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Research Article

The Dilemma of Nepal's Foreign Policy: Strategic Silence or Autonomy?

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ABSTRACT

Nepal is located between two growing large powerful neighbors, India and China, making its geopolitical importance extremely sensitive. Especially, with the emergence of a multipolar world order, Nepal is increasingly compelled to conduct its foreign policy cautiously. On the one hand, Nepal has to raise its voice in favor of own sovereignty and national interests on the issue of disputed territories such as boarder disputes. Nepal seems to have felt compelled to adopt strategic silence in some cases, which seems to be trying to preserve its existence without displeasing the great powers. However, Nepal has not limited itself to silence, it is actively seeking autonomy by participating in multilateral organizations, regional cooperation, and development-related projects. Using a qualitative and, analytical approach based on secondary data, the research thematic content analysis to study strategic silence or autonomy. This conclude that Nepal is moving forward in a multipolar world order through a combination of 'strategic silence and limited autonomy'. Ultimately, Nepal's challenging geopolitical situation is forcing it to tread a delicate path between strategic silences and autonomous decision-making, while maintaining a careful balance, which needs to be made more practical and sustainable in the future.

Keywords: Autonomy, geopolitics, India-China relations, multipolar world order, national interest, Nepal.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's global political system is entering a critical transition phase, as the post-Cold War unipolarity is coming to an end and a multipolar world order is emerging in its place. "A multipolar world is a world where there are multiple centers of power and influence, rather than one dominant superpower or a bipolar rivalry" (Dahal, 2025). This new structure is creating both opportunities and challenges for small states, especially in the geopolitically sensitive South Asian region like Nepal. A country like Nepal, caught in the middle of the competition between emerging powers like India and China, is likely to be forced to restructure its foreign policy. "Geopolitics has evolved to accommodate new interpretations, taking into account historical facts", (Dahal, 2024). "The world is now multipolar—the basis for this argument is that there are many power centers, and no single state holds the most power of influence", (Thapa, 2025).

"In international relations, the idea of sovereignty is crucial, signifying a state's right to self-govern without external interference" (Bastola, 2025). The unequal relationship that began with the Nepal-India in 1950 made foreign policy India-centric for a long time. As a result, the problem of border disputes continues to persist. However, in recent decades, Nepal has expanded its cooperation with China and signed the BRI agreement in 2017. On the other hand, the MCC project between Nepal and the United States has once again placed Nepal at the center of world powers. The development of such multilateral understandings, contacts, and cooperation has given Nepal the opportunity to move beyond mutual dependence and diversification its foreign policy. Foreign policy refers to a government's strategy for interacting with other nations and international organizations (Gautam, 2025).

However, the practice of silence seems to have given rise to two different perspectives. Nepal as a country adopting strategic silence, which is confirmed by its inaction in the China-India conflict, its silence on Russia-Ukraine, its silence on the Israeli-Palestinian war, its silence on the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, and its vague government statements on the Indo-Pacific strategy. On the other hand, some analysts have interpreted Nepal as moving towards strategic autonomy. Participation in both the MCC and the BRI, the revision of the border map with India, and its participation in multilateral forums such as BIMSTEC, SAARC, and SCO indicate Nepal's mature and balanced foreign policy. "Nepal also signed China's connectivity project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017 and member of the BIMISTEC sub-regional organization led by India" (Thapa, 2025). Prem Raj Khanal states, "Contemporary diplomatic practices focus on an integrated approach, which brings into focus the areas of aid, trade,

investment, technology, tourism, people movement, employment, green economy, among others” (Khanal, 2025).

This article will conduct an in-depth analysis to examine whether Nepal’s policy represents mere silence in the emerging multipolar world system or a new exercise of conscious diplomatic autonomy. “Liberalism focuses on international cooperation rather than power rivalry” (Baral, 2022). For this, theoretical perspectives on international relations such as realism, liberalism, and structuralism will be used as the main basis. In addition, Nepal’s international political crises, economic dependence, and institutional weaknesses related to foreign policy will also be examined in depth. Such an analysis aims to clarify the theoretical and practical aspects of the role, agency, and foreign strategy of small and economically weak states like Nepal in the multipolar world system.

The current global political structure is shifting from unipolarity to multipolarity to multipolarity, creating both strategic challenges and opportunities for small and geo-politically sensitive countries such as Nepal and many others. If we look at the current world political structure, it seems to be moving from a unipolar to a multipolar power. Nepal’s diplomacy and international relations are based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, non-alignment and balance. However, the current world power structure is changing rapidly, resulting in the erosion of American dominance while the entire world is moving towards a multipolar system. In such a world order, the strategic competition between powerful countries like India and the United States can also provide Nepal with opportunities amidst new challenges that are unusual for small and geopolitically sensitive countries. Nepal’s foreign policy has largely been shaped by the balance of power in the South Asian region, friendly relations between neighboring countries, and pressure from regional organizations and world powers. After the 1950 treaty, strategic programs with India, geographical proximity and strategic programs with the United States have placed Nepal in a multidimensional but unbalanced position in its foreign policy.

Nepal’s main problem is that it is still unable to clearly define its long-term national interests and demonstrate the ability to make independent decisions in the face of global power competition. Nepal’s diplomatic behavior sometimes seems to be limited to ‘strategic silence’, while at other times inconsistent incoherence has raised serious questions about national autonomy. Against such a backdrop, this manuscript critically analyzes the unanswered questions of what strategy and coherent policy a geographically small but sensitive state like Nepal has been adopting in international relations, why its foreign policy has not been clear

and coherent, and what the future diplomatic options could be within a multipolar system, which has not been systematically studied before. This research seeks to comprehensively analyze the behavior, strategy and redistribution of power of states in the multipolar world order, focusing on the debate whether Nepal's foreign policy is a strategy of strategic silence or an expression of strong diplomatic autonomy.

Theoretical Framework and Debate on the Foreign Policy of Small States

“Realism, believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects, however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws”(Morgenthau, 1985). The role of the international system and structure in the foreign policy of small states has long been a central debate in international relations. Kenneth Waltz's structural realism argues that in an unbalanced international structure, the independent decision-making capacity of small states is severely limited and those states are forced to limit their options to survival-oriented behavior. “The link between system structure and actor behavior is forged by the rationality assumption, which enables the theorist to predict that leaders will respond to the incentives and constraints imposed by their environments”, (Keohane). Similarly, Rothstein (1968) has noted that small states often tend to seek the protection of powerful states, making their policy choices “reactive”. However, Keohane (1969) argues that even within realistic limits, small states can exert influence on international institutions through “functional influence”, which makes “reactive autonomy” possible. These theories provide additional basis for understanding the policy-making of small but geopolitically sensitive states like Nepal.

Structuralist and liberal perspectives have developed the idea that the foreign policy of small states is not entirely guided by external forces, but is also influenced by internal political culture, leadership capacity, definition of national interest, and diplomatic innovation. “It is the mutual recognition among the actions of similarly placed domestic officials, judges, politicians and publics in liberal democratic societies that assures peace and cooperation”, (Moravcsik, 1996). Constructivist scholar Alexander Wendt has argued that state behavior is guided not only by power structures, but also by “identity formation” and “norm-based orientation”, on the basis of which small states are able to build symbolic autonomy or narrative autonomy. In the context of Nepal, various authors have noted that historical behavioral characteristics such as “sovereignty conscience”, “non-aligned identity”, and “peace diplomacy” have led Nepal in the direction of seeking limited but possible autonomy. Thus, the literature shows that the

policies of small states can be not only “survival-driven” but also “value-driven”, which helps to explain both strategic silence and autonomy as practical possibilities.

Geopolitical Context and Nepal-India-China Triangular Relations

South Asia is depicted as a complex arena of power competition, resource control, and security balance. While India has established itself as a regional power, China’s emerging economic and strategic influence has transformed the region into a multipolar security zone. Various studies, such as Tellis (2017), Pant (2010) and Baru (2021), have noted that the Sino-Indian competition has placed a buffer state like Nepal in a “strategic cross-pressure zone”. This poses a risk for Nepal to create an imbalance with another state while developing deep concerns and relations with one state, which seems to have made Nepal’s foreign policy behavior very cautious, cautious, and anticipatory.

The literature makes it clear that Nepal’s economic, cultural and geographical interdependence in the triangular relationship has decisively influenced the evolving nature of its foreign policy. The open border, trade dependence, employment shelter and historical relations with India have made it more difficult for Nepal to escape from the state of “asymmetric interdependence”. “Nepal’s strategic location has long been a central element in the dynamics of the region, influencing its political, economic, and cultural exchanges”(Adhikari, 2024). On the other hand, the emerging strategic-economic cooperation with China, mainly the infrastructure projects under the BRI, although it has provided Nepal with an important opportunity for “policy diversification”, has created new sensitivities in the Nepal-India-China relationship. Thus, the literature seems to have made Nepal dependent on finding a balance between the two superpowers and concludes that this dependence has led to “strategic silence” in many situations.

Non-alignment, Balance and Constraint

“Nepal became a founding member of the Movement for Nonalignment (NAM) in the early sixties of the last century and has actively participated in all NAM summits at the highest political level”, (Lohani, 2023). It has been extensively mentioned that Nepal’s foreign policy has been based on principles such as non-alignment, sovereign equality and regional balance throughout its history. Many studies show that Nepal’s membership in the United Nations (1955), its affiliation with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and its parallel diplomatic relations with both India and China have inspired Nepal to build a kind of “equidistance identity”. Studies by Rose (1971), Baral (2012) and Adhikari (2018) argue that Nepal has

used multi-directional diplomacy to protect its existence and autonomy. “Nepal is one of the founding members of the non-aligned movement and has a challenging geo-strategic position”(K.C., 2024).

But practical history has clearly shown that it will be difficult for Nepal to achieve complete independent decision-making. Many scholars have noted that events such as the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty, security understandings, water-energy agreements, and the Indian blockade have reduced Nepal to a state of “dependent sovereignty”. Nepal has also adopted “cautious pragmatism” many times in relation to the China, mainly on the sensitive issue of Tibet. Thus, historical practice shows that Nepal has been placed in a dual situation of “autonomy in principle but constraint in practice” which forms the main background of today’s strategic silence-autonomy debate.

Power Competition, BRI-MCC Debate and Nepal’s Strategic Ambiguity

The literature has provided in-depth analysis of how the policies of small countries like Nepal are torn between the MCC, BRI, Indo-Pacific Strategy, and national security proposals. Karna (2020), Lama (2022) and Shrestha (2023) argue that Nepal’s acceptance of the MCC has raised questions about whether it has moved closer to the US, while on the other hand, the unclear progress of the BRI and border issues have created a kind of dilemma in the Sino-SAG relationship. This shows that Nepal has deepened its “strategic polarization” and internal political divisions. “The importance of Nepalese geopolitics is further increased in the present context for global powers and they tried to make involve Nepal in their global projects like the BRI and MCC” (Chand, 2021).

Nepal’s government statements on such sensitive issues have often been ambiguous, balanced, or even completely silent, which many authors have interpreted as a practical form of strategic silence. Nepal often seems to adopt a wait-and-see policy, quiet diplomacy, and ambiguity strategy, as open support or opposition can unbalance either of the two powers. This has forced Nepal to use “policy ambiguity as a survivable tool” in international relations. Sometimes such silence or ambiguity is considered a kind of “instrumental autonomy,” that is, not speaking is a better strategy for diplomatic gain than speaking.

The Gap in Comparative Analysis of Strategic Silence vs. Autonomy

Although the current literature has extensively studied Nepal’s foreign policy issues, relations with India-China-US, non-alignment policy, border issues and economic independence, it does not seem to have paid sufficient analytical attention to why and how Nepal has adopted

“strategic silence”. Many authors have only described the practical facts, but the theoretical explanation of how silence or ambiguity works as a diplomatic tool is insufficient.

Similarly, there is a lack of comparative and interdisciplinary studies on when, in what context, and to what extent a small country like Nepal is able to use “policy autonomy.” How do Nepal’s internal political instability, party-party competition, ideological ambiguity of the leadership, and economic dependence affect foreign policy? This question is still not sufficiently included in the theoretical debate. Therefore, is strategic silence a constraint or opportunistic autonomy? This study seeks to address this gap in the available literature.

Theoretical Framework and Analysis

“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” (Bhattarai et al., 2022). In the current multipolar world order, a multidimensional theoretical framework that encompasses structural pressures and internal capabilities is necessary to understand Nepal’s foreign policy conduct. For this, three major perspectives on international relations are of particular importance, including realism and neo-realism, liberalism and institutional liberalism, and structuralism or role theory. Nepal’s diplomatic options are determined by the pressures of its geographical, social, cultural, economic, and immediate neighboring powers. Thus, the logic of balance of power sometimes pushes Nepal towards partial factional affiliation, sometimes towards hedging strategies, the purpose of which is to protect sovereignty and protect itself from the influence of a single pole.

The liberal institutional perspective, views interdependence, trade, and multilateral institutions as a means of subordinating small states. Nepal’s engagement with regional mechanisms and international organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BBIN helps to further broaden its diplomatic space. There is an opportunity to demonstrate not only a tacit diplomatic strategy but also a selective autonomy by integrating into economic institutional relations. Structuralism and role theory give special importance to identity, norms, and the perceptions of leaders. Nepal’s leaders have historically sought a national role as a strong bridge between civilizations, buffer states, and zones of peace. Recognizing such a role is sometimes seen as a weakness. Similarly, autonomy can be presented as a viable alternative based on the ideological values of non-alignment and sovereignty. Identities and norms thus mediate structural pressures and further shape Nepal’s strategic choices.

In addition, small state theory provides a more sophisticated perspective. It shows that small states often adopt a mixed strategy, such as silence on sensitive issues, diversification

of alternative partners, and selective autonomy, the use of which depends on the issue area and domestic political situation. The theoretical framework thus presented explains Nepal's behavior by integrating **realistic structural pressures**, liberal interdependent opportunities, and structuralist role recognition. It is clear from this that Nepal's foreign policy lies on a continuum from strategic silence, such as minimal engagement and risk aversion, to strategic autonomy.

The world is moving towards multipolarity, where there will be more than two poles. Then there is no question of choosing one side or the other in multipolarity (Bhattarai, 2025). The foreign policy of small state in a multipolar world order, realist, liberal, and structuralist perspectives offer different but complementary explanations. While realist theory considers the balance of power as the key variable, this view argues that Nepal must adopt options such as strategic neutrality to maintain its geopolitical existence between the competing polarities of China, India, and the United States. Liberal institutionalist theory suggests that Nepal can expand its options by engaging in multipolar organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and international organizations. It shows that Nepal is not just a silent spectator, but has the ability to secure its independence and autonomy by expanding diplomatic and economic relations. However, since realist and liberal explanations are not sufficient, structuralist perspectives and role theories also play a role. "Regional associations like SAARC have risen as crucial platforms for political and economic engagement, reflecting the growing importance of regionalism in contemporary geopolitics"(Paudel, 2023).

But when realist and liberal interpretations are not sufficient, structuralists perspectives and role theories are very important. Nepal's historical identity, which has seen itself as a buffer state, a peace zone or a bridge between great civilizations, has shaped its foreign policy. This identity-based approaches can interpret strategic silence as a prudent move rather than a cowardice one, and links autonomy with the values of sovereignty and non-alignment. "The NAM is a group of states which emerged during the 1950s and 1960s"(Ghimire, 2024). Thus, a small country like Nepal, can adopt three strategic formulas to secure its place in the multipolar international structure such as staying silent, diversifying options, and taking independent decisions based on principles when necessary. This comparative study of principles shows that Nepal is not just mere a passive observer, but an active but cautious player, balancing the structural constraints of the international system with its own identity.

The available literature does not provide a thorough analysis of the role of Nepal's strategic silence and its long-term impact. Some studies have shown silence as diplomatic

pragmatism, while others have interpreted it as a result of failed leadership and policy weaknesses. However, there is a lack of comparative studies analyzing the relationship between silence and autonomy. In particular, the question of the possibility of transforming Nepal's strategic silence into active autonomy and how it can help Nepal position itself in the multipolar international-structure has not been adequately addressed. Therefore, studies to date seem to have prioritized the traditional bipolar or regional balance of power perspective, but a new discourse on how Nepal can shape policies in its own interests in a multipolar world order has not yet been established. To fill this gap, this research presents a new theoretical and practical perspective on strategic silence and autonomy, relating Nepal's foreign policy to the multipolar power structure.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper aims to analyze whether Nepal should follow strategic Silence and the Pursuit of Autonomy. For this purpose, it adopts a qualitative analytical approach and the necessary information is collected from books, journals articles, government policy papers, think tank reports, international news and research articles that cover the 1990s. The results are presented in tabular and descriptive formats, which provide a comprehensive picture of Nepal's strategic choices and its position in regional and global politics in the context of Nepal's South Asian foreign policy.

This research systematically analyzes the data collected in this study to understand Nepal's foreign policy behavior in a multipolar world. Qualitative data such as government documents, constitution, Nepal's foreign policy, treaties, policy statements, and media materials will shed light on public and international perceptions of Nepal's diplomatic approach. In addition, case studies of specific geopolitical events are analyzed to show how Nepal has been balancing the pressures from major powers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"Nepal's geo-strategic location has presented greater possibilities for Nepal-China-India cooperation by having trans-Himalayan connectivity and becoming a vibrant bridge between the world's highest growing economies"(Aryal, 2022). Nepal often adopts strategic silence in sensitive situations and acts as an autonomous force in developmental and multilateral forums. Table No. 1 presents Nepal's diplomatic response to geopolitical events, which also

provides examples of silence and activism. The example of the border dispute with India in the Lipulekh-Kalapani region clearly illustrates Nepal's strategic silence. For example, in the Doklam standoff (2017), Nepal did not make a public statement but made an independent decision by signing the Belt and Road Initiative. In the Lipulekh-Kalapani dispute too, Nepal seems to be trying to find a solution through multilateral dialogue and diplomatic means, adopting a balanced policy on sensitive lines. "Despite its biodiverse and culturally rich nature, its geopolitical significance has only briefly diverted public attention, usually during disasters like the 2017 Doklam Clash", (Agarwal, 2017).

Table 1

Nepal's Diplomatic Participation

Events	Statements	Action	Reaction
India-China Boarder Tension, 2017	No	Request to mediation	Silence
SAARC trade, 2014	There is	Signed agreement	Active
BRI, 2018	There is	Signed MoU	Active
Doklam tension, 2017	Limit	No official opinion	Silence
Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Lipulekh dispute	Limit	Bi-lateral dialogues	Silence/balanced

Such a perspective makes it clear that Nepal adopts silence on sensitive bilateral issues, but plays an autonomous and strong role in multilateral or development projects. "The world is witnessing a kind of anarchy in the international system. "The proliferation of transnational challenges and threats including the rapid expansion of technologies such as artificial intelligence, will require multilateral coordination and cooperation", (Bhattarai, 2025, p. 29).

This has confirmed that Nepal's foreign policy is balanced, long-term and focused on strategic objectives. Analysis of various material and evidences has further proven the strategic approach adopted by Nepal. Domestic media often portrays silence as a prudent and strategic decisions, while international media sometime considers it indecisive and passive. However, Nepal is seen to have adopted a balanced approach to protect national interests and international image by limiting its response to sensitive area, especially Lipilek-Kalapani-Limpiyadhura. This demonstrates that Nepal's foreign policy is contextual, sensitive, risk-mitigation-oriented and a flexible strategy.

Both Nepal's strategic silences and autonomy are relevant in the international diplomatic landscape. By adopting silence in sensitive bilateral dispute, Nepal distances itself from direct

bilateral confrontations with major powers. On the other hand, autonomous decision-making in developments and multilateral forums has ensured national interests and sovereignty. “Nepal, as a small state between two major powers, India and China, uses foreign policy as a tool for maintaining her sovereignty and addressing security concerns”, (Bastola, 2025). Such an approach proves it’s balanced, practical and effective diplomatic practice in a multipolar world as a small and developing country. Finally; the dispute is a prime example of Nepal’s diplomatic strategic practice. It shows that Nepal has been minimizing risks to some extent by adopting strategic silences in sensitive areas, while demonstrating autonomy and proactivity in multilateral forums and development projects. This balanced strategy has helped Nepal to play an effective role as a small country in the multipolar world. Nepal’s current foreign policy is situation-sensitive, risk-restricted and focused on which ensures sovereignty and regional stability.

Foreign Policy: Silence, Balance, and Re-impersonation

The important fact that the findings of the study show is that the “strategic silence” adopted by Nepal in recent decades is not an accidental expression but a repetitive behavioral pattern, which has made diplomatic decisions cautious but ambiguous. In incidents such as the MCC-BRI debate, the Indo-Pacific strategy, the India-China border tension, the Lipulekh-Kalapani dispute, and the 2015 blockade, Nepal has often adopted “quiet diplomacy”, “issue de-escalation”, and “calibrated response strategy” rather than presenting an open diplomatic position in public. Such silence is a sign that Nepal’s policymakers are trying to stay away from direct power competition, aiming to protect Nepal from being pulled into any power center.

Some authors have attributed this silence-centric tendency to incompetence, internal political weakness, or policy-maker instability, but the study’s findings show that silence has been used as a “strategic necessity” in many contexts. Nepal’s diplomatic statements have used “ambiguity as a survivable tool”, in which Nepal is able to maintain political balance without giving its clear opinion. However, this also creates the risk of reducing “policy predictability”, further weakening the credibility of decision-making, and increasing “fraud” with international partners in the long run. Therefore, this study presents the completely contradictory result that silence has become both a “survivable strategy” and a “weakness indicator” for Nepal at the same time.

Table 2

Key Contexts in Which Strategic Silence is Manifested in Foreign Policy

Issue	Nepal's approach	The purpose seen	Potential risk
MCC controversy	Obscurity and, delay	Not allowing the relationship between the two powers to deteriorate	Possibility of loss of trust
BRI project	Long silence	India-China balance	Project delay
Lipulekh dispute	Limited diplomatic response	Preventing stress buildup	Sovereignty question
Indo-Pacific issue	Compound expression	Protecting neutrality	Strategic ambiguity

Multi-directional Diplomacy

The second important result of the research is that Nepal has succeeded in developing some basis for “relative autonomy” even though it has not achieved full autonomy. Through the expansion of parallel diplomatic and economic relations with both India and China, active involvement in the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, and “hedging diplomacy”, it is clear that Nepal is trying to develop an autonomous policy-capability focused on national interests and survival. Nepal's behavior such as engaging in China's BRI while cooperating with American aid, and showing some degree of independence on regional security issues despite its geographical dependence on India has shown the potential for “multi-vector autonomy” in Nepal.

The study shows that Nepal's internal political instability, inconsistent leadership signals, economic dependence, and weak state capacity pose major obstacles to turning these autonomous practices into reality. Due to rapid government changes, party competition, lack of policy continuity, and lack of clear definition of national interests, Nepal's autonomy appears to have become “episodic” and “contextual.” The external structure - mainly, the competition between India, China, and the United States - has limited Nepal's decision-making options, but the study concludes that the internal imbalanced structure has further narrowed those options. Therefore, since autonomy is a practical challenge for Nepal, the study argues that “partial autonomy without structural limits” is the real foreign policy situation of Nepal.

Strategic Silence vs. Autonomy

The study reveals the central dilemma in Nepal's foreign policy - strategic silence or autonomy? These are not two completely opposite situations, but rather mutually complementary ones.

“Nepalese foreign policy was strongly influenced by the change in the domestic political system” (Raj, 2018). Nepal’s silence on sensitive issues may be a strategy to preserve its autonomy, and silence may be another necessary security shield in the process of promoting autonomy. The results show that when Nepal adopts silence on issues that it should speak out, its strategic interests are weakened, but when it speaks out on issues that it should not speak out, its risks are also increased. Thus, Nepal is in a position of “dual strategy of silence and selective autonomy”, in which decisions are situation-dependent and based on risk assessment.

Looking ahead, this study suggests three main points. First, strategic silence cannot truly become a sustainable security guarantee unless Nepal shifts its foreign policy from a “reactive posture” to a “proactive clarity.” Second, Nepal needs to develop a clear national interest document to build “interest-based autonomy” in the India-China-US triangular competition. Third, only internal political stability, professional diplomacy, economic self-reliance, and strong continuity in international relations can lead Nepal to a state of “matching autonomy.” Overall, this study concludes that while both strategic silence and autonomy are indispensable strategic tools for Nepal, “issue sensitivity,” “national interest,” and “geographical timing” will determine which of them is appropriate.

Table 3

Some Signs of Nepal’s Autonomous Behavior

Area	Autonomous steps	Impact	Limitations
Multilateral diplomacy	Activism in UN peacekeeping missions	International credibility	Limited economic/strategic capacity
Economic diplomacy	Cooperation with China, India, and America	Diversified options	Dependency maintained
Security issue	Fairness-oriented policy	Moderating role in regional tensions	Open borders and insecurity
Foreign aid	Donor diversification	Increased autonomous options	Decision continuity problem

CONCLUSION

Strategically formulated keeping in mind the challenging positions of a small nation in a multipolar world order, its sensitive geopolitical environments and its expediency. The

experiences of the past two decades also shows that Nepal has been safeguarding its national interests from potential conflicts and risks by adopting strategic silence on sensitive bilateral disputes, such as the India-China border tension, Doklam and the Lipulekh-Kalapani region. Such silences are not just passivity, but is implemented as a situation-sensitive, planned and risk-mitigation-oriented strategy. This has enabled it to manage the challenges of a small nation's limited resource, geographical sensitivity and power imbalances.

Similarly, Nepal has been demonstrating autonomous decision-making and active participation in multi-polar forums and development projects. Is clear; here, ensured development and diplomatic benefits through active participation and autonomous decision-making, keeping in mind its national interests and long-term goals. This kind of approach indicates that it adopts a flexible, balanced and long-term strategy in a multilateral environment, rather than being reactive, which helps ensure national interests, regional stability and international respect. Finally; the context of sensitive territories like Lipulekh-Kalapani further clarifies the combination of strategic silence and autonomy adopted by Nepal. While strategic silence is a means of risk reduction, autonomy guides the way to achieve long-term national goals. Overall, Nepal's foreign policy is balanced, pragmatic and result-oriented, which has helped Nepal maintain its effective role, self-reliance and national respect as a small nation in a multi-polar world.

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