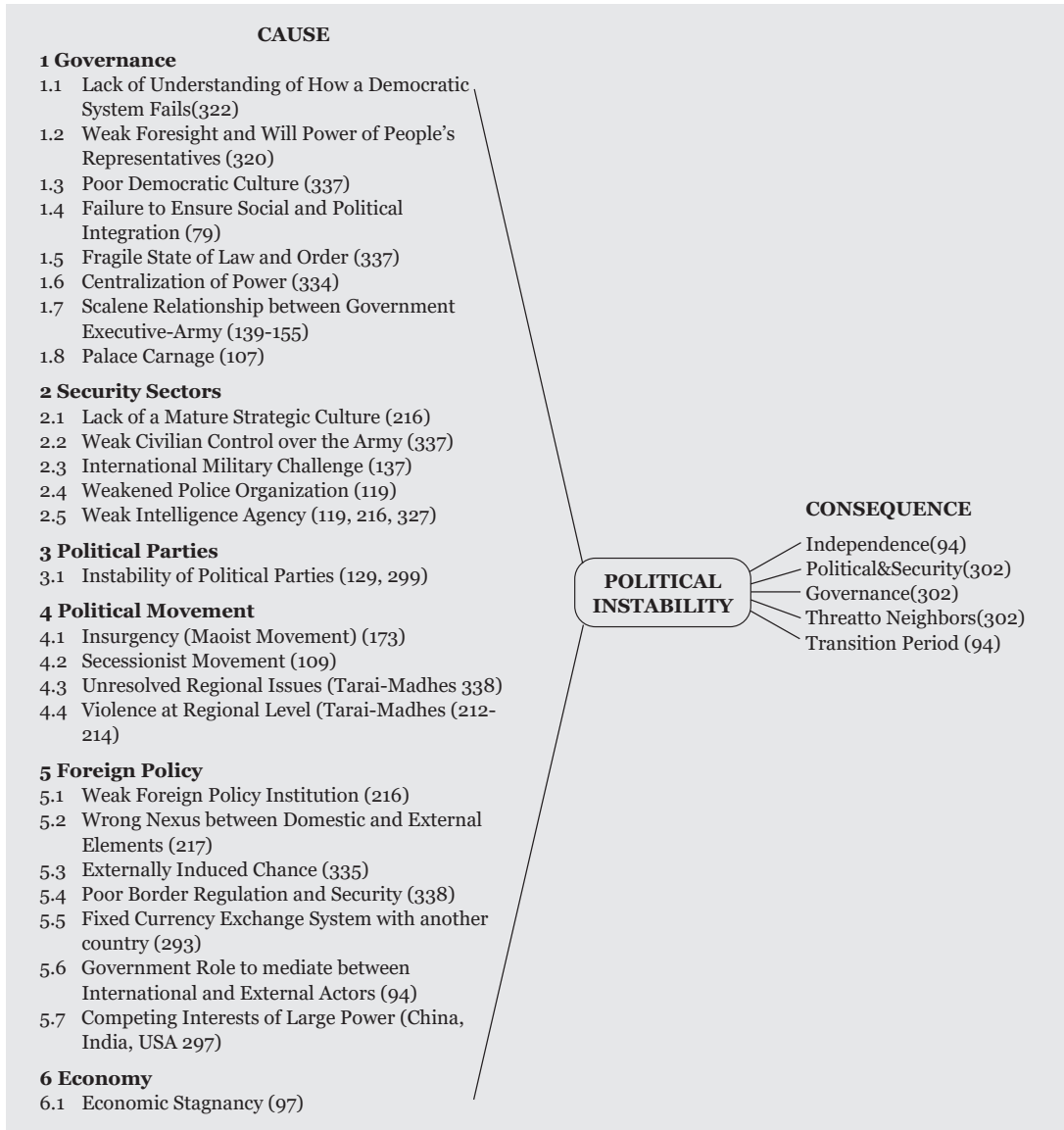
The author spares no pains to sustain his premise on political instability as the consequence of a whole set of factors, a view offered in multiple contexts. Distilling his explication of stability and its inverse instability, Figure 1 sums up the author's discussion on the central motif of the volume as a set of 26 dependent variables subdivided into six sectors and another set of five independent variables that explain the role of political instability as a cause as well as a consequence.

For the reader's convenience, the causes of political instability in Nepal in the figure have been grouped here under six dimensions—Governance, Security, Political Sector, Political Parties, Political Movement, Foreign Policy, and Economy, although some of the variables may overlap (variable 5.5, for instance, could belong also to Economy, or the case of variables 5.2 and 5.6). Governance with eight variables, and Foreign Policy with seven can be regarded as the most consequential in impacting upon political instability as a cause, followed by security (five) and political movement (four).

<sup>15</sup> See, in this context, Sam Cowan: "Nepali politicians of all shades, were like Ranas prioritizing personal and regime interests over nations." Cowan 2018, 245.

<sup>16</sup> Desch, M. C. 'Threat environment and military mission,' in L. Diamond and M. F. Platino (Eds.), *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (London: John Hopkins Press, 1996), cited by the author, 137.

<sup>17</sup> John Whelpton believes Nehru tried to counter China's advance into Tibet with the strategy of holding stable Nepal as a buffer. Whelpton 2013, 47.



**Fig. 1 Political Instability as a dependent and independent variable**

*(The figures in parentheses stand for page numbers of the book where the citation occurs.)*

Contending throughout that political instability is one key feature of Nepal’s politics, the General also claims that it has become “the new normal since the 1950s” (p.329). Has it? One group of observers, for instance, notes that the death of King Prithvi in 1779 AD [sic] was followed by political instability in the royal court of Nepal<sup>18</sup> and since then the series of coups, carnages, and takeovers that followed offer ample evidence to tell us otherwise.

<sup>18</sup> Borre, Panday, and Tiwari 1994, 6.

The author also believes that charismatic leadership can provide stability (pp. 82, 333, 339), but the research underway in sociology differs on this point. Doesn't an old Nepali adage remind that saplings overshadowed by giant trees hardly grow well?

Moreover, the argument advanced by the author on assimilation (p.338) offers another point to disagree. Assimilation in Nepal is an issue of hot controversy, fueling debate whose dust is yet to settle. Would the minorities yield to assimilation or would they prefer a mosaic-like model of existence? There is no dearth of views which perceive assimilation as a hegemonic design for dissolution, recalling Uma Pradhan's *Assimilation-Pluralism Paradox*,<sup>19</sup> the tension between assimilation and the demands for identity which pose no small challenges.<sup>20</sup> (Annex 1 continues the review.)

## 2. RETHINKING POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Given the sporadic nature of the debate on political instability, given the sparsity of literature in Nepal,<sup>21</sup> given, moreover, the paucity of a workable strategy on the problem most of which turn out to be palliatives rather than proactive – the need to probe it more profoundly instead of taking it epiphenomenally is hard to overstress.

There is certainly no dearth of institutions and associations, agreements and interactions, visits and relations with countries. But how often do we examine how the public attitude influences democratic stability?<sup>22</sup> The problem with us is: we don't understand the role political stability plays in institutionalizing governments and as a government we are not prepared to deal with the problem when it arrives at our door. Compared to the coverage made abroad, literature on the issue is generations behind in Nepal. While the people at large may be vaguely aware that their country is unstable, they are hardly in a position to be sure how unstable it is, whether it is moving upward or sliding downward and how it ranks on this parameter vis-a-vis other countries. Even more disconcerting is our attitude toward the problem. If Almond and Verba's claim that among all the demographic variables – sex, residence, occupation, income, or age – none compares with education in determining the political attitudes of the public is valid,<sup>23</sup> this begs the question how crucial education and civic socialization may be in attuning people's behavior toward stabilizing the political order. Also, if political participation by the mass public is related to political efficacy, as Huntington and Dominguez<sup>24</sup> contend, would their political involvement affect the image of the system? One telling indicator is the total absence of any strategy for *stabilization* of the political order. Making stabs in the dark is not going to help. Indeed, were one to chart out a stability curve over time and space with its peaks, plateaus, and troughs on a cross-country basis,

<sup>19</sup> N. Hopfburger 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Uma Pradhan 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Political instability, in general, is conspicuous by its absence from the indices of books. Among the analysts of Nepali politics, here is what Sebastian Von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Suman Pradhan have to say on the problem: "... governments during the 1990s, in particular after 1994 election, were increasingly instable [sic] – with the period of 1991-2003 seeing no less than 12 governments – a disaster that the Maoists as well as the palace readily exploited" (p. 17). That political instability is indexed only once can be taken as a rough indicator of the importance given to the issue.

<sup>22</sup> Dalton, 1998, 339. Drawing upon the 1981 World Values Study, Ronald Inglehart (1990: Chapter 1) offers evidence on congruence between political attitudes and democratic stability for a set of 22 nations.

<sup>23</sup> Almond and Verba, cited by Huntington and Dominguez in Greenstein and Polsby, Vol. 3, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 35.

it could reveal fascinating aspects of the way countries evolve politically. That nothing remotely reminiscent of such a purpose exists in the armamentarium of political tools devised in the one and half decades of this republic's existence should be a fitting comment on this gaping hole.

Also, while there is in general agreement that political instability is the mother of all instabilities—social, cultural, economic, and environmental—we have next to no idea what it is, when it starts taking its shape, how long it endures and why, and when it starts mutating into its chronic form. The capacity to learn in the context of education can play a crucial role in stabilizing political order, but this is where our political order appears to suffer from an acute deficit. That capacity, Karl Deutsch says, is two-fold: the capacity to accept information and the capacity to change behavior, both of which are a function of the amount of recommittable resources in the system.<sup>25</sup> “The hunger for stability”, says Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “is entirely natural,”<sup>26</sup> yet when the problem knocks at our door, few of us receive it with the seriousness it demands. Instability fails to draw the attention of those at the helms of power, fixated on their perks and privileges. Divided more than united, the literati fail to do anything meaningful; the glitterati, with time merely for glamor and glory, care least about it; and the large mass at the bottom of the power pyramid, stand paralyzed without a voice and vision. But bothered or not, instability affects us all, often extending over a longer stretch of time than we imagine and with consequences barely anticipated beforehand. In what follows, we, therefore, make a modest beginning to comprehend instability in Nepal's context.

### ***2.1 Issues Left Lingerin***

The complacency shown toward dynastic kleptocracies and dictatorships in Southeast Asia and the Middle East may have brought a stability of the virtual kind for a few decades, exemplified by Batista in Cuba, Noriega in Panama, and Pinochet in Chile in Latin America, but the fate of Col. Gaddafi, Hosney Mubarak, Saddam Hussain, and Osama Bin Laden in the Middle East at the onset of the Arab spring shows how illusive such stability can be. On quite a few issues, the culprit was the binary outlook of decision-makers clinging to the black and white version of truth in their hubris of power. The instability that ultimately followed was inevitable, but a predictable consequence of the confusion to discern the right from the wrong approach.

The militarized approach to democracy promotion among the host of illiberal practices initiated during President Bush's regime is one specimen of such blunder,<sup>27</sup> bred by western universalism – the belief in the universality of Western culture which Samuel F. Huntington warns, is not only false and immoral but also dangerous because he says, it can lead to a major inter-civilizational war between the core states that may bring defeat for the West.<sup>28</sup> Structural adjustment imposed on transitional economies was another failure and the huge political costs overclassification of state secrets are claiming, underscored by Oona Hathway<sup>29</sup> is a third problem. The gallery of errors and facile assumptions does not end here. Contrary to the long-held belief, the poverty of the backward regions, Davidson and Rees-Mogg claim,

<sup>25</sup> Deutsech 1987, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Schlesinger 1986 (in Foreword).

<sup>27</sup> Cooley and Nixon 2022, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Huntington 1997, 310-311.

<sup>29</sup> Hathaway, O. 2022, 89-91.

has little to do with the history of Western colonialism, nor is inequality a hindrance to growth.<sup>30</sup> Also interdependence between states, in contrast to the view that prevails, does not make the world safer, claim the Tofflers.<sup>31</sup> Even the role of market<sup>32</sup> and the IMF<sup>33</sup> is now being heavily contested. Challenging the belief that factors such as conflicts, war events, and processes like centralization of power in a state produce similar effects in institutions, Felix Gross argues they can produce different types of impacts on different types of institutions and systems, depending on the context.<sup>34</sup> Even the question whether a parliamentary system or a strong presidential government can bring greater political stability is far from settled.<sup>35</sup>

It is thus clear that the role of political instability as both a cause and consequence deserves a nuanced approach to the intricate relationships between actors, agencies, and factors not only because each relationship, as Arnold Toynbee says, is going to affect in the days ahead as never before,<sup>36</sup> but also because the relationship between the rules and roles and between rights and responsibilities, even the conventional relationship between resource use and the risks and opportunities they hide are going to be different and more complex than they have been so far.

A number of factors may thus be at work behind the elusiveness of political instability. The first one, of course, is the definitional confusion and the problem of interpretation. In this regard, Robert A. Dahl draws the reader's attention to the need to distinguish between a regime's stability and constitutional, that is systemic, stability<sup>37</sup> in terms of the ideological consensus among the ruling groups plus mass acquiescence of the underclass to the routine demands imposed by the institutions in the name of ideology.<sup>38</sup>

A second factor at play may be the difficulty of deciding the right kind of trade-off between the short-and long-term impact of a certain policy which may not be very clear at the time of decision-making. Also, what may look like a destabilizing factor in the short turn may become a stabilizing element in the long run. Let me explain from a couple of cases of history.

When the Spaniards banned human sacrifice in Mexico, an abominable practice in their eyes, but one which was playing so prominent a part in the Middle American life because, from the Aztec point of view, it was an indispensable means of keeping the universe going and hence the wicked decision to suppress the practice that could bring the universe to a full stop was a shocking abuse of the conquistadors' power. The theologies and codes of moralities of the two civilizations were poles apart and the Spanish intervention may have at first appeared as a *profoundly destabilizing* force to the Mexicans. Yet it was a case where the behaviors of the two peoples were standardized to *induce stability* in the long term on that particular issue: standardization of behaviors by the imposition of a minority conquerors' ruling on the conquered majority.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Davidson and Rees-Mogg 2000, 102, 408-409.

<sup>31</sup> Toffler, A. and N. 1993, 260-261.

<sup>32</sup> Soros 2009, XI. Soros says imposing market discipline invites instability.

<sup>33</sup> See William Easterly 2006, 218-229 on the failure of the IMF in the collapse of eight national economies.

<sup>34</sup> Gross 1966, 206.

<sup>35</sup> Goran, Court, and Mease 2005, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Cited by Robert D Kaplan 2017, 345.

<sup>37</sup> Dahl 1991, 362, footnote 7.

<sup>38</sup> Connor 1987, 110, footnote 5.

<sup>39</sup> Toynbee, 146-147.



The ban put on Sutte system by Lord William Bentick in India is another example, as also the abolition of slavery in the USA, although the protagonists of the Deorala episode (Rajasthan in India) and those who rose in rebellion to start the Civil War in America would surely disagree, however ludicrous their stand looks for a modern day critic.

The third concern is the fungible nature of the problem. In order to untangle the knot, stability in politics can be considered at five closely connected levels:

1. Micro (local) – Individual political actor and agency
2. Mini (sub-state) – Organized groups like political party
3. Meso (state) – Parliament, Judiciary, Executive, Army, Civil Society
4. Macro (Region) – Supra-state, continental, peninsular level
5. Mega (global) – Universal level

A couple of observations may help here to clarify the fungibility premise:

One: Political instability can originate at any one of these five levels.

Two: Once it starts, instability tends to spread vertically and horizontally and can persist over time.

Three: The higher the level of origin, the more sustaining it tends to become.

Four: The longer the delay in stabilization, the more complex the stabilization agenda.

## ***2.2 Stability: Virtual and Real***

Like an image in optics, stability can assume two forms – real and virtual, but whereas a virtual optical image can be easily differentiated from its real source, *virtual stability* poses a challenge, making it difficult at times for the observer to separate it from positive stability. It often manifests itself in seven different forms:

1. Mass emigration of people abroad, as in present-day Nepal, when the exodus of hundreds of youth and adults almost every day in the prime of their life makes a whole generation lost for political involvement.
2. Spectacular expansion of the administrative organ of the state when massive bureaucratization absorbs a significant part of the country's population rendering them unavailable for political activities.<sup>40</sup>
3. Growth of the size of political party membership when a considerable part of a state's population with the potential to become politically active are mobilized otherwise and coopted into ideological faith as party cadres who are scarcely available to join the public agendas of the day in a secular non-partisan way.
4. Absorption of segments of the country's ethnic groups into power elite who become apathetic and neutral in anti-regime activities – largely the Brahman, Chhetri, and Newar professional elites of the Kathmandu Valley coopted by the Shah and Rana regimes, absorbed into *chakari*, a form of institutionalized servitude.
5. Patronage, perks, pledges, and privileges conferred by the ruling parties to cadres and voters in the form of pecuniary gains and patronage politics.

---

<sup>40</sup> Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon 1980, 3.

6. Benefits and projects awarded to external agencies to placate or pacify foreign intervention as monopolies in the form of appeasement to keep them silent.
7. A regime based on hard power, fear, coercion, and pressure that paralyzes the citizens and can still the scope for overt resistance and movement.

To take the analysis further, Table 1 offers a three-fold classification of political instability – monocratic, hegemonic, and civic – along with their salient characteristics.

**Table 1. Three Kinds of Political Stability and Their Salient Features**

Variable\Kind of Stability	Monocratic Stability	Hegemonic Stability	Civic Stability
1 Nature of Rule	Absolute, Dictatorial	Oligarchy	Democracy (PR)
2 Constitution	Non-Existent or Nominally Existent	Majoritarian	Federal
3 Government Type (Nature)	Despotic-(benevolent)	Delegator	Broadly Representative
4 Role of Government	Autocratic	Selective Appointment	Republican (Inclusive)
5 Role of Political Party	Non-existent (Banned)	Pre-dominant	Regulatory
6 Command Mode	Peremptory	Control	Cooptation
7 Diplomacy	Selective	Club	Public
8 Regime Type	Survival	Subsistential	Sustainable
9 Mode of Representation	Selective	Delegator	Substantive
10 Level of Transparency	Opaque	Low	High
11 Relational Base	Closed/ based on secrecy	Semi—open	Broad, Open
12 Type of Power Used	Hard, Military, for coercion	Hard (for Pressure)	Hard, Soft, and smart
13 Level of Public Participation	Rulers	Political Elite	Citizens
14 Track Used in Agenda Building	One	Two (Ruling Elite & Professionals)	Three (Mass)
15 Regime Capability	Extractive	Extractive & Regulatory	Highly Distributive, Symbolic, Responsive
16 Rule/Policy Implementation	Low	Erratic	Regular
17 Tenorial Security (Executive)	Fragile	Low	High
18 Role of Civil Society	None (Dormant)	Accessory	Active
19 Pattern of Nationalism	Ruler, Race, Religion-region-centric	Hegemonic	Civic
20 Stake	Stakes defined & decided by rulers	Stakeholding	Public Stakebuilding
21 Predominance of Issue/ Agendas	Parochial/ Local	National	Global
22 Issue Distance	Maximum	Medium	Low
23 Scope for Conflict Crisis, violence	Dormant	Depends on the Balance of Power	Minimum
24 Efficacy (Psy)	Non	Low	High
25 Legitimacy-Ownership	Oligarchic	Power Elite & Professionals	Mass

Table: Author.

### 2.3 *The Stability-Instability Paradox*

Nepal offers a curious case of unstable politics in a relatively stable society and a comparatively resilient state that despite its whole set of crisis syndrome<sup>41</sup> and fault lines,<sup>42</sup> has survived when many others have disappeared from the map. The state and society in Nepal have survived but despite the profusion of its institutions that Alt and Alesina proclaim increase predictability, reduce uncertainty, and induce stability, the system here has become neither predictable, nor certain, nor stable, a paradox that can precipitate consequences intended as well as unintended. One intended consequence of the 2006 movement, for instance, was the abolition of Monarchy, till then regarded by nearly everyone as impossible or unlikely. The unintended consequence was the end to the dream of dictatorship of the proletariat and the steep decline of the Maoist Party.

One clue to that paradox may lie in the propensity of our planners to remain fixated with the political and economic dimension, dimensions which are essential, but far from sufficient. If *trust* and *justice* remain absent from their concern, the keys to the best policies, as Nimmo and Unga emphasize,<sup>43</sup> this would keep the door open for all forms of instability, including the political one.

In a larger regional context, the geopolitical script of the whole subcontinent began to change with the arrival of British power. After the retreat of Islam, the shift that this induced was of seismic proportions: if it destabilized the whole political order here on a peninsular pace and scale, it also stabilized it in short as well as long-term. If some of the causes are still at work, many of the consequences will take time to surface, because they operate slowly and subtly below the surface.

On a global scale, a semblance of stability did seem to persist from the late 1945's until 1985. But it is difficult to equate this period of geopolitical equilibrium with the events in the South, Latin America, and other parts of the world if one contraposes it with the hot peace that ensued in the wake of the Cold War that soon enveloped the whole world.<sup>44</sup> This may be related to another paradox Baylis, Smith, and Owens mention: the belief that stability at the level of nuclear war would lead to instability at lower levels of conflict. Although the debate over whether the spread of nuclear arms leads to more stability and less conflict or more instability continues,<sup>45</sup> many believe nuclear powers may feel emboldened to launch low-level conventional attacks,<sup>46</sup> confirmed by one study executed by a team which included this observer<sup>47</sup> as also by the Ukraine crisis still underway.

### 2.4 *Paradoxes Galore*

Stability has so far been defined in a conventional way and explained predominantly in terms of conflict,<sup>48</sup> violence, war,<sup>49</sup> power, or hegemonic control,<sup>50</sup> all of which look negatively

<sup>41</sup> Aditya 201, 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 2016: chart 4, 44.

<sup>43</sup> Nimmo and Unga, 321.

<sup>44</sup> Barton 1997, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Baylis, Smith and Owens 2014, 382.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>47</sup> Aditya, Upreti, and Adhikari 2008, 2008, 29-32.

<sup>48</sup> "a state of conflict between countries in which none of them has the possibility of using force of arms ... to achieve its political goals." Julian Nida-Rümelin in Pauling, Vol. 2.

<sup>49</sup> "absence of Major ... war ... characterized by minimum violence" – Spanier 1990, 118.

<sup>50</sup> "... concentration of power contributes to stability," Keohane 1989, 78.

conceptualized. The new century demands a more positive theorem of stability, a theorem based epistemically and empirically on a sound foundation since the stability premises prevailing so far are heuristic, scattered, and by and large untested. Making them more convincing and acceptable at the international level in a comprehensive form at the inter-state level is the need of the hour.

If stabilization of a political order is not to end up, as usual, as an esoteric agenda of the few, by the few, and for the few, the new approach must honor the social contract of democratic societies by making the people *en masse* integral to stability management, which is a form of risk management.<sup>51</sup>

Human progress, in fact, the advancement of the whole human race and civilization, now depends on the enhancement of the state's capacity to combat discrimination and dominance in all forms<sup>52</sup> and to accelerate social harmony. But this is possible only when human society braces itself everywhere to activate what Acemoglu and Robinson regard as the **Real Queen Effect**.<sup>53</sup> Probably this alone would stem the indeterminacy and uncertainty referred to by Norbert Wiener as the inevitable products of the globally expanding market situation with its large number of players devoid of homeostatic control.<sup>54</sup>

Political evolution of humanity today essentially faces five paradoxes, each of which, in one way or another, originates from the 'crash egotism'<sup>55</sup> of humans and the agencies they have created which brought two full centuries of conflicts, crises, and confrontations in the form of alliances and agendas – most of which are not free from the propensity to think alone, go it alone, and have it alone.

**Paradox of Violence** – “...The chief deterrence to predatory violence is the threat of still greater force, sufficient force to ensure that violence ... will not play.”<sup>56</sup>

**Utility Paradox** – “Positive feeling for the collectivity or the public interest decline as utilities are maximized. This means that the most successful utility system is, from the standpoint of the psychological model, an increasingly unsuccessful system.”<sup>57</sup>

**Paradox of Participation** – David E Apter states that study after study has shown that those with the greatest need for participation, which he regards as the most important single value in plural politics, are the least likely to participate.<sup>58</sup>

**Paradox of Consociational Democracy** – “The more homogeneous the segments and the more each bloc breaks down into a common political culture, the more commitment to compromise and negotiation declines and the more apathetic or withdrawn from politics is the bulk of the electorate.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Fiscoff and Kadvany 2011, 129-131.

<sup>52</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson 2019, 496.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 2019, 41. Stressing the need on the part of the state, the Leviathan, to activate this effect, the authors define it as “a situation where you have to keep on running just to maintain your position” (like the society running fast to maintain the balance between them).

<sup>54</sup> Cited by Apter 1977, 338.

<sup>55</sup> Harari 2018, 182.

<sup>56</sup> Davidson and Rees-Mogg 1994, 53-54.

<sup>57</sup> Apter 1972, 352.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 343-344.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 321.

**Stability Paradox** – The more there is of market competition the more uneven the playing field and hence imposing market discipline, says George Sores, means imposing instability.<sup>60</sup> Robert L. Rothstein, on his part, argues that a concern for political stability always prevails over a concern for economic development,<sup>61</sup> raising in turn the second dilemma mentioned in Section 4.

### 2.5 What More is at Stake

Stability demands reevaluation also because certain dimensions remain inadequately examined in terms of the relationship they bear to each other in ways different from the way they have been understood so far. One such dimension can be policy; another environment; a third one fiscal policy; a fourth one inter-state boundary on each of which the decisions taken and approaches adopted can go a long way to handle the paradoxes and dilemmas faced in the course of stabilization. To be more specific, how does policy stability impact the overall stability of a ruling regime? How would eco-stability influence a system's stability? How would fiscal dependence on another state render a state's economy vulnerable and unstable? When do the boundaries of states render relations sensitive? What happens if more than one of these factors come into play in a synergic or dysergic way to influence a regime's stability? Also, why would strategic stability matter? Stabilization of regimes and states handled in a strategic way could not only have saved quite a few regimes in the past from the disasters they faced (*Perestroika* in the soviet case, for one instance), but can also spare many others the costs extreme instability is likely to claim now and in the future. It is in this regard that Jan A. Lustick forwards the proposition that a well-developed concept of *State Contraction* (stress added) could have helped the former Soviet Union preserve itself within smaller boundaries or transform itself in an orderly manner.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from the reasons mentioned above, a closer study of stability/instability becomes compelling also due to the scarce attention that the conventional study pays to the new genre of social movements and the way they may impact on the political stability of states like Nepal.<sup>63</sup> One reason for the stability 'conundrum' could be the extraordinarily diverse forms of sources of its genesis, rooted in a very wide range of causes – from aspirations for power and status to Security Dilemma, from the buffer factor to shifts in the Balance of Power, from fiscal policies to factionalism, from demographic influx to fears of encirclement, from sanctions to blockade,

<sup>60</sup> Soros 2009, XIV.

<sup>61</sup> Rothstein 1977, 183.

<sup>62</sup> Herbst 2002, 205.

<sup>63</sup> Atsuko Sato defines such movements as those arising since the late 1960s, including the ecology, animal rights, anti-nuclear energy, new age, peace and women's movements. Fig 8.3, New Social Movements, in 'What Makes a Social Movement? Understanding the Rise and Success of Social Movements'. The eight basic features identified by Hank Johnston, Enrique Larana, and Joseph R. Gusfield (1994) of such movements are: diffuse social status in gender, social attention, profession rather than class-based one, pluralism of ideas and values rather than clear-cut Atsuko Sato defines such movements as those arising since the late 1960s, including the ecology, animal rights, anti-nuclear energy, new age, peace and women's movements. Fig 8.3, New Social Movements, in 'What Makes a Social Movement? Understanding the Rise and Success of Social Movements'. The eight basic features identified by Hank Johnston, Enrique Larana, and Joseph R. Gusfield (1994) of such movements are: diffuse social status in gender, social attention, profession rather than class-based one, pluralism of ideas and values rather than clear-cut ideological stand, ethnic or historically based identity, blurred distinction between the collective and the individual, relative stress on non-economic issues and agendas (abortion, alternative medicine, smoking, sexual behavior); use of radical strategies for disruption and resistance, skepticism toward conventional modes of democratic participation and segmentation, diffuseness, and decentralization in approach.

**Table 2. Structural Sources of Political Instability**

	SECTOR	SOURCE	ISSUE
A	Political System		
	Constitution/Legislature	• Adversarial Model of Governance	• Unhealthy Competition for Power
	Security Sector	• Civil-Military Relations • Absence of Human Rights • Mutiny-Rebellion/Coup d'État. <sup>64</sup>	• Unbalanced Relationship • Personal Community-based Insecurity • Discrimination-Discontent/Lust for Power
	Governance/ Administration	• Centralized Mode of Governance	• Autocratic Governance • Extractive Rule • Exploitation/Domination • Nepotism
	Law	• Non-implementation of Rule of Law (RoL) • Implementation	• Law and Order
	Election	• Majoritarian Rule <sup>65</sup> • Arbitrary Rule	• Responsivity • Representation • Responsibility/Accountability
	Foreign Policy	• Clandestine Covenants • Absence of Public Mandate	• Inter-State Relations
B	Society	• Ethnic Diversity • Faith-based Governance • Ideological Domination • Corruption • Institutionalized Discrimination	• Hegemonic Dominance • Religion-based Discrimination • Political Marginalization • Social Decay • Injustice
C	Economy	• Poverty • Extractive Resource Policy <sup>66</sup>	• Iniquity and Exclusion • Ratio of Financial Assets to Tangible Assets <sup>67</sup>
D	Ecosystem	• Pollution	• Disruption of Eco-Balance

Table: Author.

and from proxy wars to annexations, exemplified by the still fresh Putin's Donbas and Luhansk takeovers. Table 2 presents the structural sources of political instability.

If in the context of such multiply structured sources of political instability, one is to agree with the Sydney Tarrow (1994) that the political opportunity structure or changes in the structure create the impetus for social movements, the fast altering political environment and unpredictably rising momentum of change in the future is also likely to produce more demands, more resistance, and possibly more turmoil; in other words, more instability, in the days to come rather than less. The capacity of a state and political system to address them is therefore going to be more important in the future.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See Limbu-Angbuhang 2014, 141-145 on how and why mutiny can pose a threat to stability. On the way the militant groups of political parties, given their heavy presence, can create political disturbance, see Bhattarai 2014, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Nations fail, say Acemoglu and Robinson, because of extractive institutions (p. 398).

<sup>66</sup> "... the more peaceful and stable a nation, the greater will be its financial assets, relative to tangible assets." Davidson and Res-Mogg 1994, 103.

<sup>67</sup> The role of ecology from local to global levels in destabilizing a particular system is only recently being understood. Apart from the climatic shift four millennia ago that brought monsoon failure and abandonment of the Harappan cities after river Saraswati disappeared (see Sanjeev Sanyal 2016, 51), the scenario unfolding looks far from assuring whose destabilizing impact on the total human system remains to be assessed objectively, with one-third of flowering plants and between 25-50% all animal species at risk of disappearance. See Bill McGuire 2014, 111-112.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 274.



If, moreover, Wagner's law is valid (the law of increasing state activity),<sup>69</sup> the problems are likely to grow further, since the scope for the issues and agendas involved in the course of the growth of a state's role will also tend to expand. But this hardly means an assured proportional rise in the capacity of the state to handle them adequately that would leave a certain disparity. Larger such disparity, the greater the scope for political instability.

### 3. COMPREHENDING POLITICAL (IN-)STABILITY

Defining a problem is the first step to its comprehension. But defining political instability poses no small problem, not just because it is a social construct with different meanings in different contexts, but also because it influences a number of social sectors, and is in turn influenced by them, often in more than one way. In other words, it acts both as a dependent and independent variable. There may, moreover, be situations of ambiguity rendering it difficult to discern it as it may be influenced by either of these two variables. If, therefore, the analysis is not to end up focusing on the symptoms rather than the real causes of instability, the effort must delve deeper than usual.

Whereas Rudolf J. Rummel defines instability in terms of riots, demonstrations, and revolutions,<sup>70</sup> regarding stability as the lack of violent conflict, constancy in the number of the major actors in the system, the pattern of linkage among the members of the system, and the identity of the major actors, and David E. Apter regards stability as a measure of the government's implementation of the "greatest good for the greatest number by means of establishing and realizing beneficial agendas and programs," Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr define stability as 'the lack of change in the fundamental pattern of interactions in the system.'<sup>71</sup>

One problem with the Russett-Starr definition could be how under certain specified circumstances, the pattern of system interactions is to undergo fundamental change without compromising the stability of the system, but this presents a major dilemma for decision makers, which is not going to be the sole one. There will be more of such dilemmas to which we return later, in Section 4.

Defining political development in terms of eight different elements, Lucian W. Pye takes up stability and orderly change to stress that mere stagnation or arbitrary support of the status is not development and that any form of economic and social advancement becomes possible when uncertainty decreases, rendering predictable planning possible and order is maintained.<sup>72</sup> Leon Hurewitz lists five different views on political stability.<sup>73</sup> Huntington, in turn, emphasizes *order* and *continuity* by which he means the relative absence of violence,

<sup>69</sup> Alfred Wagner, a German public finance theorist, advanced the postulate that the process of industrialization in the increasingly affluent societies generated problems forcing them to devote ever larger parts of the national income to provide collective goods. The increase in the activity and role of the state, however, also brings a paradoxical diminution in the significance of the role of traditional politics as its formative influence on policy choice begins to decline along with the rise in the role of parapolitical, apolitical or nonpolitical actors and agencies. Pp. 218-219.

<sup>70</sup> In Singer 1998, 187-214.

<sup>71</sup> Russett and Starr 1986, 109.

<sup>72</sup> Pye 1966, 33-45.

<sup>73</sup> 1. Existence of a legitimate political regime; 2. Relative absence of violent civil conflict; 3. Absence of structural change in the political system; 4. Relative longevity of governments (executives and cabinets); 5. Presence of multiple social attributes (economic and social well-being and political variables). Hurewitz. 1973, 469-473.

force, coercion, and disruption from the political system as also lack of discontinuity in its political evolution, but without *fundamental changes* (stress added).<sup>74</sup>

While one could take up the case for the scope on meaningful political development of a system sans structural change which is what Hurewitz seems to argue for, or sans fundamental change under certain conditions (perfect autocracies, or dictatorships, for instance), which is what Huntington contends, *order* and *continuity* remain the two central elements common to both of them.<sup>75</sup> But Huntington's hypothesis that the importance of political party in providing legitimacy and stability in a modernizing political system varies inversely with the institutional importance of the system from traditional society appears to pose a binary separable distinction between the roles and values of political party and traditional institutions as two incompatible entities whose norms and principles are incapable of synthesizing into something common, a process that may take a long time to make it possible or feasible. However, the evolution of political parties in a country like India and elsewhere and its after-effects (evident in the movement launched by J. P. Narayan in the mid-seventies), particularly the world-wide upsurge of alienation of the public mass toward political parties points to a yawning gap in the roles and scope traditionally accorded to them. The clash between the West and the East over democracy could partly be attributed to this gap.

One curiosity that the discussion at this point raises is: To what extent can change be acceptable and under what conditions order and continuity – the two factors in opposition – can be traded off? Mediating on these two issues poses the central puzzle in any strategy for system transformation and it is here that the policies of the ruling regimes tend to differ, producing differing outcomes.

### **3.1 Stability Discourse: A Running Review**

As a favorite staple in political discourse, instability has produced a noticeable amount of literature, but there is still little tangible agreement over the findings that could be synthesized into a coherent body of conclusions or a set of propositions on the confusions clogging comprehension of this malady, in order to frame up a convincing agenda for stabilization. While it is neither possible nor the purpose here to cover the whole range of exercise done by scholars, what follows below tries to briefly scan some of them in order to distil the common strands into a semblance of conceptual framework. This may help to appraise the nature of the problem as a rough and ready guide for the moment to estimate the intensity and magnitude of the malady in the form of a proto-index.

Lucian W. Pye lists factors that may disrupt the equilibrium of an existing political order as the features of the non-western political process, many of which apply to the developing countries in general and to Nepal in particular.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Huntington and Dominguez, Vol. 3, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Huntington offers political instability as a ratio of two processes – political participation and political institutionalization, arguing that larger the participation and less the political institutionalization, the greater will be the political instability. Huntington 2009, 78-92. See also Huntington and Dominguez 1975.

<sup>76</sup> Cliques, revolutionary nature of the aspiring elites, lack of integration among the political participants, high rate of recruitment of new elements into political roles, sharp differences in the political orientation of generations, little consensus on the legitimate ends and means of political action, high degree of the substitutability of roles, and absence of brokers. Russett and Starr 1986, 82-86, 121.

Elaborating the relationship between size and democracy, Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte suggest that both severity of conflict and the chances of a state's survival do not appear to be related to a country's size, and that in the case of small states, the procedures for dealing with organized group conflicts are less institutionalized; group conflicts are more explosive; and more likely to polarize the whole country – premises that are relevant to explaining the instability of a country like Nepal. But other arguments they forward – that small systems are more homogeneous and consensual compared to the larger systems; the incentive to conform to a uniform code of behavior there are stronger; and the number of dissenting viewers there is fewer, while affirming the hypothesis on institutionalization they propose, fail to get confirmed in Nepal's case.<sup>77</sup>

The case of small states unfolds other findings of possible relevance to Nepal, particularly Paul Sutton's observations in Lino Briguglio et al. Picking up the six aspects of governance referred by the World Bank<sup>78</sup> he notes, the smaller the state, the better the record.<sup>79</sup> Carmen et al., too, agree that 21 states with per capita income above USD 4,000 show lower levels of political instability<sup>80</sup> and as a group their rank order of success is highest on the stability dimension.<sup>81</sup> Results of the Ivo Feierabend-Rosalind Feierabend study of 62 societies, moreover, reveal an extremely strong statistical correlation between their levels of political stability and of economic development as also that the rates of political instability are greatest in societies making the transition from agrarian to industrial stage, though statistically, the results are not significant.<sup>82</sup> As to the reasons for the political stability of the Western industrial democracies, Nolan and Lenski say, their largest productivity and higher standards of living give the majority of the population a vested interest in political stability, and the democratic ideology of these regimes strengthens the allegiance of most segments of the population as well as the Army, weakening support for revolutionary events, and that the complexity of the structure of industrial societies generates a readiness to compromise on most controversial issues, in addition to the multiple roles groups and individuals can play, leaving a moderating effect on the issues at stake.<sup>83</sup>

The Latinobarometric study brought out by the UNDP, moreover, says that if the majority of the citizens in a country are not loyal to the democratic system, are more active than the rest of the population, and only a small distance separates them from the ambivalents, such

<sup>77</sup> Dahl and Tufte 1972, 91, 92, 113, 122.

<sup>78</sup> Kaufmann, D., A. Kray, and M. Masruzzi 2007, "Governance Matters VII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators 1996-2006," World Bank Policy Research Paper No. 4280. Washington DC: World Bank. The six aspects are: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Lack of Violence, Governance Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption.

<sup>79</sup> The benefits of being very small, the author says, appear to diminish once the population exceeds 300,000, raising the question whether the particular category of "microstate" should be adopted to aid analysis and policy (p. 204). Anckar (2004, 15) defines a microstate with a population below 1 million (cited by the author: D. Anckar 2004. "Regime Choices in Microstates." *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol, 42 (2). 206-2223 (sic).

<sup>80</sup> Paul Sutton, 202.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>82</sup> Ivo and Rosalind Feierabend, "Aggressive Behaviors within Politics, 1948-1962: A Cross-National Study. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 10 (1966), cited by Nolan and Lenski, 255.

<sup>83</sup> Nolan and Lenski, 225-256.

system is more vulnerable to crises. Nepal's multiple crises to which we return later (in Section 6) seem to confirm that study.<sup>84</sup>

Among others who have analyzed political instability, S.P. Huntington and Jorge I. Domínguez suggest a curvilinear relationship between economic development and political instability, but a positive correlation of high level of urbanization with stability.<sup>85</sup> Nepal's case confirms the Huntington-Domínguez hypothesis on high urbanization and stability.<sup>86</sup> Edward Shils, on his part, believes that a democratic order must be supported by six social and cultural preconditions to render it stable and effective: democratic self-control among the political actors, acceptance by the society of the government's authority, coherent relationship between the political leaders, inter-party mutual solidarity, secular but adequately skilled bureaucracy, and adequate security mechanism.<sup>87</sup>

In Karl W. Deutsch's model of governmental stability, the ratio of the government's budget to its total national income, literacy, political participation, and the share of the top 10% of the population in the nation's income as an indicator of income inequality retain the key roles. The eleven social indicators proposed by Deutsch in 1961 were used by the author in 2016 to identify the pace of social mobilization in Nepal which clearly suggests that the ratio of the growth rate of the mobilized differentiated population to the growth rate of the mobilized assimilated population is here already larger than one and unless strategies are devised by the government to address the situation, the instability that such disparity is likely to bring in the days ahead may prove difficult to handle.<sup>88</sup>

Altogether, Michael Brecher enumerates 12 elements as the causes of instability – poverty, antipathy to government, oppositionalism, autocratic governance, limited experience with democracy, habits of violence (stress on force), shortage of civil servants, small middle class, quality of leadership, nature and character of political parties, social heterogeneity, and lack of tolerance.<sup>89</sup> Willian Komhauser's thesis that a high rate of mass behavior in the form of political movements against the existing political order is most likely when the nonelite mass is available for direct mobilization by the elites in the absence of associational groups mediating between the two communities<sup>90</sup> closely echoes Deutsch's hypothesis on mobilized differentiated populations. Claude Ake believes that the politically disintegrative effects of mobilization are best minimized under four conditions – centralized authoritarian political control over politics and other resources, paternalistic authority, identific mutual relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and consensual solidarity among the ruling elite.<sup>91</sup> In the case of the ruling elites of Nepal, however, while the first two factors apply,

---

<sup>84</sup> UNDP, 224-232.

<sup>85</sup> 'Political Development in the New States', cited by Davies and Lewis 1971, 100-101.

<sup>86</sup> In 2010, out of the 194 countries for which data were available, Nepal's 18.6% figure for urbanization stood at the bottom, with only four countries below it, that is 97.4% of the cases. Aditya 2011.

<sup>87</sup> For elaboration on his prerequisites of democratic order and the condition, see Shils and Gurr 1971, 285-286.

<sup>88</sup> Aditya 2015, 44-46.

<sup>89</sup> Brecher 1989, 617-637.

<sup>90</sup> 197, cited by Gurr.

<sup>91</sup> Cited by Gurr 1971, 285.

the other two do not. They would join to share power, perks, and privilege, not for the core national interests.

The tension created by the process of social change, David Singer believes, can be mitigated by the government through “regulation of social life by introducing coherence of the values and institutions and through *retraditionalization*, that is, validation of the current practices by symbolic reference to or use of the traditionally familiar patterns of social control. A large measure of the failure of the Maoists to materialize their goal of social transformation in Nepal lay in the abrupt disruption of the social order tried through their avowed policy of *Kramabhang*, that is, their failure to contextualize. The social order often was disrupted, but little social transformation could be seen.

Grouping political instability under three forms – Internal War, Turmoil, and Conspiracy – Tedd R. Gurr analyzes it in terms of Dissident Coercive Control and Regime Coercive Control, suggesting internal civil war and insurgency are likely when their ratio approaches one; turmoil (in the form of riots, rebellions, and clashes) varies inversely with the degree of dissident institutional support; and the likelihood of conspiracy (coups, mutinies, small scale terrorism, and assassinations) varies with the intensity and low scope of dissident institutional support.<sup>92</sup>

Highlighting the challenge refugee flows are posing to the demographic balance of various states, Professor Myron Weiner outlines the need for a new security/stability framework for study of international migration focused on state policies toward migration, adding that taking up migration as both a cause as well as consequence of internal and international conflict would not only direct us to study different aspects of international migration, ask different questions, offer different explanations, and create different conceptual tools, but also would help to devise different strategies for the solution of global migration as a problem that is likely to intensify in the days ahead.<sup>93</sup> The role of migration became dramatically evident when the exodus of East Germans to Austria in July August 1989 compelled the East German Government to open its western borders, propelling a massive migration westward, which brought the fall of the East German government and ended in the absorption of Eastern Germany by the Federal Republic. It was, Weiner notes, mass flight, not invasion that destroyed the East German State.<sup>94</sup>

The Almond-Powell study on the productivity of political systems differentiates political goods at three levels (system, process, and policy) and three classes of such goods, distinguishing system maintenance and system adaptation at the system level. Compared to the earlier emphasis on system goods of order, predictability, and stability, now change, growth, and development are receiving a larger priority. But since the regularity and predictability of processes in domestic and international politics (system maintenance) are in conflict with adaptability (structural and cultural) in response to the environmental change and challenges (system adaptation), a certain balance between the two kind of goods has to be maintained

<sup>92</sup> Gurr, 1971, 277-282.

<sup>93</sup> Weiner 1995, 183-218, 186.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

in the context of which they forward a number of observations for strategizing stabilization which we take up before concluding.<sup>95</sup>

Analyzing Nepal's and India's patterns of influence behavior in terms of the five elements that Holsti offers under his hypothetical frame allows us to explain the kind of relationship developed by the two neighbors in the last seven decades and to understand their potential role in stabilizing and destabilizing the overall course of their relationship. Rather than elaborating in detail, suffice it here to summarize Holsti's five elements into three dimensions – capability, need, and response. The gap in the overall capability of these two states (India and Nepal) – the quality and quantity as well as the skills available to each party, and their threat-reward capability (factors 1, 2, 3 in the list presented above) – were already large enough in the past to explain why Delhi could exert an overwhelming impact on Kathmandu. That gap, given India's steady rise as a would be superstate of the future in contrast to Nepal's stagnant growth, is likely to grow further with obvious consequences for Nepal's political (in-) stability. One corollary of that premise would be an increase in the need (read here dependence) of Nepal as a consequence of the expanding gap between these two neighbors. The situation will then be determined, not just by how the need is perceived relatively, but by how these two parties interpret each other's needs and use the dependence to formulate policies to maximize their putative gains. Response is thus the ultimate factor which is going to decide how the game is likely to unfold to denominator not just the process of exchange between the two neighbors, but also political stability there and beyond.

At the international level, Thomas J. Volgy and Alison Bailin argue that significant imbalances in the different facets of state strength pose threats to international stability and inequalities in growth are likely to further destabilize international politics.<sup>96</sup> Identifying the sources of (in-) stability and change in the global system, K. J. Holsti enumerates the costs of developing major economic, nuclear or military strength, (in-) compatibility of revolutionary ideology with liberal philosophies, scope for collaboration between major powers ( the US and Russia), virulence of nationalism, and the scope and status of direct satellite broadcasting.<sup>97</sup> While both Raymond Tanter's and Rummel's works show a weak covariation between foreign and domestic conflict behavior and Michael Skrein's study of 69 countries for the period 1966-69, fail to establish a clear relationship between domestic instability or violence and foreign policy,<sup>98</sup> and thus to confirm that governments display aggressive behavior to cope with domestic instability, the study by Istvan Kende shows that of the 97 tribal, ethnic, civil, and inter-state wars that took place in the 26 years between 1945 and 1970, external intervention occurred in a majority of cases,<sup>99</sup> underscoring the critical role outside intervention by a state can play to destabilize another state. It is in such a situation that Holsti suggests that “regardless of the quality, quantity, and credibility of a state's capability,<sup>100</sup> the more

<sup>95</sup> Almond and Powell 1980, tables 8 and 9, 125-146.

<sup>96</sup> Volgy and Bailin 2005, 82-86, 121.

<sup>97</sup> Holsti, 1981, Table 3-3, pp. 95-96.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>100</sup> Defined by him as 'any physical or mental observation or quality available as an instrument or inducement to persuade, reward, threaten, or punish. *Ibid.*, 165.



State B needs (Nepal for instance), or is dependent upon State A (India as an exemplar), the more likely that State A's acts – threats, promises, rewards, or punishments – will succeed in changing B's behavior"<sup>101</sup> Holsti then concludes that the successful wielding of influence behavior (between the two states) varies with five factors: 1. the quality and quantity of capability at a state's disposal; 2. skill in mobilizing these capabilities in support of the goals; 3. the capability of threats and rewards; 4. the degree of need or dependence; and 5. the degree of responsiveness<sup>102</sup> among the policymakers of the target country.<sup>103</sup>

It is in this regard that Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr's analysis of the issue of stability (in terms of alliances, war, and stability that postulates stability as a matter of not being war-prone in the course of explicating its scope in terms of uni-, tri-, and multi-polar world order) becomes relevant to our analysis, in considering the advent of transregional agendas like the Belt and Road and the Indo-Pacific Strategy as well as the polarization the Millennium Compact Corporation has triggered in Nepal.<sup>104</sup>

Yet, whereas the widely held view that nations afflicted by domestic instability are likely to witness more foreign conflict than others stands refuted by the empirical findings available from the DON (Dimension of Nations) project (that domestic instability has little relation to a nation's foreign conflict behavior), Nepal's case appears to strongly support the opposite stand in this regard, apparently corroborating a positive correlation between domestic instability and foreign conflict,<sup>105</sup> particularly in the context of its relation with India.

Based on the preceding analysis, the chart below presents a list of 14 authors summing up the discussion into a set of seven dimensions of 22 variables that may directly or indirectly influence the political stability of a country. Categorizing the variables is far from easy or simple and certainly not without a certain measure of controversy, whichever way it is done. Hence, some of the groupings here may look arbitrary; subjectiveness in such efforts, after all, is almost impossible to avoid. For more or less the same reason, the chart also excludes the case of the new social movements and the overall instability caused by environmental pollution, a decision the ecoradicalists could take strong exception to.

Among the variables listed here, the first one of self-control and solidarity-accommodation tops the list figuring in the analysis of seven authors, followed closely by central authority and control, referred to by six of them. Loyalty-opposition to government authority and economy rank third, followed closely by division (socio-cultural or ethnic homogeneity) and factionalism (as the focus of four authors).

Dimension-wise, the role of the state and regime with seven variables and socio-political processes (four variables) appear most salient, followed by political orientation-cum-status,

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>102</sup> 'a disposition to receive another's requests with sympathy, even to the point where a government is willing to sacrifice some of its own values and interests.' Ibid., 174.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>104</sup> Russett and Starr, 1986, 107.

<sup>105</sup> Rummel 1968, 208.

**Chart: Dimensions and Twenty-two variables Influencing Political Instability (Author-Wise)**

	1 Political Orientation & Status	2 Use of Force	3 Division	4 Social Strata & Interest Groups	5 Socio-Political Process	7 State & Regime Characteristics
1 CloudeAke	+ 1.1 Self-Control Solidarity					
2 David E. Apter	+ 1.2 Loyalty-Opposition to Govt. Authority					
3 Michael Brecher			+ 3.1 Socio-Cultural, Diversity, Faith, Ideology			
4 Dahl & Tuftte	+ 1.3 Duration of Democratic Experience		+ 3.2 Ethnic Homogeneity	+ 4.1 Quality of Pol. Parties & Their Relations	+ 5.1 Political Participation, Social Mobilization	+ 7.4 Leadership Quality
5 Karl W. Deutsch		+ 2 Habits of Use of Force, Violence (Autocratic Governance)	+ 3.3 Cliques, Oppositionism	+ 4.2 Associational Groups for Issue Mediation (Brokers)	+ 5.2 Urbanization	+ 7.3 Adequate Security Mechanism
6 Ted R. Gurr				+ 4.3 Size of Middle Class	+ 5.3 Literacy (Education)	+ 7.5 State Capability
7 K. J. Holsti					+ 5.4 Revolution, Coup, Terrorism	+ 7.6 Need (Dependence)
8 Huntington & Dominguez					+ 5.5 Urbanization	+ 7.7 Response
9 Morton Kaplan					+ 6 Economy (Poverty Status)	
10 William Kornhauser					+ 7.1 Central Authority & Control	
11 Latino-Barometric Study	+ 1.2 Loyalty-Opposition to Govt. Authority					
12 Lucian W. Pye						
13 Edward Shils	+ 1.1 Self-Control Solidarity					
14 Volgy&Bailin						

Chart: Author.

division, and social strata-groups. The second dimension, the habit of use of force, as also the duration of democratic experience, cited by one single author (Karl W. Deutsch), are of no small consequence, as also the sixth dimension of economy which can critically influence political stability in any system. History offers ample cases of deep instability demolishing regimes and political orders of various hues. The departure of Britain after the Great Bengal Famine in India and the rapid decline of the American hegemony following the global economic crash in 2008 are two instances of the point made.

#### 4. FIVE DILEMMAS OF DECISION-MAKERS AND FIVE HYPOTHESES

Dilemmas are a familiar feature of politics, but they assume a particular poignancy when the political situation becomes unstable, because dilemmas start to confront decision-makers on more than one front and can appear in several forms. The approach usually adopted by decision-makers in Nepal is no approach, reflecting ignorance, complacency, even outright neglect. Hypothetically, *The more unstable the situation, the more acute the dilemma* (Hypothesis One). One could add, *Longer the instability, higher the frequency of dilemmas* (Hypothesis Two). Also, *Larger the domain of instability, larger the number of the forms in which they appear* (Hypothesis Three). Dilemmas are thus a part and parcel of an unstable political regime, becoming embedded into it, but it is the tendency to postpone resolution or procrastinate that renders it chronic. This gives rise to the fourth hypothesis that explains the present malady of Nepali politics: *Larger the delay in addressing political instability, the more chronic, complex, costly, time-consuming, and difficult the malady becomes* (Hypothesis Four: Institutionalization). What Nepal suffered in the course of battling the Maoist insurgency offers dilemmas in their classic forms to which we return below. The delay, dilation, and deliberate neglect shown in resolving them are explained by General Silwal in the course of exposing the blunders committed by the decision-makers, but the etiology of such failures could be explicated better in terms of the concepts and hypotheses some scholars have proposed. For instance, there is what Ken Booth and Nicholas I. Wheeler regard as **Other Minds Problem** – the inability of decision-makers to get fully into the minds of their counterparts (rivals, here the Maoists) to understand their motives, intentions, and feelings that can induce a certain level of uncertainty into the process of decision-making.<sup>106</sup> **Inattentional Blindness** (the inability to detect the dynamic element of a complex scenario may hamper perception when attention is diverted to another object or task and the observers often fail to perceive an unexpected object, even if it appears at fixation.<sup>107</sup> Another possible barrier is the **Educated Incapacity** of those in government who are likely to develop what Herman Kahn and B. Bruce-Briggs regard as ‘an acquired or learned inability to see a problem, much less a solution,’ due to fear of the new or individual or ideological biases aggravated by the inertia of acquired learning that results in the failure to see what lies outside an accepted

<sup>106</sup> Paper ‘Uncertainty’ in Paul D. Williams 2008, 136.

<sup>107</sup> Chabris and J. Simons, 2010.

framework.<sup>108</sup> As if all this were not enough, veto players may, moreover, put up another barrier to serve their own interests in formulating the right kind of strategy.<sup>109</sup> Then there is also the **Thomas Theorem** (named after W.I. Thomas) that says that societies often behave as if they think a certain idea is true or right regarding certain situations as real which pushes organized groups like political parties to promote their own interests confounding their desires and objectives with the interests of the societies at large. The problem here is the lack of empathy among the players who often succeed in preserving the status quo and thus their vested interests by falsely convincing the public at large that they are serving the nation's interest.<sup>110</sup>

**Cognitive Dissonance** is another issue that Morton R. Davies and Vaughan A. Lewis<sup>111</sup> take up in the course of explaining what happens when a sociocultural and technological change happens too fast in a modernizing society, too fast for it to absorb the shocks and stress that modernization may bring that may turn out to be too complex and difficult for the population to tolerate or accommodate. What they leave untouched here, which is of crucial relevance to our context, is how such an incongruence impacts on the overall stability of the system. Hypothetically, *Larger the cognitive dissonance* (which means more sudden, rapid or larger the intensity and momentum of the political change), *the greater the political instability* (Hypothesis Five). Conversely, slower and more incremental the structural changes, less the incongruence, and larger the probability of success. Testing this hypothesis in Nepal's context could explain the whole array of failures of plans and projects related to democratization and development, but the evidence and information needed for this purpose are scant and explanation remains limited to descriptive depiction of historical narratives.

Finally, even if none of the six elements operate to damage right perception in the course of decision-making, neglect can undo the whole process. In the course of invading North Vietnam in the mid-sixties to contain communism, if, as Robert McNamara clearly admits, President Lyndon Johnson and his whole cabinet "had not truly investigated what was essentially at stake and important to us," the question that arises here is: What stopped them from exploring fully whether there were other routes to their destination or to start a national debate on a war that was to bring a national disaster for both sides (three million Vietnamese lives plus fifty-eight thousand body bags to America) in the hubristic glow of their power? as the *New York Times* asked on April 12, 1995. The way the American government responded to suggestions and protests at home indicates, apart from hubris, neglect was another factor<sup>112</sup> behind their failure to handle the dilemmas they were facing.

The five hypotheses stated above may not just help to explain better the confusion in decision-making in unstable situations, but they also relate to quite a few dilemmas faced

<sup>108</sup> Herman Kahn and B. Bruce-Briggs 1972, 82. This proposition echoes the second hypothesis on misperception explained by Robert Jervis whose fourteen hypotheses on how misperception can lead policy and decision-makers astray may help in clarifying the vision problem. See 'Hypotheses on Misperception', in Klaus Knorr (Ed.) 1987, 152-177, 157.

<sup>109</sup> Kelman 2002, 174. A Veto player is an individual or collective actor whose agreement is required to change a policy. For explanation on the Veto Player Theorem, the interested reader is referred to Tesebelis 1999, cited by the author.

<sup>110</sup> Chirot 1977, 201.

<sup>111</sup> Davies and Lewis 1971, 118-119.

<sup>112</sup> McNamara 1996, 354-355.

by the decision-makers in politics. Five of them deserve mention. But since the first three of them are fairly familiar to observers, two others deserve explanation.<sup>113</sup>

## **Five Dilemmas**

### **Dilemma One: Stability vs Liberty**

The tradeoff between stability (regularity, consistency, security, order) and Liberty (or adaptation), say Almond and Powell, is not easy to make “where the very concepts imply giving up some of one for some of the other.”<sup>114</sup>

### **Dilemma Two: Growth vs Stability**

In the context of choosing between Growth and Stability (Security), David E. Apter underscores the incompatibility between political democracy and economic growth where stability becomes the priority.<sup>115</sup>

### **Dilemma Three: Equity vs Liberty**

Conflict over Equity (justice) and Liberty (growth) arises when demand for more equitable distribution of resources and the policies to enhance the nation’s economy (through industrialization that brings economic disparities alienating the communities effected) become difficult to resolve.<sup>116</sup>

### **Dilemma Four: Liberalization vs Stabilization**

That overly rapid, premature liberalization under the guise of privatization and hasty political opening, however pious the purpose, can unhinge the whole political regime became evident in the last decade of the past century which witnessed the Soviet debacle. This, however, is a lesson left unlearned in Nepal. When there is low political accountability, World Development Report 2006 warns, premature liberalization can be captured by a group, increasing not only financial fragility, but also the risk of opportunistic default,<sup>117</sup> which can destabilize the whole financial sector as it did in Nepal, but to which the parties responsible chose to keep their eyes shut.

How accountable have Nepal’s ruling regimes been so far in this regard? The Voice and Accountability Indicator of governance in Nepal does not fetch satisfaction on this test. Nepal’s score of -0.06 in 2000-01 among the 168 countries for which data are available, places 95 countries above Nepal which is too low to ensure the State against the two risks the report mentions—financial fragility and opportunistic default. The dubious way adopted and the undue hurry made to dispose of the whole set of the four or so enterprises gifted by China, ignoring even a semblance of

<sup>113</sup> Some of these dilemmas have been cogently explicated by Almond and Powell (1980) who also elaborate how they were handled by various kinds of political regimes, 140-146.

<sup>114</sup> Almond and Powell 1980, 142.

<sup>115</sup> Apter 1977, 477.

<sup>116</sup> Almond and Powell 1980, 145.

<sup>117</sup> World Development Report 2006, 182.

regulatory oversight, exposed the devious intent of those at the helm of affairs to capture the sale. Nepal, of course, was not the sole victim of such maldecisions. That report explains similar things happening in 18 countries from Brazil, France, Indonesia, and Korea to the USA (in the early 1800s) as also Zimbabwe.<sup>118</sup>

#### **Dilemma Five: Sovereignty vs Ecoscurity**

Does Ecoscurity, a global public good, make an iota of sense when one clings to National Sovereignty? If it does not, as is axiomatically evident, then the reason is the logical incompatibility between Ecology which is global and seamlessly undivided and Sovereignty which by definition is separationist, isolatory, and self-centered. Combining the two terms is therefore meaningful only at the global level. But for this to happen, the boundaries and the frontiers of states and nations set up by human hands must be tossed away. Neither Mother Nature nor climate recognizes sovereignty.

#### ***How the Government and the Nepal Army handled their Dilemmas***

In the course of explaining the background to the dilemmas, General Silwal has tried to expose the weaknesses behind the decisions taken up to handle the insurgency.<sup>119</sup> If one central clue to the series of dilemmas that each agency-actor in the scalene power triangle of relations between the Palace (King) – Army – and the Parliament would face in the midst of the Maoist turmoil was the ban put on debate on Army in the National Panchayat,<sup>120</sup> another problem, partly a product of that ban that repeatedly appeared was that of time lag in the regime's response to the Maoist attack at Dang, which certainly was not the only slip. If Information was available to the Army from some Chinese source on the impending Dang attack, as is claimed,<sup>121</sup> why did it go unheeded? Despite the Royal Nepal Army's claim that it was cognizant of an internal threat in the early 80's, some hold that neither the National Investigation Department (NID) nor the Army had foreseen the prospects of a 'People's War'.<sup>122</sup> The government declared Emergency and mobilized the Army through the National Defense Council only on 26 November 2001, after a delay of full three days;<sup>123</sup> and advice was sought only after the situation went out of hand.<sup>124</sup> Conflict of interests was another factor (in the ruling party Nepali Congress).<sup>125</sup> The task force group set up to study the problem under the presiding prime ministers took one to four years,<sup>126</sup> and was membered by just one single party. As if all of this were not enough, the first peace talks took five years to start<sup>127</sup> and the second stage came two years later. Indecision

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Table 9.2, 181.

<sup>119</sup> See for his explanation, pp. 117, 134, 182, 185, 186, 188, 189, 191, 197, 199, 205, 208, 217, 218, 220, 223, 321, 323.

<sup>120</sup> Silwal, 138.

<sup>121</sup> Shah 2067 BS, 253.

<sup>122</sup> On Nepal Army's shortcomings and its contempt for the political establishment, which allegedly verged on the pathological, see Mehta 2005, 71-75.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 186.



of the National development Council on policy and the clash of interests between the King plus the Army and the Prime Minister, too, ended up benefiting only the insurgents.<sup>128</sup> Delay and dilatory decision-making<sup>129</sup> and inconsistency and discontinuity of plans such as Internal Defense and Development (IDAD) (later Internal Security and Development Plan-ISADP) showed the level of confusion and indecision further eroded the ruling regime's overall capacity to handle the situation,<sup>130</sup> not to mention the Civil Military National Camping plan (CMNCP), conceived after ten years of army mobilization and abandonment of the ISDP.<sup>131</sup>

The series of dilemmas, delays, and dilatory decisions does not end here. Since the King and the Army insisted the NDC's decision was a prerequisite to army mobilization, the mutual suspicion between the King and the Prime Minister held the NDC back from conducting meetings, regulating its work procedures, and formulating the policies and implementing strategies the crisis demanded. Who prevented the NDC from deciding for several years? asks the General.<sup>132</sup> Apart from the inability to raise the agenda of reformulating the Nepal-India Treaty of 1950, long due for revision, the Government in Kathmandu faced one more dilemma in handling its foreign relations with China, India, and USA after the Belt and Road and Indo-pacific Strategy appeared on the scene, which got compounded further after India signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in October 2020 and the MCC issue that deeply divided not only the political parties and the House, but also the whole public mass.<sup>133</sup> The ideological dilemma that was soon to confront the Nepal Communist Party, turned out to be no less perturbing, reflected in the statements released by one of the Maoist ideologues.<sup>134</sup>

### 5. ANALYSIS: APPROACH AND OPERATIONALIZATION

For this exercise, overall, ten variables representing ten sectors of society have been selected to assess Political Stability in a total of 130 countries (N).

Political stability Index (PSI) has been proposed as a proto-index or proxy variable to compare globally the stability status of the 130 countries on which data are available on a 5-point ranking ordinal scale (very high – high – medium – low – very low).

Variable	Sector	Variable	Sector
Voice & Accountability (VOAC)	Democracy	6. Global Terrorism Index (GTERI)	Terrorism
Corruption (GRAFT)	Corruption	7. Life Satisfaction Index (LISAI)	Social satisfaction
Human Development Index (HDI)	Development	8. Confidence in Judicial System (CIJUS)	Image of Judiciary
Social Cohesion Index (SOCOI)	Integration	9. Trust in National Government (TINAG)	Trust in Government
Quintile Ratio (QUIRA)	Economic Disparity	10. Global Peace Index (GLOPI)	Level of Peace

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 323-324.

The hypothesis is: The aggregated 5-point ranking score of countries on the ten dimensions should correlate closely with their Political Stability (here, Political Stability and Lack of Violence – POSLA) ranking score, the variable used by the Human Development Report 2002.

The sources of data on the 11 variables are (with page numbers for definitions bracketed):

POSLA, VOAC, GRAFT – Human Development Report (HDR) 2002, Table 1.1

HDI – HDI 2017 (29)

LISAI – HDII, T14 (7-4)

SOCOI – Briguglio et al., (292-294)

CIJUS – HDII, T14 (74)

QUIRA – Table 3, HDII (33)

TINAG – HDII, T14 (77)

GTERI – GTR 2018 (8-9)

GLOPI – Col.1 (pp. 8-9), GPI 2018 (IEP) (8-9)

Annex 2 explains the measures and methodology used as also the sources.

The Table in Annex 3 presents the data for 130 countries on the eleven variables and the 5-point ranking based on the conversion scale given above. The last column (the 11th one) tallies the aggregated rank of each country with the POSLA rank and Table 4 shows the results in a Tally Matrix with the findings shown on the right side.

FINDING: In 38 cases (i.e. 29.2% of them, which is close to one-third), the rankings tested correlate exactly and in 64 others they do so closely. Combined together, they total to 102 out of 130 cases, that is 78.4 percent correlating closely or exactly. Hence, the inference can be safely drawn that political stability can be projected up to a substantially high level, if the relevant data are available. Given the time gaps on some of the data used in this analysis, POSLA's for instance which is drawn for the year 2002, one may expect the correlation to rise further if updated data become available.<sup>135</sup>

Table 5 also presents separately a list of the 42 countries figuring as most stable and Table 6 lists 12 whose stability status is uncertain due to data unavailability or political reasons (see the world map).

### Five-Point Conversion of Scales

Ranking Variables	1, 2, 11	3, 4	5	6	7	8, 9	10
Very Low (VL)	-2.50 to -1.50	0 to <0.20	21 to >21	9 to 10	1 to 2	0 to 20	>3.00
Low (L)	-1.50 to -0.50	0.21 to 0.40	16 to 20	7 to 8	3 to 4	21 to 40	>2.50 to 3.00
Medium (M)	-0.50 to <0.50	0.41 to 0.60	11 to 15	5 to 6	5 to 6	41 to 60	>2.00 to 2.5
High (H)	0.50 to <1.50	0.61 to 0.80	6 to 10	3 to 4	7 to 8	61 to 80	>1.50 to 2.00
Very High (VH)	1.50 to 2.50	0.81 to 1.00	1 to 5	0 to 2	9 to 10	81 to 100	1.00 to 1.50

<sup>135</sup> The Policy IV Score suggested by the IEP (Institute of Economic and Peace, Sydney) as a potentially useful proxy for political stability covering 55 countries in 1918 and increasing to over 100 for 1961 and 158 by 2012 is the only alternative this observer is aware of so far measuring comparatively status of the political instability of countries. Fig 2.13 (pp 36-37) in the Global Peace Index 2018 – brought out by the Institute that purports to show the score for the 94 years from 1918 to 2012 as a simplified measure of the competing values of autocracy and democracy in direct comparison indicates a global overall rise in political stability. One problem with the Policy Score IV is the rationale and methodology left unexplained. Another is the range of sectors included to develop the score which, too, remains unexplained, with stress focused on democratization which certainly is important, but not important enough to represent the other sectors, such as economy, geopolitics, external relations, social well-being, corruption, political violence (terrorism), and environment. Obviously, the larger the number of domains such a score incorporates, the more robust, valid, and reliable the indicator.

**Table 4. Tally Matrix for the Cross-Country Analysis of PSI**

	A	B	C	D	E
<b>A</b>	Finland Iceland Malta Switzerland 4 (3.0)	Australia Austria Canada Denmark Germany Ireland Japan Luxemburg	Netherland New Zealand Norway Singapore Sweden UK 14 (30.8)		
		Argentina Belgium Botswana Chile China Costa Rica Czech Rep El Salvador Estonia France Greece Hungary Italy	Korea Rep Latvia Mauritius Mongolia Panama Poland Portugal Slovakia Slovenia Spain Tunisia USA Uruguay 26 (20.0)	Belarus Brazil Bulgaria Cambodia Croatia Cyprus Dem. Rep Egypt Gabon Gambia Ghana Haiti Honduras India Iran Israel Jamaica Jordan Tobago Kazakhstan 37 (28.5)	Kyrgyzstan Laos Lithuania Madagascar Malawi Malaysia Mexico Morocco Mozambique Nepal Nicaragua Peru Philippines Romania Tanzania Thailand Trinidad & Tobago Vietnam 37 (28.5)
<b>B</b>				Albania Algeria Armenia Azerbaijan Bangladesh Benin Bolivia Burkina Faso Ecuador Georgia Guatemala Guinea Macedonia Myanmar Namibia Paraguay Rwanda	Senegal Sierra Leone Togo Uzbekistan Zimbabwe 22 (17.0)
					Indonesia Sri Lanka Tajikistan 3 (2.3)
<b>C</b>					
<b>D</b>					
<b>E</b>					
<p>Group A: 38 (29.2)                  Exact %: AA 4, BB 26, CC 8                  Close: AB 14, BC 37, CD 13, 64 (49.2)                  Others: BD 22, BE 3, CE 3, 28 (21.5)                  Total: 130 (99.9)                  Group B: 26/41 (63.4)                  Group C: 6/10 (60.0)</p>					

**Table 5. Forty-Two Countries with Very High Political Stability**

	1 VOAAC	2 GRAFT	3 HUDEI	4 SOCOI	5 QUIORA	6 CTERI	7 LISAI	8 CIJUS	9 TINAG	10 GLOPI	
1 Australia	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	VH	H	H	M	VH	AB
2 Austria	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	H	M	VH	AB
3 Belgium	VH	H	VH	H	VH	M	M	H	M	H	BB
4 Botswana	H	H	H	H	VL	VH	L	H	H	-	BB
5 Canada	VH	VH	VH	H	H	H	H	H	H	VH	AB
6 Chile	H	H	VH	H	M	H	H	L	L	H	BB
7 Costa Rica	H	H	H	H	M	VH	H	M	M	H	BB
8 Czech Rep.	H	M	VH	H	VH	VH	H	M	L	VH	BB
9 Denmark	VH	VH	VH	-	VH	VH	H	VH	M	VH	AB
10 Estonia	H	H	VH	H	H	VH	M	M	M	H	BB
11 Finland	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	H	VH	M	H	AA
12 France	H	H	VH	VH	H	M	H	M	L	H	BB
13 Germany	H	H	VH	VH	H	M	H	H	H	H	AB
14 Greece	H	H	VH	VH	H	M	M	M	VL	M	BB
15 Hungary	H	H	VH	H	VH	VH	H	M	L	H	BB
16 Iceland	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	M	L	VH	AA
17 Ireland	VH	H	VH	VH	VH	H	H	H	M	VH	BB
18 Israel	H	H	VH	H	H	M	H	M	L	L	BC
19 Italy	H	H	VH	VH	H	H	H	L	L	H	BB
20 Japan	H	H	VH	VH	H	H	M	H	M	VH	AB
21 Korea Rep	H	H	VH	VH	H	VH	H	L	L	H	BB
22 Latvia	H	M	VH	H	H	VH	H	L	L	H	BB
23 Lithuania	H	M	VH	H	H	VH	H	M	L	H	BC
24 Luxembourg	VH	VH	VH	H	VH	-	H	H	H	-	AB
25 Malta	H	M	VH	VH	VH	-	H	M	H	-	AA
26 Mauritius	H	M	H	H	H	VH	H	H	H	H	BB
27 Mongolia	H	M	H	H	H	VH	M	L	L	H	BB
28 Netherland	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	H	H	H	AB
29 New Zealand	VH	VH	VH	H	-	VH	H	H	H	VH	AB
30 Norway	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	VH	H	H	AB
31 Poland	H	M	VH	H	VH	VH	H	M	M	H	BB
32 Portugal	H	H	VH	H	H	VH	M	M	M	H	BB
33 Singapore	M	VH	VH	H	-	VH	H	VH	VH	VH	AB
34 Slovakia	H	M	VH	H	VH	VH	H	L	L	H	BB
35 Slovenia	H	H	VH	H	VH	H	H	L	L	VH	BB
36 Spain	H	H	VH	H	H	M	H	M	L	H	BB
37 Sweden	VH	VH	VH	VH	VH	H	H	H	M	H	AB
38 Switzerland	VH	VH	VH	H	H	VH	H	VH	H	VH	AA
39 UK	H	VH	VH	VH	H	M	H	H	M	H	AB
40 USA	H	H	VH	M	H	L	H	H	L	M	BB
41 Uruguay	H	H	VH	H	H	VH	H	M	M	H	BB
42 Vietnam	L	L	H	H	VH	VH	M	H	VH	H	BC

**Table 6.12 Countries with Uncertain Status in PSI**

	1 VOAC	2 GRAFT	3 HUDEI	4 SOCOI	5 QURA	6 GTERI	7 LISAI	8 CIJUS	9 TNAG	10 GIOPI	
1 Afghanistan	-	-	.498M	-	-	9.391VL	2.7L	24L	26L	3.585VL	D--
2 Bahrain	-.96L	0.04M	.846VH	0.774H	-	3.883H	6.2H	-	-	2.437M	A-0.04C
3 Bhutan	-1.2L	-	.612H	0.605H	6.9H	0.019VH	5.1M	97VH	95VH	1.545M	B--
4 Brunet D. S.	-0.93L	-0.17M	.852VH	0.694H	-	-	-	-	-	-	B.86B
5 Cuba	-1.49L	-0.12M	.777H	0.503M	-	0.000VH	-	-	-	2.037M	B.07B
6 Kuwait	-0.08M	0.59M	.803VH	0.728H	-	3.126H	6.1H	-	-	1.799H	B.64B
7 Libya	-1.35L	-0.90L	.706H	0.520M	-	6.987L	5.6M	-	-	3.262VL	B-.38
8 Qatar	-0.54L	0.57H	.855VH	0.630H	-	0.057VH	6.4H	-	-	1.869H	A1.40B
9 Saudi Arabia	-1.07M	-0.35M	.854VH	0.806VH	-	5.479M	6.3H	-	-	2.417M	B.51B
10 Syria	-1.40L	-0.83L	.536M	0.728H	-	8.315VH	3.5L	27L	-	3.6VL	C-.28C
11 Turkmenistan	-1.42L	-1.12L	.706H	0.603H	-	0.000VH	5.2M	-	-	2.283M	B.11C
12 United A. E.	-0.51L	0.13M	.862VH	0.609H	-	0.105VH	7.0H	-	-	1.82H	B1.09B

## 6. INSTABILITY AND NEPAL'S CRISIS SYNDROME

### 6.1 *Is Instability Unique to Nepal?*

Instability has become so pervasive in Nepal's politics that it may convince a common citizen it is unique to it. Riaz and Basu regard it as a defining character of Nepal's politics after 1990.<sup>136</sup>

Between 1996 and 2006, the INSEC report claims 13,190 lives were lost in the course of the Maoist Movement (8,457 killed by the State and 4,733 by the Maoists). In the 3,840 major attacks on public property facilities recorded and 3,162 incidents, the loss was estimated to be worth NR 3.52 billion (government property worth NR 2.39 billion damaged) and the country suffered a sharp drop of 1.9% in its average annual growth rate of 4.9% recorded in the 90's.<sup>137</sup>

In the five years between 2008 and 2013 alone, a total of 4,451 events of general strike have been recorded by the UN Department of Safety and Security, started by political parties, rebel groups, and local or business communities, resulting in a Total Factor Production (TFP) loss which was the largest in South Asia. As for terrorism, the Terrorism Index on Nepal stood at 5.59 between 2002-2009, reaching an all-time high of 6.68 in 2004 with a record low of 4.39 in 2016. One school of thought to which there is no dearth of subscribers holds that even the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India ended up destabilizing Nepal's sovereign status through its several biased and unfair provisions. Proximity to India and over 1,200 km of continuous border with all the assets and benefits such vicinity to a rising superstate's democracy and development may bring is not without its downside. In terms of **conflict-years**, explained as 'a calendar year in which a country has been involved in a state-based armed conflict of any type',<sup>138</sup> the Human Security Centre shows that among the 27 countries listed as the most conflict-prone countries of the world between 1946 and 2003, India figured second (behind only Myanmar) with 156 conflict-years for the 57 years intervening, that means 2-7 conflicts every year. That report explains India's "many long-running infra-state conflicts and its wars with neighboring states" ensured its second place. Would there then also be a neighborhood effect on Nepal?

It looks relevant at this point also to see in brief how the people at large perceive political instability.

### 6.2 *What Survey Polls Say*

Asked what kind of change followed the restoration of democracy in 1990, the second largest category of respondents (62.6%) said it increased *political instability*, agreeing strongly, compared to 31.7% who just agreed. Also, whereas 74% of the respondents were found attributing as the reason strongly to the leaders' lust for self and party interest rather than national interest, 20.6% just agreed. Among the choices offered — decrease in social disparity and equality, mobilization of marginalized groups for their rights, growth in development infrastructure, increased *political instability*, and leaders' lust for self-and party interest—the last two items came up as the two most important responses (94.3% and 94.6% respectively which are almost equal).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Riaz and Basu 2007, 23-24.

<sup>137</sup> Dhakal 2006, 131-133.

<sup>138</sup> Human Security Centre 2005, Fig. 1.4, 26-28.

<sup>139</sup> Kathmandu: SDSA 2004, 143.



However, in the context of identifying problems at the personal level, when asked what causes them anxiety personally, *political uncertainty/instability* consistently figured as the 5th, that is, the last, factor behind poverty (1), price hike (2), unemployment (3), and lack of development and infrastructure (4) in the three surveys done from August 2010, February 2011, to June 2011, where the percentage figures oscillated between 7 and 9, and the urban respondents exceeded the rural ones on a 14:6 ratio,<sup>140</sup> compared to 43% of the respondents who said the inability of the political parties to formulate a new constitution lay behind the country leading in the wrong direction, where 36% put the blame on the country's.<sup>141</sup>

When asked what are the two most damaging consequences that the failure of political consensus among the political parties could induce (phrasing modified due to problem in the original text, p. 10, V 19), 34% of the respondents attributed it to *political instability* (highest response, as the first consequence) and 15% figured it as the second consequence.<sup>142</sup>

But when asked what were the two most important reasons behind the failure of the first Constitution Assembly to deliver constitution, compared to 53% who blamed leaders' lust for power and 28% claiming in-party split, only 3% regarded foreign intervention as the first factor, the percentages on the second most important reason standing at 27, 23, and 10.<sup>143</sup>

Another small sample survey, carried out on a group of 44 social observers (N=44) based on a 5-point scale (1-very negative, 2-negative, 3-moderate, 4-positive, 5-very positive) on 6 indicators (with 2 value Indicators – Freedom and Constitutional Freedom and 4 Performance Indicators – Rule of Law, Periodic Elections, Accountability, and Stable Good Governance), shows the government's performance scoring just 2.09, where an overwhelming proportion of the observers rated it to be very weak or weak (95.6%) with stable, good governance obtaining the minimum score 1.36).<sup>144</sup>

### **6.3 Stabilizing Nepal**

Can stability be planned into a system? The approaches adopted often so far look *ad hoc*, ambivalent, and ambiguous rather than assuring, but there is little ambiguity in the inferences deducible from the foregoing analysis or the lesson one could draw from the attempts made in this regard. This does not mean the task is going to be easy or simple. Far from that. It demands a studied effort at an inter-sectoral, multi-disciplinary level based on empirical evidence as also a holistic strategic investment that combines the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the issues at stake.

The next query that raises its head is: Is it possible to nationally direct the change meditated as a time-bound process in order to stabilize the political order rather than merely respond to it as a point event in time? If yes, the effort has to be more than just an adjustative mode of approach toward one which is systematically designed, that incorporates a certain number

<sup>140</sup> IDA, 17-18.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>144</sup> Rawal 2073, 32-35.

of phases, each with clear adjectives some of whom can be concretely assessed or measured over time and can be compared on the progress made. Only such a strategy can take due account of the disruptions that the various elements brought in the nation's political system.

Hypothetically speaking, the less the care given to the implementation of the stabilization agenda and policy, the larger the measure of failure that will result. Two clear instances of misapplication of public policies in Nepal still fresh in public memory are Land Reform and the New Education Plan, both of which ended in considerable social instability, less because they were wrong *per se*, but more because the strategy adopted was poorly conceived and designed. The catalogue of such policy errors unfortunately is far too long to describe here.

Table 3 presents a three-stage scenario analysis on Nepal's political stability and shows how instability can worsen further (Stage 1) if strong steps are not taken to improve the status quo (Stage 2) toward Stage 3.

**Table 3. SCENARIO ANALYSIS ON POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NEPAL**

	<b>1 WORSE MONOCRACY (AUTOCRACY)</b>	<b>2 STATUS QUO HEGEMONIC OLIGARCHY</b>	<b>3 (OPTIMALLY) SATISFICING REPUBLIC</b>
1. Political Order	Autocracy	Party-state (captive state)	Direct & Delegated
2. Key Role Player (SB)	King, Autocrat, Dictator	Power Oligarchs (Iron Triangle)	Government Civil Society, Private Sector
3. Model of Power Use	Hard, Coercion, Command	Control	Predominantly Soft, Influence, Cooptation
4. Regime's Natural Capability	Nominated/V. Weak	Appointed, Delegators/ Medium	Broad & Substantive Robust
5. Agenda Builders	Rulers, Religious Elite	Political & Economic Elite, Political Party	Public, Govt, Private Sector
6. Mode of Election	None, Pseudo-, Selective	Delegatory	Direct + Delegatory
7. Representation	Proxy	Nominal	Substantive
8. Diplomacy	Informal	Club	Public
9. Nature of Policy/ Strategy	Uncertain	Intermittent	Continuous, Consistent, Coherent
10. Mode of Political Mobilization	State	Professional Elite	Mass
11. Pattern of Resource Use	Largely Extractive	Top-Heavy Distribution	Relatively Equitous Distribution
12. Rational Status	Isolated	Broad	Extensive, Deep
13. Track Used	One	One, Two	One, Two, Three
14. Awareness of issues, Agenda, Policy	Dormant, Limited	Limited to Power Elite	Mass Awareness
15. Inclusion	Virtual	Narrow	Broad
16. People's Participation	Lowest	Passive	Active, Broad Continuous
17. Transparency	Opaque	Semi-Transparent	Largely Transparent

	<b>1 WORSE MONOCRACY (AUTCOCRACY)</b>	<b>2 STATUS QUO HEGEMONIC OLIGARCHY</b>	<b>3 (OPTIMALLY) SATISFICING REPUBLIC</b>
18. Accountability	None. V. Low	Low	High
19. Ownership	V. Weak, Ruler-based	Weak	Strong
20. Legitimacy	None	Low	High
21. Safety & Security	V. Low	Low	High
22. Crime	High	Medium	Low
23. Scope for Conflict, Violence, Crisis	V. High	Medium	Low
24. Human Rights Situation	Virtually Non	Civil and Political	Civil, Political, Economic, Identity
25. Law & Order	Negative	Medium	High
26. Status of Civil Society	Non-Existent (Ban)	Accommodation but Polarized, Passive	Active, Vibrant
27. Public Sector	Largely Absent or Directed	Predominant Political (Govt.) Sector)	Autonomous & Interactive
28. Access to Resources & Opportunities	Power Oligarchs	Pol. Party, Power Elite	Mass (Public)
29. Subsidiarism	None	Low	High
30. Level of Political Ethics (Integrity) <sup>145</sup>	Largely Missing	Medium	Optimum
31. Socio-Economic Disparity	Great	Medium	Minimum
32. Equity	V. Low	Medium	High
33. Public Efficacy	Absent	Low	High
34. Political Stability	V. Low	Low	High
35. Solidarity (Nation-State)	Fragile (Assimilatory)	Weak (Hegemonic)	Strong (Mosaic)
36. Existential Scope for System	Survival	Substantial	Sustainable

**6.4 Strategy to Stabilize**

Stabilization in the conventional sense means “actions undertaken by international actors to reach termination of hostilities and consolidate peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict.”<sup>146</sup> This, in fact, was the interpretation given to the word when the Multinational Implementation Force (IFOR), later named the Stabilization Force (SFOR), started operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996 which by 1998 achieved considerable progress in stabilization without a single casualty among the international troops or any significant flare-up between the former warring parties.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Values, Principles, and Norms.

<sup>146</sup> Call 2009, 5 (Box).

<sup>147</sup> Cox 2009, 255, in Call 2009.

The overwhelming force available did reinforce division of the country, yet it was successful and stabilization remains one key goal (the two other being reconstruction and transformation) that the European Union pursues in its strategy of post-conflict statebuilding.<sup>148</sup> Earlier, the CIA had in 1994 appointed POLITICAL STABILITY TASK FORCE (PTTF), its prototype named State Failure Task Force when US officials were beginning to hold the failed states as one cause of global problems.<sup>149</sup> Both *Stability* and *Stabilization* have been taken in this study to embody a broader process and feature in space and time. It is an approach that demands a longer timeframe and a mechanism far more complex than the case just mentioned. This, however, poses a challenge which may look formidable at first. But is it really so?

How is Nepal likely to fare in the stabilization agenda and how would the people take to it? Responding to the query demands at least a cursory glance at the character of the population at large in terms of their attitude toward violence, their feelings about safety and security, entrepreneurship, as also the image they bear of the key institutions of the political order and how distanced they remain on the issues and agendas of the day. Fortunately, some information is available on these issues and on that basis, it may be possible to suggest measures for stabilization in a preliminary form.

On unconventional political behavior (violent approach to politics), such as taking up arms against the government, more than four-fifths of the respondents asked in a survey stood against it (with only six for it) and nearly the same proportion opposed damaging government buildings (vs three who supported).<sup>150</sup>

Comparing this with the results of the findings on Nepal that the *Human Development Report 2010* has brought out on certain aspects of the political sector here can be of help in formulating the stabilization strategy. Whereas only 5.3% of the country's population say they are satisfied with their life, no more than 11% voice their opinion to the public officials.<sup>151</sup>

Considering the low level of issue salience, among the public at large, of stability and the low level of political and social values and of institutional trust that people carry about the political institutions,<sup>152</sup> as also the large issue distance between the mass public and the politicians, the hope that an agenda on political stabilization may generate at first among the public, the political (the government) and the private sectors may not be very high. Yet, one reason to retain hope and sustain a belief in the feasibility of this agenda could be the finding reported by another survey of 1994 that tells us that the potential for entrepreneurship development in Nepal is an immense one, and their hard working habits, internal locus of control, openness to change for the better, risk taking ability, above all, a positive attitude toward life in general, can offer a large public platform and constituency for stabilizing the political order; in other words, to turn the vicious cycle of instability into a virtuous one.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Anastasakis, Captain, and Economodes 2018, 159-160, in Berdal and Zaum (Eds.)

<sup>149</sup> Matthew and Upreti 2007, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Borre, Pandey, and Tiwari 1994, Table 7.

<sup>151</sup> *Human Development Report 2010*, tables 9 and 6.

<sup>152</sup> Among all the eight public institutions on which an image survey was done by IDEA in 2008, political parties were at the bottom, less than three-fourths said they trusted them and barely 68% said they trusted the government. IDEA 2008: V 20 A-H. See also Tables T 4.2-4.11 (246-254).

<sup>153</sup> Karki et al., 1994, VII.

In this context, what anthropologists Clayton and Carole Robarchek report is truly heartening; in just thirty years after 1958, homicide rate dropped from 1,000 per 100,000 population to 60 per 100,000, registering a straight 94% reduction among the Waorani people of Ecuador, regarded as the most violent society known to anthropology (note: the reduction was 94%, not 90% reported wrongly by the author), which shows humans are capable of rapid no-killing change.<sup>154</sup>

### 6.5 A Menu for Stabilizing Nepal

Stabilizing Nepal’s political order demands incorporating elements in five areas critical to it, each of which is either missing so far or has not been tried well enough.

- 1. **REPRESENTATION**      NOTA,<sup>155</sup> Recall, Referendum, Initiative, Tenurial Stability
- 2. **JUDICIARY**              Measures against Impunity, Fast Track Justice
- 3. **ELECTION**                PR, Fixed Date for Election, State funding
- 4. **ECONOMY**                Land Reform, Red Book for Everyone
- 5. **CIVIL SOCIETY**         PIL (Public Interest Litigation) Ombudsman

But since political stability is not just a national good, but also a regional and global public good, before trying our hand at the stabilization agenda, a holistic approach has to be adopted, on which the four caveats Almond and Powell forward should come handy to facilitate the process.

- One: All public goods cannot be pursued simultaneously.
- Two: All of them don’t have only negative trade-offs, which are not the same under all circumstances.
- Three: The problems are often so formidable that no single strategy may ensure the goals of growth.
- Four: No ideology and political science available can solve the problems objectively.<sup>156</sup>

## 7. ROUND-UP

Work started on the theme with an outline hardly anything like its present form, but as it progressed, the temptation rose to get a deeper view of the problem rather than just to keep the exercise limited to a book review, but without overstretching the time and space at hand and avoiding what David Fisher dubs ‘the Holist Fallacy’.<sup>157</sup>

The holistic approach adopted in this study was intended to push political stability toward the epicenter of debate in Nepal’s contemporary politics. Cross-country comparison was done, keeping in mind what Al-Biruni, an Iranian mathematician, said – learning about each other contributes to knowledge as well as peace – apart from the fact that only a fuller view, rather than a fragmentary one, can do justice to such an effort.

<sup>154</sup> Paige 2003, 160. The rate is 10 or less per 100,000 for the US.  
<sup>155</sup> None of the above.  
<sup>156</sup> Almond and Powell 1980, 142-146.  
<sup>157</sup> The holist fallacy, argues David H. Fisher, is an exceedingly common form of error, an absurd effort to know the whole about a thing, adding “a project designed to explain everything ends...by explaining nearly nothing.” Fischer 1970, 65-68.

While the analytics of this exercise compels a closer look at stabilization, four caveats are in order at this point before the study concludes: the key role of harmony in the agenda with peace as the first order of priority, with respect for diversity in social relationship as a viable bridge between the East and the West;<sup>158</sup> stress on consensus in deciding not *what*, but *what stabilization is about in the course of decisions*, adopting what Peter Drucker regards as the Japanese approach to decision-making;<sup>159</sup> the need to adopt *resilience in decisions* (how, for instance, John F. Kennedy turned the failure of the Bay of Pigs strategy into success in handling the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962;<sup>160</sup> and given the hysteretic nature of modern technology, including cybersecurity techniques (*the better the security technique and products, the higher the attack techniques and methods*<sup>161</sup>), given, moreover, the various dilemmas and paradoxes the strategists of a stabilization agenda may face, constant vigilance along with *caution and countermeasures of various sorts* will remain at a premium to optimize the scope of the stabilization agenda to success. Still, however smart the strategy, it will fail if the *Sovereignty Strategy and the Santiago Principles* are not followed in the course of its implementation.<sup>162</sup>

Covering the ground somewhat cursorily, this paper has tried to explain political instability as a syndrome rather than a conundrum. The objective was neither to be very comprehensive nor exhaustive, but to explain the problem as a structural malady rather than a mere symptom, transcending space and time with universal and indigenous features built into it. Including a fairly large number of countries, it offers a comparative base to draw inferences of projective and hypothetical scope. The inferences each reader could derive from the findings may differ and so may the implications, but some of the lessons and impacts look assuredly common for applied politics and strategic planning in system stabilization.

The key conclusion of this study is that, as an instrument of statecraft, the utility value of positive stability is impossible to ignore; it deserves systematic and systemic, sustained, and serious attention.

The Second Conclusion responds to the second query raised at the outset as a corollary of the syndrome proposition – Political Instability Syndrome (PIS) can be projected, which evolves in stages, but to make it a genuinely valid and reliable predictor of countries' political instability, collective and sustained efforts in study and investment at both the state and inter-state level is needed. Both the risk culture<sup>163</sup> and the Paradox of Globalization Thesis<sup>164</sup> which Baylis,

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Bell, quoted by Parag Khanna 2016, 385.

<sup>159</sup> Drucker, 196-197; see also Kissinger (1994, 829) on the Japanese way of decision-making.

<sup>160</sup> Diamond, 439-440.

<sup>161</sup> Samuel 2016, 325.

<sup>162</sup> *Sovereignty Strategy*: Alignment of internal and external stakeholders of states to the goals through joint formation and adherence to the rules of the game mandated by citizens to mobilize resources, perform critical tasks - ensuring reflexive monitoring and adjustment of implementation.

*Santiago Principles*: International standards to ensure that the investment to be made and the mechanisms set up for public work and projects are professionally and honestly utilized to prevent misuse by those in power.

<sup>163</sup> The emerging realization that the global risks of pollution and HIV/AIDs states alone cannot handle. Galbraith 1984, 10.

<sup>164</sup> Whether Asian economies rejecting Western values can modernize successfully. Galbraith 1984, 11.



Smith, and Owens refer to, demand that a broader outlook be adopted on the stabilization agenda, but a globally inclusive strategy, too, becomes essential if we are not to forget that even in the course of establishing the Westphalian system nearly four centuries ago in the year 1648, some 200 delegates were involved in the draft;<sup>165</sup> that a stable international order is a principled international order<sup>166</sup> with an ethical foreign policy based not just on sovereignty and deterrence as before, but on democracy, relatively free private sector, and rule of law; that a stable world order, as Kissinger reminds, cannot be achieved by any single country acting alone, but demands a global culture transcending the ideals of a single nation and region;<sup>167</sup> that inter-regional struggles can be more debilitating than those between states;<sup>168</sup> that Europe modernized not in a spasmodic burst of change, but as Francis Fukuyama reminds, through piecemeal shifts over a period of some fifteen hundred years;<sup>169</sup> that the spirit of **Deep Ecology**<sup>170</sup> can no more be ignored; and that the Euro-American polities have survived and sustained to become more stable than most other political orders because, in contrast to the frequently fracturing and fragile polities elsewhere, they have the capacity for *epigenesis*<sup>171</sup> as well as *autopoiesis*<sup>172</sup> in contrast to our largely *allopoietic*<sup>173</sup> propensity.

“For decision-making,” says E.S. Quade,” the value of a forecast does not necessarily lie in whether or not it comes true, but in its utility in helping the decision-makers to choose a satisfactory course of action to do it in time.<sup>174</sup>

The last leg of the exercise concludes that stabilization is a worthwhile agenda, but it is an agenda that will demand investment of vision, resources, humanpower, and time from both the government and the people all focused on the five areas mentioned. A wide debate, as General Krishna N. S. Thapa suggests on matters of public concern (such as treaties and here, system stability) is essential to make the agenda legitimate and broadly owned.<sup>175</sup>

As a matter of fact, every transition in the course of evolution and every disruption of the status quo tends to invite a new phase of crisis or instability and every solution of such problems also opens the door to challenges in some new form or shape. Would the resolution of terrorism in its present shape give rise to a new genre of the issue? How will the larger opening of Africa, Antarctica, and the Arctic Ocean impact regional and global stability in the days to come? How would the emergence of Brazil and Indonesia, the would-be superstates of the future, influence world events? And the future inroads of humankind into space and cosmos? These are queries better left for future probing.

---

<sup>165</sup> Kissinger 2014, 373.

<sup>166</sup> Steve, Hadfield, and Dunne 2012, 230.

<sup>167</sup> Kissinger 2014, 373.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>169</sup> Fukuyama 2011, 460.

<sup>170</sup> A green ideological perspective that rejects anthropocentrism, prioritizes maintenance of nature, and is associated with values such as bioequality, diversity, and decentralization. Heywood 2014, 397.

<sup>171</sup> Progressive emergence of structural differentiation.

<sup>172</sup> Self-production and self-renewal in an organism.

<sup>173</sup> Not self-producing. See Dobuzinskis 1987, 213.

<sup>174</sup> Quade 1978, 239.

<sup>175</sup> Thapa 2078 BS, 245

At the end of the quarter-millennium of its evolution as a state-nation, when a whole array of other states appeared and disappeared from the world's map, Nepal struggled through a century of state formation, through two World Wars and a Cold War, etching a glorious saga of its valor on the sands of history. The challenge that this oldest state of South Asia<sup>176</sup> today faces to sustain itself in the emerging new world order, that of volatile political scenario, is going to be the agenda of the first order whose chronic instability is not beyond cure.

Chronic political instability is a symptom of system failure. Cognitive psychology, says Chris Clearfield, has given us a window into how small mistakes blossom into massive failures and how small steps can prevent them. Many of the instability factors mentioned in this study can be seen originating from small errors, left ignored, or unexamined which later snowball into large system failures. Large system failures, said Ben Berman in the spring of 2016, are incredibly costly, but easy to underestimate. The good news here is, as Berman put it, everyone can make a real difference.<sup>177</sup> What we all need now is the conviction to try, but we can succeed only if we all try together.

## REFERENCES

- Accemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2013. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. London. Profile Books.
- Adhikari, Saroj. 2017 BS. *Chakravyuhma Chandrasurya: Rastriya Surakshya ra Swadhintaka Chunauti*. Kathmandu: Sangri-La Books.
- Aditya, Anand, Bishnu Raj Upreti, and Poorna Kanta Adhikary. 2004. *Countries in Conflict and the Processing of Peace: Lessons for Nepal*. Kathmandu: Friends for Peace.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. 'From Subjects to Citizens: Civic Transformation in a Captive State', in Anand Aditya (Ed.), *The Civil Society – State Interface in Nepal: Renegotiating the Role between the Private and the Political*. Lalitpur: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and Pragya Foundation.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2013. 'The 21st Century: The Twilight of Monarchy', *The Himalyan Times*, 19 July 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2016. 'Minorities on March; Turbulent Tarai-Madhes: Reshaping Party Image and Renurturing Nepali Politics', in Anand Aditya and Chandra D. Bhatta (Ed.), *The role of Political Parties in Deepening Democracy in Nepal: A Study of Party Image, Issues at State, and Agenda Building* (Kathmandu, FES).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2021. 'Regime Capability and Relational Stakes in the Emerging World Order', Institute of Foreign Affairs, *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, January 2021, 9-25. Kathmandu.
- Ake, Claude. 1971. Cited by Gurr.
- Almond, Gabriel A. and G. Bingham Powell, Jr. 1980. *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Anastasakis, Othen, Richard Captan and Spyros Economodes. 2018. 'Regional Approaches to Statebuilding: The European Union', in Berdal and Zaum 2018.
- Apter, David 6. 1971. Cited by Gurr.
- Apter, David and Harry Eckstein. 1987. *Comparative Politics*. Delhi: Surjeet Publications.

- Apter, David E. 1978. *Introduction to Political Analysis*. Delhi: Prentice Hall of India.
- Axford, Barrie, Garry K. Browning, Richard Huggins, and Ben Rosamond. 2002. *Politics: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2nd Edition.
- Barton, Jonathan R. 1997. *A Political Geography of Latin America*. London: Routledge.
- Baylis John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens. 2014. *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berdal, Mats and Dominik Zaum (Eds.). 2018. *Political Economy of Statebuilding: Power after Peace*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Bernham, Peter, Karin Gilland, Wyn Grant, and Zig Layton-Henry. 2004. *Research Methods in Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhandari, Durga P. 1983. 'Subjective Essay on the Need of Monarchy in Nepal', in *The Monarch* (Souvenir volume published in 1983 to celebrate King Birendra's 38th Birthday, 14-21), cited by Malla 2015, 59.
- Bhattarai, Umesh K. 2014. *Conflict to Peace Transition in Nepal*. New Delhi: Adarsh Books.
- Bista, Dor B. 1991. *Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Booth, Ken and Nicholas J. Wheeler. 2008. 'Uncertainty', in Williams (Ed.).
- Borre, Ole, Sushil R. Panday, and Chitra K Tiwari. 1994. *Nepalese Political Behavior*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher PL.
- Brecher, Michael. 1987. 'Political Stability in The New States of Asia', in Apter and Eckstein, 1987.
- Brennan, Geoffrey and Alan Hamlin. 2000. *Democratic Devices and Desires*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briguglio, Lino, Gordon cordina, Nodia Farrugia, and Constance Vigilance. 2008. *Small States and the Pillars of Economic Resilience*. Malta: Islands and Small States Institute of the University of Malta and London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Cai, Cuihong. 2016. 'Global Cybersecurity Environment: Perspectives of the US and China in Comparison', in Samuel and Sharma.
- Call, Charles T. with Vanessa Wyeth. 2009. *Building States to Build Peace*. New Delhi: Viva Books.
- Castles, Francis G. 2002. 'Policy Performance in the Democratic State: An Emergent Field of Study,' in Hans Kelman (Ed.) *Comparative Democratic Politics: A Guide to Contemporary Theory and Research* (London: Sage Publication, 2002).
- Chabris, C. F. and D. J. Simons. 2010. *The Invisible Gorilla: Thinking Clearly in a World of Illusions*. London: Harper Collins.
- Chirot, Daniel. 1977. *Social Change in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- Clearfield, Chris and Andreas Tilcsik. 2018. *Meltdown: Why Our Systems Fail and What We Can Do About It*. New York: Penguin Press.

- Collins. 1987. *The Collins Atlas of World History*. London.
- Cooley, Alexander and Daniel H. Nexon. 2022. 'The Real Crisis of Global Order: Illiberalism on the Rise', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February.
- Cowan, Sam. 2018. *Essays on Nepal: Past and Present*. Kathmandu: Himal Books.
- Cox, Marcus. 2009. 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Limits of Liberal Imperialism', in Call with Wyeth (Eds.), 2009.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1991. *Democracy and Its Critics*, 1st Indian Reprint. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Dahl, Robert A. and Edward R. Tuft. 1973. *Size and Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dalton, Russell J. 1998. 'Comparative Politics: Micro-Behavioral Perspective', in R. E. Goodin and H. Klingemann (Eds.), *A New Handbook of Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Danspeckgruber, Wolfgang (Ed.). 2002. *The Self-Determination of Peoples: Community, Nation, and State in an Interdependent World*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Davidson, James Dale and William Rees-Mogg. 1994. *The Great Reckoning: How the World Will Change Before the Year 2000*. London: Pan Books in Association with Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd.
- Davies, Morlon R. and Vaughan A. Lewis. 1971. *Models of Political Systems*. London: Macmillan.
- Debuzinskis, Laurent. 1987. *The Self-Organizing Polity*. London: Westview Press.
- Deutsch, Karl W. 1987. 'Peace, Violence and War,' in Vayrynen and Senghaas.
- Dhakal, Dilli Raman. 2006. *A Decade of Disaster: Human and Physical Cost of Nepal Conflict 1996-2005* (Research Report). Kathmandu: Community Study and Welfare Centre (CSWC).
- Diamond, Jared. 2011. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*. London: Penguin Books.
- Doggan, Mattei and Dominique Pelassy. 1984. *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*. New Delhi; Vision Books Private Ltd.
- Drucker, Peter F. 2010. *Men, Ideas, and Politics*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Easterly, William. 2006. *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid The Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. New York: Fenguin Books.
- Einsiedel, Sebastian von, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan. 2012. 'Introduction', in Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan, *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- Feiraband, Ivo and Rosalind Feirabend. 1966. 'Aggressive Behaviors within Politics, 1948-1962: A Cross-National Study,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 10 (1966), cited by Nolan and Lenski, 255.
- Fischer, David H. 1970. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historic Thought*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Fischoff, Baruch and John Kadwany. 2011. *Risk: A very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor and Lynn Lyons Morris. 1987. *How to Analyze Data*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Fukuyama, Francis, 2011. *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. London: Profile Books Ltd.

- Gautam, Kul Chandra. 2015. *Lost in Transition: Rebuilding Nepal from the Maoist mayhem and mega earthquake*. Kathmandu: Nepalaya.
- Goran, Hyden, Julius Court, and Kenneth Mease. 2005. *Making Sense of Governance: Empirical Evidence from Sixteen Developing Countries*. New Delhi: Viva Books.
- Greenstein, F. I. and N. W. Polsby. 1975. *Handbook of Politics, Vol. 3: Macropolitical Theory*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison – Wesley Publishing Company.
- Gurr, Ted R. 1971. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hachhethu, Krishna. 2004. 'The Nepali State and The Maoist Insurgency, 1996-2001', in Hutt.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2018. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hart, B. H. Liddell. 1970/2014. *A History of the Second World War*. London: Pan Books.
- Hathaway, Oona. 2022. 'Keeping the Wrong Secrets: How Washington Misses the Real Security Threat', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February.
- Herbst, Jeffrey. 2002. 'Global Change in the Future of Existing Nation-States' (13-30), in Danspeckgruber 2002.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2014. *Global Politics*. London: Palgrave.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1995. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. London: Abacus.
- Holsti, K. J. 1981. *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India PL.
- Hopfburger, N. 2000. 'Bilingual Education Policies and Practice in the Andes: Ideological Paradox and Intercultural Possibility,' in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 3 (2).
- Hornby, A. S. (Ed.). 2015. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Human Security Centre. 2005. *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 20th Century*. New York: Oxford University Press; University of British Columbia, Canada.
- Huntington, S. P. and Jorge I. Dominguez. 1975. 'Political Development,' in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of Politics*, Vol. 3: Macropolitical Theory.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 2009. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Delhi: Adarsh Books (78-92).
- Hutt, Michael (Ed.). 2004. *Himalayan 'People's War': Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Hutt, Michael. 2014. 'The Last Himalayan Monarchies' (Ch. 17, 419-443), in G. Toffin 2014.
- Ilchman, Warren F. and Norman Thomas Uphoff. 1971. 'Political Resource Accumulation,' in *The Political Economy of Change*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 180-207).
- Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). 2018. *Global Peace Index*. Sydney.
- Johnston, R. J., J. O' Loughlin, and P. J. Taylor. 1987. 'The Geography of Violence and Premature Death: A World Systems Approach', in Vayrynen, Senghaas, and Schmidt.
- Kahn, Herman and B. Bruce-Briggs. 1972. *The Things to Come: Thinking about The Seventies and Eighties*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Kandel, Shubha Shankar. 2075 BS. *Avataran*. Kathmandu: Centre for Asian Policy Research and Studies.

- Kaplan, Robert D. 2012. *The Revenge of Geography*. New York: Random House.
- Karki, Yagya B., Gaja Nand Agrawal, and Murari Regmi. 1994. *Attitude toward Entrepreneurship in Nepal*. Kathmandu: GTZ and SBPP, HMG.
- Kelman, Hans. 2002. *Comparative Democratic Politics*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Keohane, Robert O. 1989. *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Khanna, Parag. 2016. *Connectography: Mapping the Global Network Revolution*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Kissinger, Henry. 1994. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Kissinger. 2014. *World Order*. UK: Penguin Books.
- Kling, Merle. 1962. 'Towards a Theory of Power and Political Stability in Latin America,' in John H. Kautsky (Ed.), *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 123-139).
- Knorr, Klaus (Ed.). 1987. *Power, Strategy and Security*. New Delhi: Asian Books.
- Kohn, George Childs (Ed.). 2008. *Dictionary of Wars*. New Delhi: Viva Books.
- Kornhauser, William. 1971. Cited by Gurr.
- Lakeman. Enid. 1970. *How Democracies Vote: A Study of Majority and Proportional Electoral Systems*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Lim, Timothy C. 2007. *Doing Comparative Politics: An Introduction to Approaches and Issues*. New Delhi: Viva Books PL.
- Limbu-Angbuhang, Ranadhoj. 2014. *Lessons of War and National Security*. Kathmandu: Renu Limbu.
- Lustick, Jan S. 2002. Cited in Danspeckgruber, 205.
- Lynn-Jones, Sean M. (Ed.). 1995. *Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security*. Cambridge; Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Mahat, Ram Sharan. 2020. *Trials, Tremors and Hope: Political Economy of Contemporary Nepal*. New Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Malla, Kamal P. 2015. 'Hard Plan in a Soft State' (61-71), in *From Literature to Culture: Selected Writings on Nepalese Studies, 1980-2010* (Kathmandu: Social Science Baha, Himal Books).
- Mansbach, Richard W. and Kersten L. Taylor. 2012. *Introduction to Global Politics* (2nd edition). London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Marshall, Tim. 2021. *The Power of Geography*. London: Elliott and Thompson Ltd.
- McGuire, Bill. 2014. *Global Catastrophes: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McNamara, Robert S. with Brian Van Demark. 1996. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Vintage Books. See also "Mr. McNamara's War," *The New York Times*, *ibid*.
- Mehta, Ashok K. 2015. *The Royal Nepal Army: Meeting the Maoist Challenge*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co.
- Morrisey, Oliver, Dirk William te Velde, Adrian Hewitt. 2002. 'Defining International Public Goods: Conceptual Issues', in Marc Ferroni and Ashoka Mody (Eds.), *International Public Goods:*



- Incentives, Measurement, and Financing* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publication/Washington, DC: World Bank, 31-46).
- Nimmo, Dan and Thomas D. Unger. *American Political Patterns: Conflict and Consensus*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Nohlen, Dieter. 1996. *Elections and Electoral Systems*. Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd.
- Nolan, Patrick and Gerhard Lenski. 2009. *Human Society: An Introduction to Macrosociology*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- NOSC. 1994. *Nepal Political Opinion Survey 1993*. Kathmandu.
- Overy, Richard (Ed.). 2015. *The Times Complete History of the World*, 9th ed. London: Times Books.
- Paige, Glenn D. 2003. *Nonkilling Global Political Science*. Honolulu: Center for Global Nonviolence.
- Pandey, Ramesh Nath. 2077 BS. *Kranti ra Pratikaranti*. Kathmandu: Sangri-La Books.
- Pauling, Linus. 1986. *World Encyclopedia of Peace*, Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Piers, John, Blaikie Cameron, and David Seddon. 1980. *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Pokharel, Bhojraj and Shrishti Rana. 2013. *Nepal Votes for Peace*. Delhi: Foundation Books.
- POLSAN. 1992. *Political Parties and Parliamentary Process in Nepal: A Study of the Transitional Phase*. Kathmandu.
- Poudel, Narendraraj. 2071 BS. *सीडीओका सत्र वर्ष*. Kathmandu: WeRead.
- Pradhan, Uma. 2020. *Simultaneous Identities: Language, Education and the Nepali Nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prasad, Naren. 2008. 'Social Cohesion, Governance and Social Development,' in Briguglio et al., 292-295.
- Pro-Public & SeeD. 2016. *Predictors of Peace and Violence in Nepal: An Empirical Study of Peace Needs and Peace Services*. Kathmandu.
- Pye, Lucian W. 1966. *Aspects of Political Development*. New Delhi: Amerind Publishing Co. PL.
- Quade, E. S. 1978. *Analysis for Public Decisions*. New York: Elsevier, 4th Printing (Chapter: Forecasting and Planning).
- Rae, Ranjit. 2021. *Kathmandu Dilemma: Resetting India-Nepal Ties*. Gurugram: Penguin Random House India PL.
- Rana, Sagar S. J. B. 2017. *Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.
- Random House. 2001. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Random House.
- Rawal, Ram B. 2073 BS. 'Yo. Loktantra Ke Loktantra!' (What Kind of Democracy This!) in *Nepal*, 8 Falgun.
- Reynolds, Andrew, Ben Reilly, and Andrew Ellis. 2008. *Electoral Design: The New International Idea Handbook*. Sweden: International IDEA.
- Riaz, Ali and Subho Basu. 2007. *Paradise Lost? State Failure in Nepal*. New Delhi: Adarsh Books.

- Rose, Leo E. 1971. *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*. Bombay: Oxford University Press.
- Russett, Bruce and Harvey Starr. 1986. *World Politics: The Menu for Choice*. Bombay: Vakils, Feffer and Simons Ltd.
- Samuel, Cherian and Munish Sharma (Eds.). 2016. *Securing Cyberspace: International and Asian Perspectives*. New Delhi: Pentagon Press.
- Sanyal, Sajeew. 2016. *The Ocean of Churn: How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History*. Gurgaon: Penguin Books.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. 1986. *The Cycles of American History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- SDSA (State of Democracy in South Asia). 2008. *State of Democracy in South Asia – A Report*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, SDSA, CSDS.
- SEARCH. 1994. *Public Political Opinion Survey Nepal*. Kathmandu.
- Shah, Vivek K. 2067 BS. *Maile Dekheko Durbar* (Memoirs of a Military Secretary). Kathmandu: Yeti Publications Nepal.
- Sharma, Sudheer. 2019. *The Nepal Nexus: An Inside Account of the Maoists, the Durbar and New Delhi*. Gurgaon: Viking.
- Shils, Edward. 1971. 'Political Development in New States', cited by Morton R. Davies and Vaughan A. Lewis (*Models of Political Systems*, London: Macmillan).
- Silwal, Purna B. 2021. *Nepal's Instability Conundrum: Navigating Political, Military, Economic & Diplomatic Landscape*. Lalitpur: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Singer, J. David (Ed.). 1968. *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence*. New York: Free Press.
- Smith, Steve, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne. 2012. *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soros, George. 2009. *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*. London. Little Brown, Reprint 2009.
- Thapa, Ganga B. 2018. 'Quest for Political Instability in Nepal', in Thapa, *Reflections on Nepali Politics* (Kathmandu: Bhagawati/Bipun Thapa).
- Thapa, Krishna N. S. 2078. *Samay Samjhana: Jeewanko Bansurima Bajeka Dhunharu*. Kathmandu: Rang Nepal.
- Toffin, G. Joanna Pfaff-Czaznecka (Eds.), 2014. *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Toffler, Alvin and Heidi Toffler. 1993. *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today's Global Chaos*. London: Warner Books.
- UNDP. 2002. *Human Development Report (HDR 2002)*.
- UNDP. 2004. *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizen's Democracy*. New York.
- Vayrynen, Raimo, Dieter Senghaas, and Christian Schmidt (Eds.). 1987. *The Quest for Peace: Transcending Collective Violence and War among Societies, Cultures and States*. London: Sage Publications.

- Volgy, Thomas J. and Alison Bailin. 2005. *International Politics and State Strength*. New Delhi: Viva Books PL.
- Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. 2010. New York: Random House.
- Weiner, Myron. 1995. 'Security, Stability, and International Migration', in Lynn-Jones.
- Whelpton, John. 2013. 'Political Violence in Nepal from Unification to Janandolan I: The Background to 'People's War'', in Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (Ed.), *Revolution in Nepal: An Anthropological and Historical Approach to People's War* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, 17-74).
- Williams, Paul D. (Ed.). 2008. *Security Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- World Bank. 2004. *World Development Report 2004*.
- World Bank. 2006. *World Development Report 2006*, Box 6, 3 (118).

**Access this article online**

[www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info](http://www.ifa.org.np/www.nepjol.info)

For reference: Adityaw, Anand (2022) "Why is Nepal Politically so Unstable? Deconstructing the Instability Conundrum through Cross-Country Comparison"  
Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA), Volume 2, Issue 1  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44026>

## Annex 1

- One: Given the long span of time covered by the book studded with events, the author marshals the episodes copiously and returns to them more than frequently which may tax the reader's patience. Repetition is obvious in the multiple references he makes, often to the point of redundancy. If brevity is the art of wit, a considerable part of the text could be condensed to make it more concise to allow smoother flow in reading; coherence is interrupted at places by a sudden leap to a new theme.
- Two: A chronology with notes on the key elements and the impacts and implications may go a long way in crystallizing the shape of events better in the reader's mind which would also render categorization and comparison much easier.
- Three: A separate section on the key dramatis personae and the places and phenomena would add further value to the text, a point left better to the author's discretion.
- Four: Consistency, the nemesis of all writers, remains a major issue: should a state and country be referred to in the context of pronominalizing it in a feminine or neutral style (she vs it) remains a vexing issue, here as elsewhere. In referring to Nepal on p. 327, for instance the author jumps from *its* in the 4th line of the previous paragraph to *her* in the first sentence of the next paragraph.
- Five: Contradiction on the length of Nepal's border which has been differently put at two places:  
(p. 219) 1439.18 km with China vs (p. 295) 1414 km with TAR
- Six: Weakly linked sentences and statements at places reveal incoherence impeding reading flow, apart from cases where objects can be found missing in the sentence.
- Eight: The seven items included in the Annexure compiled haphazardly could be put in a chronological order.
- Finally: a little more attention to the References would also enhance the text. At least thirteen of the titles cited are not in alphabetical order. At three other places, they remain incomplete or have been wrongly cited or misspelt (pp. 358, 359, and 357) with metaphors wrongly used. Periodicals and newspapers can be seen often un-italicized and inconsistency in capitalizing book titles is frequent, problems that can be handled in the future edition of the volume.

## Annex 2

### Chart: Concepts and Measures used in Instability Analysis

(Note: The range for all indicators is -2.5 to 2.5 (higher is better.) The scale has been converted into a 5-point ordinal ranking like all the other 8 variables to facilitate comparison and equivalence in categorization of each country case on the 11 variables.

Indicator	Concept Measured	Methodology Used: A variety of sources including
1. Voice and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free and fair elections</li> <li>• Press Freedom</li> <li>• Political Rights</li> <li>• Civil Liberties</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Business kept informed of developments in laws &amp; policies</li> <li>• Business can express its concerns over changes in law &amp; policies</li> <li>• Change in government</li> <li>• Military in politics</li> </ul>	Freedom House and International Country Risk Guide
2. Graft (Corruption)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption among public officials</li> <li>• Corruption as an obstacle to business</li> <li>• Frequency of “irregular payments” to officials and judiciary</li> <li>• Perceptions of corruption in civil service</li> <li>• Business interest payment</li> </ul>	Freedom House, Economic Intelligence Unit, and Business Environment Risk Intelligence
3. Political Stability and Lack of Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of the likelihood of destabilization</li> <li>• Ethnic tensions</li> <li>• Armed conflict</li> <li>• Social unrest</li> <li>• Terrorist threat</li> <li>• Internal conflict</li> <li>• Fractionalization of the political spectrum</li> <li>• Constitutional changes</li> <li>• Military coops</li> </ul>	Economic Intelligence Unit, PRS Group 2001, and Business Environment Risk Intelligence

Source: World Bank Governance Indicators Dataset for Indicators 1, 2, and 3.  
Adapted from *Human Development Report 2002*, Appendix 1.1 p. 37.

## Annex 3

### PSI: Cross-Country Comparison

	1VOAAC	2GRAFT	3HUDEI	4SOCOI	5QUI9RA	6GTERI	7LISAI	8CIJUS	9TINAG	10GLOPI	
1 Albania	.01 M	-.60 L	.785 H	.757 H	4.3 VH	1.008 VH	4.6 M	29 L	46 M	1.849 H	B -.60 D
2 Algeria	-1.19 L	-.62 L	.754 M	.685 H	4.0 VH	3.763 N	5.2 M	28 L	-	2.182 M	B -1.27D
3 Angola	-1.26 L	-1.14 L	.581 M	.550 M	9.0 H	4.473 M	3.8 L	44 M	57 M	-	C -1.98E
4 Argentina	.57 H	-.36 M	822 VH	.730 H	9.3 H	1.680 VH	6.0 M	25 L	31 L	1.947 H	B .55HB
5 Armenia	-.22 M	-.80 L	.755 H	.780 H	5.1 H	1.692 VH	4.3 M	29 L	25 L	2.287 M	B -.84D
6 Australia	1.7 VH	1.75 VH	.939 VH	.818 VH	5.8 H	2.827 H	7.3 H	55 M	45 M	1.435 VH	A 1.26B
7 Austria	1.34 VH	1.56 VH	.908 VH	.831 VH	4.9 VH	1.852 VH	7.2 H	73 H	44 M	1.274 VH	A 1.27B
8 Azerbaijan	-.70 L	-1.05 L	.757 H	.713 H	2.3 VH	.957 VH	5.2 M	36 L	77 H	2.454 M	B -.70D
9 Bangladesh	-.20 M	-.64 L	.608 H	.787 H	4.8 VH	5.697 M	4.3 M	80 H	88 VH	2.084 M	B -.57D
10 Belarus	-1.40 L	-.06 L	.805 H	.589 M	3.8 VH	.000 VH	5.6 M	46 M	45 M	2.112 M	B -.04C
11 Belgium	1.24 VH	1.05 H	.916 VH	.715 H	4.2 VH	4.060 M	6.9 H	60 M	45 M	1.56 H	B 1.24B
12 Benin	.47 M	-	.515 M	.554 M	16.3 LI	.000 VH	4.9 M	60 M	62 H	1.973 H	B .72D
13 Bolivia	.27 M	-.72 L	.693 H	.524 M	12.6 M	.000 VH	5.7 M	22 L	43 M	2.092 M	B -.61D
14 Botswana	.80 H	.89 H	.717 H	.600 H	23.2 VL	.000 VH	3.5 L	78 H	77 H	-	B .71B
15 Brazil	.53 H	-.02 M	.759 H	.643 H	15.6 L	1.388 VH	6.3 H	38 L	17 VL	2.16 M	B .47C
16 Bulgaria	.59 H	-.16 M	.813 VH	.681 H	7.3 H	.315 H	5.1 M	22 L	33 L	11.635 H	B .37C
17 Burkina Faso	-.26 M	-.93 L	.423 M	.660 H	5.3 H	4.811 M	4.6 M	48 M	54 M	2.028 M	B -.54D
18 Cambodia	-.77 L	.34 M	.582 M	.764 H	-	.091 VH	4.6 M	59 M	75 H	2.101 M	B -.13C
19 Cameroon	-.82 L	-1.11 L	.555 M	.520 M	11.5 M	6.615 L	5.1 M	47 M	58 M	2.484 M	C -1.3C
20 Canada	1.33 VH	2.05 VH	.926 VH	.705 H	6.2 H	3.527 H	7.4 H	67 H	65 H	1.372 VH	A 1.24B
21 Chile	.63 H	1.40 H	.842 VH	.700 H	11.2 M	3.454 H	6.3 H	21 L	27 L	1.649 H	B .87B
22 China	-1.11 L	-.30 M	.752 H	.777 H	9.2 H	5.108 M	5.1 M	-	-	2.243 M	B -.39B
23 Colombia	-.41 M	-.39 M	.747 H	.673 H	14.3 M	5.611 M	6.2 H	25 L	22 L	2.729 L	C -1.36D
24 Congo	-1.38 L	-.49 M	.606 H	.558 M	12.8 M	3.368 H	4.9 M	39 L	47 M	2.343 M	C -1.36D



	1VOAAC	2GRAFT	3HUDEI	4SOCCI	5QUI9RA	6GTERI	7LISAI	8CIJUS	9TINAG	10GLOPI	
25 Congo DR	1.70 L	-1.24 L	.457 M	.460 M	8.8 H	7.055 L	4.3 M	43 M	48 M	3.251 VL	C -2.58E
26 Costa Rica	1.37 H	.87 H	.794 H	.751 H	12.9 M	.000 VH	7.2 H	45 M	41 M	1.767 H	B 1.08B
27 Cote d'Ivoir	-1.19 L	-.71 L	.492 M	-	8.4 H	3.276 H	5.0 M	42 M	52 M	2.207 M	C -.95D
28 Croatia	.48 M	.02 M	.831 VH	.724 H	5.2 VH	.014 VH	5.3 M	48 M	21 L	1.639 H	B .18C
29 Cyprus	1.28 H	1.24 H	.867 VH	.793 H	5.3 H	1.206 VH	6.1 H	42 M	31 L	1.913 H	B .48C
30 Czech Rep	1.04 H	.31 M	.888 VH	.748 H	3.7 VH	1.562 VH	6.8 H	50 M	34 L	1.381 VH	B .74B
31 Denmark	1.60 VH	2.09 VH	.929 VH	.829 VH	4.0 VH	.817 VH	7.6 H	85 VH	57 M	1.353 VH	A 1.96B
32 Dominican Rep	42 M	-.20 M	.736 H	.778 H	10.4 M	.382 VH	5.6 M	30 L	46 M	2.073 M	B .46C
33 Ecuador	-.14 M	-.98 L	.752 H	.633 H	10.7 M	1.417 VH	5.8 M	49 M	64 H	1.987 H	B -.80D
34 Egypt	-.65 L	-.16 M	.696 H	.766 H	4.6 VH	7.345 L	3.9 L	65 H	62 H	2.632 L	B .25C
35 El Salvador	.21 M	-.33 M	.674 H	.734 H	7.9 H	.000 VH	6.3 H	27 L	27 L	2.275 M	B .62B
36 Estonia	.94 H	.73 H	.871 VH	.617 H	5.4 H	.229 VH	5.9 M	55 M	41 M	1.732 H	B .73B
37 Ethiopia	.85 L	-.40 M	.463 M	.589 M	7.1 H	5.631 M	4.2 M	60 M	77 H	2.524 L	C -.55C
38 Finland	1.69 VH	2.25 VH	.920 VH	.823 VH	3.9 VH	2.501 H	7.8 H	83 VH	60 M	1.506 H	A 1.61A
39 France	1.11 H	1.15 H	.901 VH	.803 VH	5.2 H	5.475 M	6.6 H	59 M	37 L	1.909 H	B 1.04B
40 Gabon	-.40 M	-.56 L	.702 H	.544 M	8.4 H	1.198 VH	4.8 M	32 L	29 L	2.099 M	B -.44C
41 Gambia	-.73 L	.13 M	.460 M	.588 M	5.9 H	.000 VH	4.1 M	68 H	80 H	1.989 H	B .49C
42 Georgia	-.07 M	-.69 L	.780 H	.608 H	6.5 H	1.422 VH	4.5 M	33 L	30 L	2.13 M	B -1.00D
43 German	1.43 H	1.38 H	.936 VH	.812 VH	5.1 H	4.601 M	7.1 H	68 H	62 H	1.531 H	A 1.21B
44 Ghana	.02 M	-.28 M	.592 M	.631 H	8.9 H	.162 VH	5.5 M	59 M	67 H	1.772 H	B .11C
45 Greece	1.12 H	.73 H	.870 VH	.805 VH	7.1 H	4.29 M	5.1 M	42 M	14 VL	2.02 M	B .79B
46 Guatemala	-.33 M	-.69 L	.650 H	.710 H	11.9 H	.205 VH	6.3 H	49 M	46 M	2.214 M	B -.77D
47 Guinea	-.98 L	.13 M	.459 M	-	5. VH	.324 VH	4.9 M	54 M	64 H	2.101 M	B -.99D
48 Haiti	-.80 L	-.94 L	.498 M	.851 VH	8.6 H	1.714 VH	3.8 L	37 L	44 M	2.064 M	B -.38 C
49 Honduras	-.045 M	-.63 L	.617 H	.843 VH	16.9 L	1.714 VH	6.0 M	44 M	50 M	2.282 M	B .25C
50 Hungary	1.19 H	.65 H	.835 VH	.742 H	4.9 VH	.363 VH	6.1 H	50 M	38 L	1.531 H	B .75B
51 Iceland	1.53 VH	2.16 VH	.935 VH	.875 VH	3.6 VH	.057 VH	7.5 H	55 M	37 L	1.096 VH	A 1.57A

	1 VOAAC	2 GRAFT	3 HUDEI	4 SOCOI	5 QUI9RA	6 GTERI	7 LISAI	8 CIJUS	9 TINAG	10 GLOPI	
52 India	.66 H	-.39 M	.640 H	.746 H	5.3 H	7.568 L	4.0 L	83 VH	84 VH	2.504 L	B -.05C
53 Indonesia	-.40 M	-1.01 L	.694 H	.633 H	6.6 H	4.543 M	5.1 M	72 H	83 VH	1.853 H	B -1.56E
54 Iran	-.36 M	-.64 L	.798 H	.679 H	7.2 H	4.399 M	4.7 M	57 M	71 H	2.439 M	B 0.02C
55 Ireland	1.57 VH	1.16 H	.938 VH	.835 VH	5.1 H	3.045 H	7.1 H	74 H	60 M	1.393 VH	A 1.24B
56 Israel	.98 H	1.12 H	.902 VH	.737 H	9.8 H	4.578 M	7.3 H	55 M	39 L	2.704 L	B -0.54C
57 Italy	1.10 H	.63 H	.878 VH	.823 VH	6.6 H	2.736 H	6.2 H	30 L	23 L	1.766 H	B .82B
58 Jamaica	.78 H	-.06 M	.732 H	.744 H	-	1.091 VH	5.9 M	29 L	35 L	2.068 M	B .35C
59 Japan	1.03 H	1.20 H	.909 VH	.826 VH	5.4 H	2.926 H	5.9 M	67 H	41 M	1.381 VH	A 1.20B
60 Jordan	.10 M	-.09 M	.735 H	.703 H	5.2 H	3.404 H	4.8 M	-	-	2.104 M	B .13C
61 Kazakhstan	-.80 L	-.83 L	.797 H	.600 H	3.7 VH	2.228 H	5.9 M	55 M	76 H	1.974 H	B .29C
62 Kenya	-.68 L	-1.11 L	.590 M	.524 M	11.5 H	6.114 L	4.5 M	57 M	64 H	2.354 M	C -.83D
63 Korea Rep	.98 H	.37 H	.900 VH	.811 VH	5.3 H	.286 VH	5.9 H	26 L	36 L	1.823 H	B .50B
64 Kyrgyzstan	-.57 L	-.85 L	.672 H	.624 H	3.7 VH	1.719 VH	5.6 M	37 L	56 M	-	B -.32C
65 Laos	-1.05 L	-.31 M	.601 H	.625 H	5.9 H	1.675 VH	4.6 M	72 H	84 VH	1.821 H	B 0.00C
66 Latvia	.81 H	-.03 M	.847 VH	.600 H	5.9 H	.458 VH	6.0 M	30 L	26 L	1.689 H	B .50B
67 Lebanon	-.32 M	-.63 L	.757 H	.754 H	5.1 H	5.154 M	5.2 M	30 L	22 L	2.778 L	C -.55D
68 Lithuania	1.00 H	.20 M	.858 VH	.627 H	7.2 H	.000 VH	6.3 M	46 M	32 L	1.749 H	B .29C
69 Luxembourg	1.41 VH	1.78 VH	.903 VH	.732 H	5.0 VH	-	7.1 H	76 H	74 H	-	A 1.48B
70 Macedonia	.03 M	-.51 L	.757 H	.708 H	7.3 H	.649 VH	5.2 M	31 L	44 M	2.058 M	B -1.45D
71 Madagascar	.28 M	-.93 L	.519 M	.534 M	8.7 H	2.613 H	4.1 M	46 M	54 M	1.766 H	B -.34C
72 Malawi	-.14 M	.10 M	.477 M	.568 M	9.4 H	.458 VH	3.4 L	59 M	62 H	1.811 H	B .03C
73 Malaysia	-.13 M	.13 M	.799 H	.663 H	11.2 M	2.700 H	6.3 H	55 M	44 M	1.619 H	B .31C
74 Mali	.32 M	-.41 M	.427 M	.602 H	5.2 H	6.015 L	4.7 M	39 L	50 M	2.686 L	C -0.13C
75 Malta	1.43 H	.13 M	.878 VH	.853 H	4.4 VH	-	6.7 H	51 M	75 H	-	A 1.05A
76 Mauritania	-.59 L	-.97 L	.520 M	.683 H	5.4 H	-.000 VH	4.7 M	27 L	29 L	2.355 M	C -.87D
77 Mauritius	1.27 H	.69 M	.790 H	.666 H	5.9 H	.000 VH	6.2 H	67 H	61 H	1.548 H	B 1.12B
78 Mexico	.12 M	-.28 M	.774 H	.677 H	8.8 H	3.533 H	6.4 H	32 L	26 L	2.583 L	B .06C

	1VOAAC	2GRAFT	3HUDEI	4SOCOI	5QUI9RA	6GTERI	7LISAI	8CIJUS	9TINAG	10GLOPI	
79 Moldova	.12 M	-.83 L	.700 H	.588 M	3.7 VH	.229 VH	5.3 M	20 VL	13 VL	1.939 H	C -.29C
80 Mongolia	.73 H	-.19 M	.741 H	.686 H	5.1 H	-.000 VH	5.3 M	36 L	28 L	1.821 H	B .72B
81 Morocco	-.23 M	.44 M	.667 H	.638 H	7.4 H	.038 VH	5.3 M	28 L	38 L	1.979 H	B .16C
82 Mozambique	-.22 M	.10 M	.437 M	.599 M	14.2 M	4.579 M	4.3 M	67 H	76 H	2.056 M	B .20C
83 Myanmar	-1.93 VL	-1.18 L	.578 M	-	6.3 H	5.916 M	4.2 M	65 H	82 VH	2.302 M	B -1.20D
84 Namibia	.32 M	1.25 H	.647 H	.583 M	20.1 VH	.000 VH	4.4 M	59 M	75 H	1.806 H	B -.52D
85 Nepal	-.06 M	-.31 M	.574 M	.620 H	5.0 VH	5.259 M	4.7 M	65 H	56 M	2.053 M	B -.26D
86 Netherland	1.16 VH	2.09 VH	.931 VH	.833 VH	4.4 VH	1.960 VH	7.5 H	71 H	67 H	1.574 H	A 1.48B
87 New Zealand	1.59 VH	2.09 VH	.917 VH	.760 H	-	.286 VH	7.3 H	63 H	61 H	1.192 VH	A 1.21B
88 Nicaragua	-.06 M	-.80 L	.658 H	.683 H	10.2 M	.747 VH	6.5 H	45 M	59 M	1.96 H	B .31C
89 Niger	.11 M	-1.09 L	.354 L	.584 M	5.4 H	6.004 L	4.6 M	65 H	60 M	2.359 M	C -.61D
90 Nigeria	-.44 M	-1.05 L	.532 M	.597 M	9.1 H	8.660 VL	5.3 M	53 M	56 M	2.873 L	C -1.36D
91 Norway	1.58 VH	1.76 VH	.953 VH	.842 VH	4.1 VH	.153 VH	7.6 H	88 VH	72 H	1.519 H	A 1.32B
92 Pakistan	-1.43 L	-.79 L	.562 M	.554 M	4.4 VH	8.181 VL	5.8 M	5.7 M	56 M	-	C -.39C
93 Panama	.77 H	-.45 M	.789 H	.638 H	16.6 L	.076 VH	6.6 H	42 M	39 L	1.826 H	B .57B
94 Paraguay	-.77 L	-.97 L	.702 H	.838 VH	11.8 M	3.443 H	5.9 M	29 L	31 L	1.997 H	B -.87D
95 Peru	.15 M	-.04 M	.750 H	.653 H	10.6 M	2.950 H	5.7 M	21 L	25 L	1.986 H	B -.23C
96 Philippines	.53 H	-.49 M	.699 H	.756 H	7.2 H	7.181 L	5.6 M	72 H	84 VH	2.982 L	B -.21C
97 Poland	1.21 H	.43 M	.860 VH	.745 H	5.0 VH	.719 VH	6.2 H	52 M	50 M	1.727 H	B .75B
98 Portugal	1.42 H	1.21 H	.845 VH	.794 H	6.4 H	0.000 VH	5.7 M	45 M	50 M	1.318 VH	B 1.41B
99 Romania	.50 H	-.51 L	.807 VH	.724 H	4.3 VH	.000 VH	6.1 H	41 M	30 L	1.596 H	B -.08C
100 Russia	-.35 M	-1.01 L	.816 VH	.548 M	6.0 H	5.230 M	5.6 M	36 L	56 M	3.16 VL	C .41C
101 Rwanda	-1.42 L	.35 M	.524 M	.649 H	11.0 M	2.177 H	3.1 L	91 VH	98 VH	2.140 M	B 1.16D
102 Senegal	.12 M	-.39 M	.505 M	.604 H	7.7 H	1.012 VH	4.7 M	60 M	61 H	1.8439 HY	B -.68D
103 Sierra Leon	-1.35 L	-.45 M	.419 M	.551 M	5.4 H	1.066 VH	4.1 M	49 M	74 H	1.74 H	B -1.26D
104 Singapore	.11 M	2.13 VH	.932 VH	.683 H	-	.000 VH	6.4 H	89 M	93 VH	1.382 VH	A 1.44B
105 Slovakia	.99 H	.23 M	.855 VH	.746 H	4.1 VH	.115 VH	6.4 H	39 M	34 L	1.568 H	B .62B

	1VOAAC	2GRAFT	3HUDEI	4SOCOI	5QUI9RA	6GTERI	7LISAI	8CIJUS	9TINAG	10GLOPI	
106 Slovenia	.07 H	1.09 H	.896 VH	.776 H	3.7 VH	.000 VH	6.2 H	29 M	24 L	1.396 VH	B .87B
107 South Africa	1.17 H	.35 M	.699 H	.494 M	28.4 VH	4.263 M	4.5 M	52 M	42 M	2.328 M	C .07C
108 Spain	1.15 H	1.45 H	.891 VH	.748 H	7.3 H	4.024 M	6.2 H	42 M	27 L	1.678 H	B 1.01B
109 Sri Lanka	.23 M	0.00 M	.770 H	.647 H	6.8 H	4.048 M	4.3 M	68 M	52 M	1.954 H	8-1.63E
110 Sudan	-1.53 VL	1.24 L	.502 M	.536 M	6.2 H	6.178 L	4.1 M	-	-	3.155 VL	C -2.01E
111 Sweden	1.65 VH	2.21 VH	.933 VH	.847 VH	4.6 VH	3.936 H	7.3 H	69 H	56 M	1.502 H	A 1.38B
112 Switzerland	1.73 VH	1.19 VH	.944 VH	.746 H	5.2 H	.134 VH	7.5 H	88 VH	72 H	1.407 VH	A 1.61A
113 Tajikistan	-.69 L	-1.08 L	.650 H	.731 H	5.6 VH	2.233 H	5.8 M	74 H	93 VH	2.266 M	B -1.77E
114 Tanzania	-.07 M	-.92 L	.538 M	.584 M	6.2 H	3.368 H	3.3 L	77 H	91 VH	1.837 H	B -.34C
115 Thailand	.37 M	-.46 M	.755 H	.650 H	6.5 H	6.252 L	5.9 M	65 H	61 H	2.259 M	B .21C
116 Togo	-1.06 L	-.48 M	.503 M	.572 M	9.7 H	.000 VH	4.4 M	43 M	48 M	2.104 M	B -.62D
117 Trinidad & Tob	.61 H	.49 M	.784 H	.645 H	-	.124 VH	6.2 H	29 L	27 L	2.053 M	B .27C
118 Tunisia	-.61 L	.86 H	.735 H	.733 H	6.4 H	4.088 M	4.1 M	46 M	25 L	1.998 H	B .82B
119 Turkey	-.55 L	-.48 M	.791 H	.675 H	8.5 H	7.036 L	5.6 M	5 M	59 M	2.898 L	C .75D
120 Uganda	-.79 L	-.92 L	.516 M	.476 M	7.6 H	3.926 H	4.0 L	51 M	66 H	-	C -1.31D
121 Ukraine	-.31 M	-.90 L	.751 H	.569 M	3.5 VH	6.048 L	4.3 M	11 VL	11 VL	3.113 VL	C -.59D
122 United Kingdom	1.46 H	1.86 VH	.922 VH	.805 VH	5.4 H	5.610 M	7.1 H	68 H	44 M	1.87 H	A 1.10B
123 USA	1.24 H	1.45 H	.924 VH	.586 M	9.4 H	6.066 L	7.0 H	61 H	39 L	2.3 M	B 1.18B
124 Uruguay	1.08 H	.71 H	.802 VH	.717 H	7.9 H	.344 VH	6.3 H	41 M	41 M	1.761 H	B 1.05B
125 Uzbekistan	-1.18 L	-.66 L	.710 H	.701 H	-	.38 VH	6.4 H	82 VH	96 VH	2.144 M	B -1.17D
126 Venezuela	.34 M	-.59 L	.761 H	.732 H	15.8 L	3.665 H	5.1 M	22 L	24 L	2.642 L	C -.33C
127 Vietnam	-1.29 L	-.76 L	.694 H	.752 H	5.9 H	.663 VH	5.2 M	66 H	81 VH	1.905 H	B .44C
128 Yemen	-.63 L	-.70 L	.452 M	.769 H	6.1 H	7.534 L	3.3 L	24 L	25 L	3.305 VL	C -1.07D
129 Zambia	-.17 M	-.87 L	.588 M	.529 M	21.1 VH	-	3.9 L	63 H	72 H	1.822 H	C -.42C
130 Zimbabwe	-.90 L	-1.08 L	.535 M	.682 H	8.6 H	1.569 VH	3.6 L	66 H	68 H	2.326 M	B -1.25D

# Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA)

Volume 2, Issue 1, March 2022

## **Details for Submission**

IFA encourages submissions from researchers and scholars interested in contributing their works in Foreign Affairs, Diplomacy, Political Economy, International Relations, Security and Strategic Affairs.

Articles for JoFA must be submitted electronically as a MS word file attached to: [jofa@ifa.org.np](mailto:jofa@ifa.org.np). Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA) follows a double-blind peer-review process, where the identity of authors and reviewers won't be revealed to each other.

Any inquiry about guidelines for submission and style sheet can be directed to: [info@ifa.org.np](mailto:info@ifa.org.np) or [jofa@ifa.org.np](mailto:jofa@ifa.org.np).

## **Institute of Foreign Affairs**

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal

Telephone: 00977-4266954, 4266955

Fax: 00977-4266956

Email: [info@ifa.org.np](mailto:info@ifa.org.np)

Website: [www.ifa.org.np](http://www.ifa.org.np)

Copyright: Institute of Foreign Affairs







The Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), a government think-tank, was established in 1993, and reconstituted as a semi autonomous body in 2012. It conducts research on the matters of national interest particularly Nepal's external relations and diplomatic dealings with foreign countries and provides policy inputs and recommendations to the Government of Nepal on foreign policy, international relations and strategic affairs. The IFA also caters to the professional training needs of Nepali officials serving in Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a policy research think-tank, the IFA delves into research studies on matters of national interest, particularly Nepal's relations and conduct with foreign countries. The IFA collaborates with partner organizations, at home and abroad, to realize its objectives relating to foreign policy issues and interaction with political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Besides organizing seminars, workshops, meetings, dialogues and conferences, and bringing out relevant publications, it is also a repository of information on Nepal's foreign policy issues.



**INSTITUTE OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Institute of Foreign Affairs**

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal

T. +977-1-4266954, 4266955

E. [info@ifa.org.np](mailto:info@ifa.org.np)

W. [www.ifa.org.np](http://www.ifa.org.np)