

# Safeguarding Nepal: National Security Landscape & Challenges

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## **Abstract**

*This article explores the complex notion of security in Nepal, covering its history, current challenges, and future prospects. It compares the traditional view of national security focused on protecting borders with newer threats that include social, economic, environmental, and geopolitical factors. Political instability, bureaucratic politics, economic crises, ethnic and religious tensions, occasional acts of violence, refugee problems and ecological destruction are ongoing challenges to the Nepal's internal security. The state also has external issues such as its geographic position as well as socio-cultural pressure, which are immense and aggravated by the geopolitical complexities that stem from being landlocked and surrounded by powerful neighbors, India and China. The researchers used qualitative and analytical methods that involved collecting secondary data from various sources like books, journals, websites, dissertations, and reports, as well as the researcher's academic and professional proficiency. The comprehensive national security*

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*policy and strategy is essential to bolster defensive capabilities contribute to resilience building and socio-economic growth. The government required adopting adept statecraft to maintain the equilibrium between national interests and threats; domestic and international. Further, preserving Nepal's sovereignty and ensuring the welfare of her people necessitate joint efforts and unity among all stakeholders along with a deep comprehension of evolving security dynamics.*

## **Introduction**

*“A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war.” (Lippmann, 1943, p. 5)*

The concept of security is complex and difficult to find precise explanation due to its nature. Security discussed here is related to the national security and the national security is interlinked with national interest and the interest of the nation is solely dependent on internal politics and diplomacy. However, it applies to many different situations and serves various purposes for individuals, businesses, governments, and scholars. Different stakeholders have different understandings of security and national security. The national security is the state of being free from physical violence and protecting a country's people, land, government, policy, and institutions from both internal and external threats to preserve its values and interests (Uberoy, 2004).

Every state has the highest objective of making itself secure. However, all states still feel insecure, because of various internal and external threats. Absolute security involving the complete eradication of threats as detrimental is generally neither unobtainable nor will states attain a stage of perfection in the future. The traditional sense of national security implies the relationship between a population and the territory it occupies which is viewed as a nation; its government and state institutions as legitimate bodies and the ability of the nation to protect its internal values and national interests against both internal and external threats. National security has two major goals: preserving sovereignty and maintaining territorial integrity. Governments usually use military or diplomatic means to deal with external threats. However, for internal threats like inadequate integration; political instability; social unrest; economic fragility; and environmental degradation require

comprehensive approaches that involve all aspects of national power, influence, and control (Baral, 2006). At a minimum, this is important because it helps the country build up resilience at a local level whereby it can then be able to strengthen its own political, economic as well as military capacity to confront effectively both internal and external risks.

Nepal's national security policy was first outlined by King Prithvi Narayan Shah. He was a visionary leader who shaped the country's security landscape. King Prithvi Narayan Shah used both diplomacy and military strength to unite the various principalities of Nepal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He didn't just prevent Nepal from losing any of its territory but also laid the groundwork for the nation's independence. He was able to unite different kingdom under a single ruler and this established the basis of Nepal's ability to resist external threats and internal dissension. His strategic planning remains a touchstone in Nepal's modern security approach, emphasizing oneness and military acumen as vital means of protecting national interests. He advocates that Nepal is in vulnerable geological position and should avoid direct confrontation with India and China focusing on defensive approach. Nepal must choose a policy of peace and stability through a constructive endeavor that promotes sovereignty and protection of the nation's interest. Once these facts are taken into account, it becomes clear that Nepal managed to remain an independent state within the existing Asian powers – India and China. However, such rulers focused rather on internal power, thereby leaving no distinct state-level strategy for those who would come after them in history apart from conquests inside their own territories. If one looks at factors like economic development, geography, size, population, foreign policy among others which determine national security status of any country then definitely Nepal is categorized as weak landlocked poor state though never colonized by any other modern nation-state (Thapa, 2002).

Following the end of the Shah Dynasty, Nepal encountered a mix of liberty, more external interference and societal discord. The constitution of Nepal 2015 was crafted by the people's representative in parliament and normal people's son became the head of state. Nepal became the secular country and civil liberties are more protected compare to King's regime. On the other hand, the engagement of India, China and western countries in Nepal's internal affairs seems considerably

increased. India's special support towards Madesh based political parties and western countries supports to ethnic parties are very open to all of us. International agencies involvement in fault lines such as fomenting free-Tibet movements, ethnicity-based federalism and social transformation explain the degree of engagement and external influence in Nepal (Bhatta, 2013). Political instability and dissatisfaction among the populace propelled the Maoist movement, which assumed an ethnic dimension. Though Nepal has achieved inclusive constitution in 2015 but its full implementation is still in dilemma. Still there are the impediments related to delegation and decentralization of authority to province, disregard of provincial civil service and police acts, ongoing ethnic and socio-economic issues and allocation of resources. All these challenges and obstacles are directly and indirectly threats to Nepal's internal security. Addressing these looming security challenges necessitates a comprehensive understanding of threats and the formulation of appropriate national security policies. The repercussions of a decade-long Maoist insurgency and globalization and its effect have prompted a public discourse on the demand for human security and the roles of society and the state, highlighting challenges in reconciling them (Lohani, 2017). Despite the geographic unification achieved by our founding fathers, Nepal still struggle with inclusiveness and cohesion among diverse populations.

The developing nations are sensitive to any real or perceived threats to their fragile identities. Nepal being an underdeveloped and landlocked country; external threats may come in any form or means. Nepal is geopolitically situated between two giant nations, India and China, and external challenges from them against Nepal's vital interests cannot be ignored. In such circumstances, while determining our strategic and security relations, the most crucial factors for Nepal in its interstate dealings would remain its survival as well as independence. Nepal should not be carried away with a mindset of a yam caught between two boulders, rather should advocate Nepal as a root of prosperity and stability for both China and India (Baniya, 2023). Likewise, the prevailing internal political landscape marked by frequent changes in government and its coalitions, coupled with economic challenges such as a substantial trade deficit, environmental issues including the impacts of climate change, and social dynamics underscore the imperative for us to address a range of threats facing our society and country with utmost seriousness.

The article focuses on Nepal's security landscape, discussing its current threats and challenges. The scope of the study is mainly confined to the existing provisions, practices, and issues on national security, external and internal security, national interest, policies and possible challenges ahead of national security.

### **Review of the Literature**

The main aim of this review is to create a framework for the study of Nepal's national security landscape and its challenges in order to guide the analysis towards discussion and findings, and conclusions. The review has been structured thematically to discuss various aspects about research article.

Khand (2005) investigates basic concepts of security, power dynamics and national security by intertwining them with Nepal's national interests and aligning them with broad security objectives. This study further looks into essential aspects that are extremely necessary for Nepal's defense system, such as capacity building issues like military capabilities and strategic considerations which provide insights on what diplomatic as well as defense strategies have been adopted in the country. Concurrently, Brown's (1984) examination of U.S. national security provides a philosophical view point which advocates for global defense through democratic principles. His work forms significant additions to the ongoing debates regarding national defense strategy but also addresses multifaceted issues such as tensions with neighboring states, arms control and domestic threats. In an extensive review of systemic dimensions of contemporary world, both Khand and Brown offer subtle perspectives that are vital in understanding and designing effective national security policies.

Singh (1996) and Jayasekera (1992) give fresh ideas on the national security dynamics within South Asia, concentrating mostly on India's strategic considerations and its engagements with the neighboring nations such as Nepal. For instance, Singh's assessment of India's security policy offers a template for comprehending regional security challenges and thus helps provide recommendations to Nepal based on its neighbor's policies. On the other hand, Jayasekera explores the issue of security dilemmas in small states which bring out significance of geographical vulnerabilities or threats stressing that any potential aggressor trying to exploit strategically placed

but economically deprived countries like Nepal will face high costs in terms of economic burden. This is because these works bring out how various geopolitical factors coupled with security dilemmas creating complexities in ensuring national security.

Baral (2006) and Thapa (2002) both present valuable insights into the complex character of national security in Nepal. Baral's examination of security aspects in a democracy underscores the need for fair power sharing and individual empowerment, calling for a response to traditional as well as non-traditional threats. He highlights that there is no one country whose security interests cannot be affected by another's insecurity; thus it is important to redefine security beyond the confines of state-centralism. Thapa further highlighted that economic, environmental and social well-being are vital elements towards achieving national security. He emphasizes redirecting priorities towards indigenous resources and strengthening democratic institutions so as to promote public confidence and allegiance towards national interests. Consequently, the two authors advocate for a comprehensive approach to safety hence involving socio-economic progress, democratic ruling as well as strategic foresight that will see Nepal's stability and prosperous in future.

Uberoy (2004) has further explained the complexity of threats through emphasizing that political threats take precedence over military ones and connecting them by analyzing historic events such as the Iran-Iraq war and Cold War. The author's detailed analysis of diplomatic history clarifies the tainted intelligence assessment on Soviet military strength during this period, highlighting vulnerability to threat perception as pivotal for national security. However, Joshi (2000) focuses on security and strategic thinking, looking at armed forces optimization within a larger national security framework. From another point of view, Joshi focuses on these aspects, but it is through his assertion that we get to understand conflict dynamics in relation to military forces and caution against possible pitfalls brought about by dominance of some sectors in national discourse on national security. In summary, these works help us to learn much more about threat perceptions and dynamics of conflicts as well as the organization of security forces in safeguarding national security.

Stiller (1989) and Baidhya (1993) both emphasize on Nepal's historical and geopolitical landscape exploring leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Stiller had

revealed invaluable information of Shah's commitment and strategy on statehood establishment, structuring government, economics administration and military matters. On the other hand, Baidhya adumbrates further on this knowledge since he discusses geographical characteristics of Nepal, consolidation efforts by Shah resulting in a unified kingdom extending over vast territory. In summing up these historical and geographical findings, it is significant to note that history, culture and strategic considerations are intricately intertwined with each other in shaping Nepal's national security framework.

In summary, these literature review highlights how complex interlink ages in relation to security dynamics transcend traditional military paradigms into diplomacy, economics, society and environment. A more nuanced understanding of national security challenges and formulation of effective strategies towards protecting interest of nation-states like Nepal may be achieved by exploring fundamental concepts, regional perspectives, historical contexts and comprehensive approaches to security.

### **Research Methodology**

This research methodology is qualitative-analytic in nature drawing from broad professional as well as academic competence of the researcher. The process involves synthesizing secondary data from a variety of sources including books, scholarly journals, dissertations, websites and reports were used for descriptive analysis among others. This study therefore attempts to facilitate an all-round understanding about the research topic through systematic analysis of multi-faceted data that utilizes both existing knowledge and researcher's opinion thus enabling detailed explanations and advice.

### **Discussion**

#### **Conceptualizing National Security**

The concept of comprehensive security was first put forth in Japan during the early 1980s and is based on the fact that contemporary threats are multidimensional, economic crises, trade interruptions or natural calamities as well as military aggression (Tsuneo, 1991). These include full use of political, economic, diplomatic, and military resources. Comprehensive security refers to safeguarding essential

interests and fundamental values from both internal and external risks. These core values may change according to internal or external contexts such as military security, territorial integrity, economic viability or national political stability. The security perceptions are not only of individuals but also of states that tend to differ from each other. National security in its conceptual framework cannot be observed independently since it is related to the concepts of national power, national stability, national objective, and national interest.

A key matter in comprehending the concept of national security is national power that involves both the tangibles and intangibles. These are such as military power, territory occupation and economic capability, form of governance, population factors and patriotic feelings among others. The central issue in discussing national security is about national stability which can be divided into two major components; internal and external stability. Internal stability refers to the perception of fairness and equality between citizens within a country while external security refers to strategies employed by the government to protect it from threats coming from outside its borders. Simultaneously, formulation of national goals is important because they represent what the government believes how things should be for it to spend resources and effort on them. In a democratic society, these goals are often consistent with national interest as determined by the majority opinion. National interests in Nepal arise out of an intersection between internal dynamics and external imperatives defined as collective demands and aspirations for development amongst its people. As a sovereign entity, Nepal determines its own interests and devises strategies to pursue them, with scholars commonly delineating between vital national interests: such as independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty preservation, economic prosperity, and national cohesion; and other interests (Thapa, 2002).

### **National Security Policy**

Nepal's first national security policy was included in the 'Rashtriya Mul Neeti' adopted in 1985 (Acharya, 2019). That policy was abandoned after the advent of democracy in 1990 despite its inherent to security agencies for strategic guidelines and to maintain peace and security. After the formulation of the 2015 constitution, the Nepali strategic and political thinkers have developed a greater understanding



of the importance of national security policy. The Constitution has set forth its national security policies under Article 51(a) as to promote and preserve national independence, sovereignty, national unity and harmony among diverse ethnic, religious cultural and linguistic groups to promote a national security system including human security and to make the national security institutions professional and capable. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 defines such things as maintaining national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity; protecting rights of Nepal and Nepali citizens; creating laws to punish any act against nation's interest; seeking economic prosperity (Secretariat of Legislative Parliament, 2015). The National Security Policy (NSP) was adopted in 2016 with a broad definition of security comprising: human, economic, environmental, and resource securities (Ministry of Defense, 2024). Also, there is a provision for compulsory consultation with the National Security Council regarding major decisions concerning projects, construction, treaties, foreign investment, and trade with strategic significance to the country.

The policy has also found several external threats and challenges to Nepal such as foreign intervention, porous international borders that could be encroached upon or infiltrated, fuel supply bottlenecks, regional security environment and competitive conflict prone global security landscape. All these threats pose crucial risks to Nepal's national security along with other factors. It is the Nepal's national security policy documents which outline an inclusive set of policies covering both internal and external dimensions of Nepali statecraft. The main objective is to safeguard Nepal's freedom, independence, sovereignty, national unity, dignity, territorial integrity and national interests. The security agencies of Nepal; such as Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Nepal and the National Investigation Department, should be given top priority on enhancing their institutional capability in a aim to bolster national security mechanisms. This strategic approach aims to strengthen Nepal's defense capabilities and safeguard a robust response to emerging threats, both domestically and internationally.

Nepal does not have a unified national security strategy as some other countries do notably the United States, China, UK and Russia. The Nepal's national security policy could be said to have components of national security strategy although it

does not measure up to that level. The policy was revised by the government in 2019 however it is not disclose to the public yet. The main thing about the national security strategy first and foremost is to identify and apply wisely the national power for securing national interests. It should however be noted that military power of a country forms an important part of its national security strategy but not the sole power in the modern world. There are other powers such as power diplomacy, political diplomacy and approach, economic strength, social and cultural power, and power of the people that determine the elements of national security (Acharya, 2019). A national security strategy must include military security, land and border security, economic security, environmental security, energy security, resources security, human security, technology and cyber security, patent security, health security and food security.

It is indeed a foreign policy that stands as the principal element of a nation's security. It is the responsibility of a nation-state to defend its territory from internal and external threats. It utilizes all available resources encompassing political, diplomatic, economic, military, civilian and legal powers so as to achieve this comprehensiveness. For such a strategy to be effective in attaining security objectives in context with external milieu, it must have elements of diplomacy within it. However, the foreign policy dimension is often ignored by Nepal's security forces thereby giving rise to strategic gaps. This means there is an urgent need for consensus on matters regarding the nation's vital issues pertaining to domestic interest, internal stability as well as foreign affairs with the guiding principle being 'Amity with all enmity with none' (Shrestha, 2017).

The use of soft power is the best tool for Nepal to secure its national interests, prioritizing the cultivation of trust and confidence with immediate neighbors India and China, while also vigilantly monitoring and swiftly engaging with extra-regional powers. The management of its internal capabilities and external opportunities along with global dynamics is crucial to overcome geographical limitations. To ignore this responsibility will risk engaging the country in serious consequences. It illustrates the complex yet highly important nature of formulating and implementing a robust foreign policy and national security strategy, as well as defense and diplomacy management. They are essential for protecting the nation's

sovereignty, democratic principles, peace, tranquility and well-being of people that directly serve the common good.

### **National Security Doctrine**

Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) said “The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.” It means a nation must always be conscious of threat and danger, predict them and take the steps necessary to guard against it. The interest of national security will determine the direction of foreign policy and is the only basic duty of a country’s citizens is to promote or defend national objectives. There is very little conventional external military threat to Nepal's security in the form of aggression or war. Nepal has peace and friendship treaties with both India and China. A potential threat to Nepal's security may come from the military conflicts between other states in the neighborhood. There is the possibility of spillover of wars between them, sometimes dragging Nepal into the conflict.

Nepal has always maintained neutrality in the war between its neighbors; it cannot remain untouched if a full-scale military conflict were to outbreak between them. Nepal might have to take measures to repulse the military advances by either of the conflicting parties wanting to use her soil to achieve their military objectives against the other. Any conflict that may arise involving China a major power in the world may affect Nepal as it cannot remain untouched when the next-door neighbor is in a conflict. The Western powers might want to make use of Nepal as a platform from which to watch China and deploy their security footprints in the event of a break out of hostility with China (Sangroula, 2018). Though Nepal has always pledged not to allow its soil against the security interests and the territorial integrity of China; the Tibet issue is one such factor that has the possibility of dragging Nepal into the conflict.

The geopolitical reality does not allow Nepal to enter into any military pact or alliance with any particular power. For its security, Nepal has to keep its military ready for minimum deterrence, against any possible external military intervention. Such deterrence can be created by a combination of the conventional and modern military apparatus. Nepal's earliest national security doctrine was laid out by King

Prithvi Narayan Shah. He had not only likened Nepal to a 'yam between two rocks', but also stated a defensive strategy saying don't attack others unless you are attacked. Though not spelled clearly, the modern security doctrine of the country includes refraining from any offensive acts without being provoked, not allowing the Nepali soil against the security interests of neighboring countries, and rejecting the stationing of any foreign troops on its soil under its policy of non-alignment. As per the state's policy of non-alignment, Nepal's governments have refrained from joining any military alliance or security pacts, but the army maintains cooperative relations with the armies of the neighboring countries and big powers (Lohani, 2017).

### **Emerging National Security Issues**

Over the past two decades, Nepal's security landscape has undergone significant transformation, shifting from conventional military threats to a more diverse array of non-traditional challenges stemming from various non-military sources. The shift has been influenced by dynamics within the country and political changes in Nepal, which have resulted in more social and environmental complications due to a decade long conflict and negative impacts of globalization. Nepal has faced numerous serious challenges such as; sporadic fighting between ethnic and religious groups, heinous crime and violence, e-crimes, the transformation of the nation into one of transiting hubs for illegal drugs and gold smuggling networks, trafficked persons across borders, corruption at all levels of governance, income inequalities getting wider apart between rich and poor people; escalating unemployment rate and massive youth emigration. Moreover, there's been an alarming trend of illegal migration, politicization of governmental institutions, and the intertwining of criminal elements with politics. At the moment, the environmental security challenges are another serious security threat for Nepal. On the environmental front, Nepal is facing the issues of the constant degradation of shared rivers, the recurrent bursting of glacier lakes, and rising landslides and floods due to torrential rainfalls in the hilly and mountain regions. Additionally, growing urbanization and the development of unplanned city centers is also emerging issue and concerned of national security (Pyakurel & Uddhab, 2018).

Both Nepal and India have recognized the emerging nexus between various armed

groups operating across their borders, as well as the challenges posed by human trafficking, goods smuggling and unregulated migration, which threaten the security and national interests of both nations. The Nepal-Indo border is neither closed nor heavily guarded allowing free movement especially for Nepali and Indians. As well as China's relationship with Nepal continues to be shaped by the Tibet issue where Chinese policies reflect both internal as well as international imperative (Baniya, 2023).

### **National Security Threats and Challenges**

Nepal faces a greater array of internal challenges than external ones. The factors endangering national security are dynamic, evolving, and based on circumstances. Safeguarding Nepal's cultural, social, political, psychological, economic, and physical integrity, along with its value system, necessitates vigilant protection against diverse pressures and challenges.

### **Political Instability**

Nepal grappled with political instability after the abolition of its age-old monarchy in 2008. The period following this change has seen the formation of 13 different governments suggesting that it is still hard to establish a lasting framework for good governance. Due to the frequent changes in government, it has direct impact on achieving national goals and objectives. The former Prime Ministers of Nepal include Puspa Kamal Dahal, also known as 'Prachanda', who held office from 2008 to 2009, 2016 to 2017, and from 2022 onwards; KP Sharma Oli, who served in 2015-2016 and 2018-2021; Sher Bahadur Deuba, who served from 2017 to 2018 and again from 2021 to 2022; Madhav Kumar Nepal, who was Prime Minister from 2009 to 2011; Jhala Nath Khanal, who briefly held office in 2011; Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, who served in 2011; Khil Raj Regmi, who held office from 2013 to 2014; and Sushil Koirala, who served as Prime Minister from 2014 to 2015 (Government of Nepal, 2024). It strongly indicates that frequent changes in government and its coalitions are becoming common and public sentiments towards political parties and government are on a downward trend. Political instability, political distrust, and external influence (to some extent) are significant challenges that pose a threat to the national security of Nepal to a considerable degree.

## **Politicization of Bureaucracy**

It is a fact that bureaucracy is regarded as the permanent government of a country and the backbone of every nation. They are entitled to provide good governance to the public by any means. On the contrary, Nepali government services are known to operate on favoritism, patronage system, institutionalized corruption and political inclinations. There are various civil service employee unions in Nepal government associate to the political parties such as Nepali Congress affiliated trade union, UML affiliated trade union, Maoist affiliated trade union, etc. It is clear indication that bureaucracy is amalgamated with politician and political party. Moreover, this bureaucracy intersects with party dynamics while manifesting much fragmentation along ideological lines. Often time's bureaucrat seems prejudiced in their dealings with elite group, politicians and normal people thus undermining ideals of neutrality and non-partisanship (Singh, 2020).

## **Economic Factors**

The economy is basis for building up and the means to safeguard the nation and should be considered as a main servant of national security. Nepal ranked 110th position of the world economy in 2022 and 30th largest economy in Asia-Pacific (World Economics, 2024). The problem of national security of the particular state is closely associated with the economy and can't be separated. A noteworthy decline in economic activities, reflected by the worsening of indicators, is how the Nepal's economic crisis begins. This has been marked with decrease in Nepal's economic growth from 6.7% in 2019 to -2.4% in 2020 and increase in unemployment levels from 10.6 in 2019 to 13.1 percent in 2020 (World Bank, 2024). That indicates lack of job opportunities and low purchasing power thereby worsening social and economic problems. With falling demand and a decrease in the country's currency value, inflation rates raise thus rendering goods more expensive to ordinary consumers. In addition, a devaluing currency compounds this problem since rises in imports and foreign debt costs placing pressure on national financial stability. Government revenues drop due to reduced economic activity resulting into fiscal shortfalls that reduce its ability to deal with major social and economic needs. An uncertain atmosphere created by a feeling of unease among people as well as investors hampers any recovery plans for the economy therefore making things

worse during such crises. The causes for such crises are varied comprising political instability, natural disasters, poor infrastructures, graft cases, external interference into economies COVID 19, and poor economic governance (Subedi, 2023).

### **Ecological Factors**

Nepal is in the 20<sup>th</sup> topmost disaster prone country in the world. Nepal is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts and ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in vulnerability position, 11<sup>th</sup> in earthquake prone area and 30<sup>th</sup> with regard to vulnerability to flood hazards (Khanal, 2020). Nepal's immediate environment is fraught with numerous natural threats that could be a result of either natural phenomena or human interaction with nature. Floods, landslides, avalanches, deforestation, earthquakes, hurricanes, climate change, global warming and its repercussions, scarcity of water and food, pollution of air and water, as well as the rise in contagious diseases like Covid-19 are some of the ecological challenges Nepal's faces due to her geographical position and global impact. World Bank report shows that approximately 80 percent of Nepal's population is at risk from natural and climate-induced hazards; and Nepal could faces losing 2.2% of annual GDP due to climate change by 2050 (World Bank Group, 2024).

### **Ethnic and Religious Problems**

Nepal is home to approximately 30 million people who are multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-cultural. In essence, the Nepalese populace predominantly consists of two main racial groups: the Indo-Aryan and the Tibeto-Mongoloid. These two races have distinct cultural and genetic backgrounds. In addition to that, Nepal has five key religious communities namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Jainism according to census data (National Statistical Office, 2024). This has contributed towards a unique tapestry of Nepalese traditions values and culture through the diversity in racial and religious demography. Prior to 2046 B.S., there was no any issues on national unity and identity as nowadays. There have been increased ethnic and religious tensions especially in Tarai and East Nepal leading to questioning social fabric as well as norms within the country. This shift raises pertinent questions regarding the traditional coexistence and national solidarity that Nepal has long prided it on.

## **Illegal Immigrant**

Nepal stands out among South Asian nations due to its distinctive international border dynamics. The movement of people across this border can be termed open migration where migrants effortlessly coalesce with local settlements, which share common language, customs, and religion. Nonetheless, the presence of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal has generated a number of problems that are undesirable. Moreover, the occasional focus on Tibetan refugees in the mass media and undue interest shown by western countries contributes further to the complexity of Nepal's situation. Nepal has currently shelter approximately 20,000 refugees, including those from Bhutan, Tibet and other states after resettling more than 113,500 Bhutanese refugees to eight different countries with the help of UN refugee agency (UNHCR, 2024).

## **Extremism**

Extremist activities have become a notable concern in Nepal despite the country not being traditionally associated with such threats. These happenings at times are attributed to different rebel groups and eras of political uncertainties particularly during the Maoist insurgency between 1996-2006 characterized by huge loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure. Nevertheless, sporadic acts of extremism continue to occur since the conflict officially came to an end with Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 as various Maoist splinter groups and other marginalized ethnic and political factions resort to violence. The continued existence of extremism is driven by entrenched socio-economic grievances, ethnic tensions and political turmoil worsened by ineffective governance systems; widespread poverty levels and limited access to essential services especially in some parts of Nepal. Moreover, Nepal's porous borders, notably with India, enable militants and weapons to move freely, making security efforts more challenging (Baniya, 2023).

## **External Threats**

It is widely accepted that the potential enemy of any country is its neighbors and there are no permanent friends or foes, only permanent interest. Considering the present international and regional security environment, Nepal does not see any immediate military threats to Nepal from either of our neighbors. We can presume that direct aggression is likely to be the last resort that either China or India will



resort against Nepal to further their national interest even Nepal has good relation with both neighbors. They both have the capability to interfere and compel Nepal to allow their national interests through the use of soft power such as political, economic, and psychological means.

### **Military Factors**

A nation's security can be threatened in various ways and means. Armed aggression is the most direct and visible of these, it can also be endangered by means other than a full-fledged war (Uberoy, 2004). Nepal is surrounded by two big and powerful countries in Asia- India and China. Both China and India have the largest military forces in the world and are ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of the 145 countries considered for the annual global firepower review, respectively (Global Firepower, 2024). On the other hand, Nepal is just ranked 128<sup>th</sup> and has 95,000 personnel serving in the Nepali Army (Baral, 2022). Both neighboring countries have powerful armies with sophisticated military equipment and nuclear power. The Nepali Army is too small and less equipped; hence, the fear of slim threat is obvious to Nepal despite its close relationship.

### **Geo-strategic Factors**

Nepal is a landlocked country having 147,516 km<sup>2</sup> with diverse ethnic composition of rich culture which faces multiple threats from within towards societal cohesion and fundamental values. However, within that small area, there is a great variation in altitude and hence also very difficult terrain. Nepal lies in a strategic position between democratic India and socialist China. After the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Nepal's strategic position has been further enhanced. Hence, looking at it from a broader perspective, Nepal is acting as a buffer zone or cushion between two giants; India and China.

### **Geo-political Factors**

Geopolitical issues arising from poorly demarcated borders remain a key threat in many developing countries. Unchecked migration and flow of people is another burden arising from neighboring countries. Of course, larger and stronger neighbors remain less caring about the geo-political issues of other states. Nepal is always aware of whether the external situation threatens her survival or not. There is also a

need to check the behavior demonstrated by neighbors. None of the countries show concern over border issues until their security is under threat. Nepal's geographical vulnerabilities cover a wide area of national security.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Nepal is a country with a diverse socio-cultural structure. Its socio-cultural structure towards the international boundary matches with neighboring countries, especially India. Unwanted socio-cultural penetration and the flow of information along with illegal migration are also the main threats to Nepal. Also, the Indians crossing with negative mindset into our border by hundred every day without being recorded has certainly become a serious concern for security agencies. The trend of ethnic-based politics in Nepal can be considered as a part of these socio-cultural threats.

### **Border Disputes**

*“For an independent nation, failure to protect its boundary is equal to failure in protecting its national security.” (Shrestha, 2003, p.1)*

Nepal shares a border of over 1880 km with India to the south, east, and west respectively and a 1,414-km-long border with Tibet China along the north Himalayan range. The present status of the Nepal-Indo border is marked by historical treaties: the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 and the 1950's Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Additionally, there are various ongoing border disputes with India, especially in the areas of Kalapani, Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Susta. Around 60,000 hectares of Nepalese land have been encroached upon by India in various disputed areas (Shrestha et al., 2020). On the contrary, there is no official record or statement regarding border disputes with China, despite occasional media reports. The border security situation on the Chinese side doesn't seem problematic, but due to the difficult terrain, it is not easy to deploy security personnel at all the border crossings.

### **Economy**

Economy is a crucial component of nation and inextricably interlinked to the national security. The country is in safe site when she doesn't depend on other nation for essential commodities and technology. Geographical limitations coupled with

Nepal's geopolitical situation makes it prone to several economic risks. Nepal relies heavily on its neighbors for daily commodities and trade route. Nepal had a trade deficit of 11.04 billion USD in the fiscal year 2022/23, which shows the dependency and trade imbalance facing the country (Lakhey, 2023). That dependence raises the risk of economic controls and instabilities like inflation, technical constraints as well as other forms of adverse economic pressures such as blockades, trade embargoes sanctions and unfair trade practices. Previous experiences with Indian unofficial economic blockade and subsequent imbalances in trades suggest a graver outcome resulting into more difficulties on national economy and hindering developments in the country.

### **E-crime**

Electronic crime (e-crime) refers to unlawful activities conducted through electronic tools such as computers, mobile, digital devices and internet. These actions are wide-ranging including hacking, identity theft, frauds, phishing and spreading of malware. Moreover, online harassment and cyber bullying, copyright law infringements, sharing undesirable or illegal content also fall under e-crime illegal activities (Forensic Focus, 2023). Cybercrime is a significant external threat to Nepal due to the interconnectivity of the whole world using digital means. As more communication, commerce and governance activities depend on digital technologies in Nepal, it becomes increasingly vulnerable to attacks from abroad hacker. A number of attacks have been launched by cyber-criminal groups who exploit vulnerabilities in the country's cyber security infrastructure thereby threatening various critical infrastructures such as economy and people's privacy. With cybercrime not having boundaries especially for attacks originating from abroad that can greatly affect national security in Nepal showing the need for global collaboration regarding this developing threat environment.

### **Conclusion**

The national security of Nepal, being multidimensional and complex, requires a subtle approach that covers both traditional and emerging threats. Nepal's geographical location and internal dynamics like political uncertainty and ethnic diversity have shaped Nepal's security policy historically, thereby making it very

sensitive for two regional powers, India and China. King Prithvi Narayan Shah's defensive strategy, articulated in 18<sup>th</sup> century, still holds today, as it focused on maintaining sovereignty without aggression. Despite some success in forthrightly stating its national security policies, such as the adoption of a national security policy in 2016, Nepal remains without a comprehensive national security strategy and doctrine. An integrated approach of foreign policy is also required to align diplomatic efforts, economic strategies, environmental factors and security forces towards common national interests. This must consequently be directed at protecting vital interests such as territorial integrity, independence, social cohesion, and economic prosperity among others.

In the context of Nepal, political instability, bureaucratic politicization, economic vulnerabilities, ecological threats, ethnic and religious tensions, illegal immigration and sporadic violence activities are well known threats and challenges to the national security. Nepal needs to improve its governance processes by addressing socio-economic disparities, environmental degradation, and other underlying factors contributing to the internal insecurity. Through this, Nepal can reduce the root causes of internal instability and enhance societal cohesion. Also, Nepal ought to implement proactive measures to expand trade relationships, strengthen economic resilience, and encourage cooperation among neighboring countries to safeguard Nepal's economic sovereignty. As for its external influences, it is worth mentioning that no direct military threat will come from the neighbors, but the country remains susceptible to geopolitical forces. Nepal has a unique geostrategic position with India and China, which calls for diplomatic engagement and cautious application of soft power in safeguarding national interests. Nepal should give top priority to developing a strong national security strategy concentrating on traditional and non-traditional threats. This approach must be all-encompassing, involving all agencies of government, and designed to achieve synergy among different actors to build a nation that can survive amidst changing global ecosystems. By adopting a proactive and comprehensive approach, Nepal can strengthen its resilience and safeguard its national sovereignty and national interests in an increasingly complex security environment.

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