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Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity [Public Lecture]

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Abstract

The process of globalization, with the flow of people, merchandise, and capital, has invited different challenges, threats, and insecurities. Thus, the idea of border governance has emerged among the states, calling for a collaborative approach to border management systems between the neighboring states. As a qualitative study adhering to the "practice turn" in International Relations (IR) and considering human actions responsible for constructing social realities, the study has focused on the Nepal-India open border. As a unique border, the study has pointed out different threats and challenges faced by Nepal and India because of their openness. The article has briefly elucidated the emerging concept of border governance. Likewise, it has introduced the idea of border governance for Nepal-India open borders, outlining its principles and strategies. Overall, the study emphasized the importance of border governance for Nepal-India borders, recognizing border disputes and enormous challenges.

Keywords: Nepal-India, open borders, border governance, transnational threats, border governance strategy

Introduction

Francis Fukuyama argues that never before has liberalism been more contentious than it is now. From Putin's populism to the Trump administration and autocratic regimes across the

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

globe, identity politics, authoritarianism, social media, and a restrained free press have all contributed to its success or failure. Conservatives and progressives alike, and even in its birthplace have decried liberal thought since the debates that followed the Reformation, it is now mostly seen as an outmoded ideology. It is also believed that both sides have overreached themselves with their ideologies. A new age of "might makes right" is perilously close at hand since liberalism appears to have failed to convince a jaded world of the merits of its beliefs. Russian President Putin has been showing gestures that he will no longer abide by international laws. He plans to put in place a new system where Russia will be recognized as a significant actor with a wider area of influence

Similarly, US President Joe Biden mentions that China and Russia pose unique security risks in the nation's usual national security policy. China is the only US adversary with the purpose and, increasingly, the economic, political, military, and technological means to achieve that goal, notwithstanding Russia's savage war of aggression, which poses an urgent threat to the free and open international system. China is hence regarded as the pacing problem of the Pentagon.

It is important to reflect on how US policy towards China has evolved in light of how Chinese President Xi Jinping utilized the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to consolidate his power and further consolidate his ideological and nationalist objectives. Some American critics contend that the circumstances of today demonstrate how foolish it was for Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton to pursue an engagement strategy that included permitting China to join the World Trade Organization. Though opinions about China twenty years ago were overly optimistic, they weren't necessarily stupid.

Throughout the Cold War (1945–1989), the Soviet Union took care to avoid striking Western Europe or the United States directly. (In addition to the opposite). Instead, both sides employed a range of enforcement techniques, including proxy clashes. However, there have been even more recent confrontations, such as the Israel-Hamas War and the Russo-Ukrainian War. The United States and Russia are fighting proxy wars in Ukraine using an odd mix of long-range missiles and heightened right-wing nationalism. After a year of big shocks like the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the rise in global inflation rates, the war between Israel and Hamas, the potential start of an Arab-Israeli conflict, and the collapse of bitcoin firms, what type of year will 2023, 2024, and beyond be?

Power Shift Dynamics

William MacAskill claims that several scholars calmly forecast a chaotic future as the Cold War came to an end a little over thirty years ago. The fear of the end of the world that had been so pervasive in people's thoughts had started to fade throughout the Cold War. Following the defeat of fascism in World War II and the subsequent rise of communism, it appeared that the fundamental ideological differences had been resolved. Similarly, following the conclusion of the Cold War (1945–1989), the United States of America instituted a unipolar world order, stating that a rival force would not be able to emerge soon to challenge the USA; Francis Fukuyama called this the end of history.

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

Nevertheless, in just a few decades, China's ascent and Russia's reappearance in the Balkans and elsewhere have already begun to reshape the world order. Political theorist Francis Fukuyama claims that cultures can be categorized as historical or post-historical based on how the distribution of power has evolved. He reaffirmed that economic calculation and the never-ending resolution of complex consumer demands will take the place of daring, courage, imagination, and idealism and that the end of history will be a very depressing moment.

Even neoliberals questioned their theories, displaying a pessimistic outlook on the future and perceiving it as a drab, grey landscape designed for technocrats. As opposed to Fukuyama's apocalyptic view of the end of time, other specialists in international relations have recognized existential threats to global human life, such as deliberate pandemics, artificial intelligence, and nuclear war. The competition between the superpowers in the previously listed domains also heralded the start of a novel phase in the conflict, sometimes referred to as Cold War 2.0.

Viruses and microbes are also shifting the global power structure. Though the world contains hundreds of biological laboratories, there are only nine nuclear-armed states (the United States and Russia possess over 90% of all weapons). Several of them, spanning five continents, have been given authorization to use the deadliest viruses on the globe for scientific purposes. Henry Kissinger met with Mao Zedong in secret while serving as the national security adviser for the United States in China in July 1971. Kissinger's visit was a preamble to the end of the Cold War (1991) and the short-lived "unipolar" period (1991–1991) in which the United States was the sole superpower. It appeared that the presidents of the two countries got along nicely for almost 40 years. After forty years of working relations, the US had expected Beijing to take a new stance and join the US-led liberal economic and political order, but China instead became a strong, technologically and militarily advanced nation. Despite being a communist country, China has become more well-known both domestically and abroad, challenging long-held beliefs about free markets and democratic institutions.

It is stated that the United States and China's recent geopolitical, ideological, and economic conflicts have sparked a new Cold War that is spreading around the world. However, after the 2008 financial crisis, which hurt the country's reputation, it is believed that America has been facing serious challenges. Some economists have used the term secular stagnation to describe declining growth and productivity. Some drew attention to the increasing disparity, while others highlighted the devastating social impact of drug and alcohol addictions and suicide—known as the deaths of despair. The ensuing pandemic highlighted the issues facing America, including its corrupt political system, inadequate healthcare system, and vicious polarization pathology. Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington used the phrase American declinists to refer to this population in this regard. The first wave is believed to have started with the Soviet launch of Sputnik and was further fueled by the US involvement in the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, the 1973 oil crisis, the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, and Japan's emergence in the late 1980s. He claimed that America was going through its fifth wave of decline at the time.

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

Fareed Zakaria questioned whether the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2008 financial crisis, and the Iraq War had contributed to a sixth wave of decline. Similarly, in fiscal year 2021, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office received approximately 595,700 patent applications, a slight decrease from the 597,000 applications received the year before. However, the US led the world in 2021 in terms of military spending, allocating \$801 billion, or more than 38% of all military expenditures. Conversely, China has authorized more than 2.53 million patents in the previous five years, with an average annual growth rate of 13.4% in the country's patent approval rate. China will authorize about 695,400 patents in 2021. In China, patents for inventions are being issued at a rate that is almost double what it was at the end of 2017—7.5 patents for every 10,000 people. China has set a goal of having patent-based and innovative businesses make up 13% of its GDP by 2025, as part of its plan to develop intellectual property rights over the next 15 years.

China ranked second with military spending of \$293.4 billion in 2021, or around 14% of total military spending worldwide. China has boosted its military spending for 27 years running, despite having a budget that is still less than half that of the United States. Geographic location can have a significant impact on a nation's ability to interact with neighbors and other nations, as well as its ability to collaborate and progress. Factors such as resource constraints, historical trauma, cultural and ethnic divisions, and geopolitical competition can all have an impact on a country's ability to interact and progress

Robert Kaplan predicts that the United States in the 21st century will develop into a "Mestizo Polynesian Society." This raises the question of why American strategic planners were unable to anticipate the actual challenges that the United States would face. Kaplan outlines several pre-existing fault lines that are likely to re-emerge shortly. For the next ten or twenty years, the United States will remain engaged in geopolitical competition with China. According to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen., China and Russia are described as revisionist powers. However, "China and Russia are revisionist powers," says Kishore. "They want to shape the world to suit their regime type, and they want to have a say in other countries' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions." The executive summary of US National Defense Strategies for the Coming Decade (2018–2022) describes China and Russia as "revisionist powers."

Henry Kissinger, in his book "On China," noted that the Chinese chess game "wei qi" had a greater influence on Chinese strategy than Western chess. While the goal of Western chess is to capture the king as quickly as possible, the goal of Wei qi is to keep increasing the number of assessments to swing the balances in your favor. This suggests that China prioritizes long-term strategy over short-term profitability and may be gradually shifting the strategic balance to its advantage through its slow and steady asset acquisition program.

In 2014 and 2015, the Obama administration made two unsuccessful attempts to dissuade its allies from joining the AIIB, which was established by China. Similarly, the Trump administration tried to prevent its allies from engaging in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The question remains whether the US is ready to compete with China in the long term.

Do Americans possess the innate resilience and tenacity required to compete with China's long-term strategy? The purpose of these questions is to shed light on the numerous intricate

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

aspects of the geopolitical relationship between the United States and China that will develop over the next ten years, stimulate strategic debate, and stimulate new ideas.

An American strategist might ask a question to assess the risks involved in getting involved in a significant geopolitical dispute. The United States has implemented various plans, such as the Indo-Pacific Plan, Quad, and AKUS-style global security plan, to address the changing geopolitical complexity in the Asia Pacific, Indian Ocean, and beyond. One area of conflict between the US and China is the regional politics of the Indo-Pacific region. Both nations are strengthening their military and economic connections with Southeast Asia. The security and economic relations in the Indo-Pacific region have become increasingly important since the Obama administration, and this policy has been maintained by both the Trump and Biden administrations.

The United States of America has included Japan, Australia, and India in the Quad and Indo-Pacific security networks to counteract China's assertive actions in the area. The current US President, Joe Biden, who was previously Vice President, has acknowledged that the US and other nations are engaged in a geopolitical competition to determine the course of the global order. He has unveiled the US National Security Strategy 2022, stating that NATO is now stronger and more united than ever before, as we welcome our two new allies, Finland and Sweden. By implementing initiatives such as the Australia and United Kingdom Security Cooperation (AUKUS) program, we are taking further steps to strengthen our partnerships and cross-regional collaborations.

In partnership with our collaborators, we are exploring new methods to address mutual interests. This is in addition to our existing partnerships, such as those with the European Union (EU), the Indo-Pacific Quad (IPQ), the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (EFP), and the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APPE).

In the statement, he emphasizes that his administration will take the issue seriously and recognizes its great significance in the fight for the future of our planet. Although the US has pledged to handle international competition responsibly, China possesses both the determination and the capability to reshape the world order and establish a more favourable environment for competition.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has significantly disrupted the peace and stability of Europe. Moreover, Russia's reckless use of nuclear weapons has put the global nonproliferation system in peril. Autocratic leaders are actively working towards dismantling democracy and promoting oppressive governance systems both within their own countries and abroad. During the 20th Congress of the CPC, President Xi Jinping expressed China's determination to prevent separatism and external interference, indicating the country's effort to protect its sovereignty and oppose Taiwan's independence. The move was in response to the separatists' actions to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty and the involvement of external actors in Taiwan's internal affairs. China is committed to achieving full reunification and supports the one-China concept globally. Geopolitical tensions are occurring in the Indo-Pacific region, the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea, involving the United States, Russia, and China.

India, a significant South Asian nation, joined the United States to form the Indo-Pacific Strategy and Quad, intensifying their geopolitical rivalry. This is in contrast to several middle- and small-power countries in the region, such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

Sri Lanka, joining the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has a considerable presence in South Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative and bilateral trade. Additionally, China plans to establish networks with some BRI countries in South Asia to promote its newly announced Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI). India's strategic partnership with Russia and involvement in the US-led IPS and QUAD have created a challenging situation for the country. The geopolitical complexity in the region, largely due to shifting international power dynamics, has also had a significant impact on Nepal's foreign and national security. In this context, Thucydides' maxim that the powerful do what they can and the weak take what they must accept seems particularly relevant.

Nepal's strategic location has made it a target for both China's Belt and Road Initiative and the United States' Millennium Challenge Corporation. Additionally, India's history of seeking out managed instability could present a trilateral dilemma for Nepal. Despite sharing an open border and treaty engagements dating back to before India's independence, Nepal could fall into Thucydides' trap due to potential rivalry between established and emerging global and regional powers.

Conclusion

Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China in May 2017 regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. However, Nepal has not started any of the nine priority projects outlined in the MoU. During his visit to Nepal in 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that China-Nepal relations had reached a strategic level. Similarly, the United States described Nepal as a critical ally during the Trump administration. Nepal has also approved a \$500 million US-funded MCC project, which has brought them into a more complex geopolitical situation.

Nepal needs to avoid aligning with any security allies that may jeopardize its national security and further complicate its geopolitical relations. Nepal is one of the founding members of the non-aligned movement and has a challenging geo-strategic position. Nepal should prioritize its survival over the security of its neighbors by adopting a reactive and practical security posture. Therefore, Nepal must remain committed to a non-aligned foreign policy and strive for a state of permanent neutrality.

To remain competitive in the face of new geopolitical complexities, Nepal must develop a comprehensive foreign policy that includes establishing political stability, forming influential think tanks, and promoting forward-looking diplomacy. Nepal should also promote soft power, including its Buddhas, Himalayas, (UNPKO), and diasporas, and provide a level playing field for global goals like preserving the Himalayas, combating climate change, and promoting green development.

Nepal has historically maintained a careful foreign policy to protect its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Nepal has adopted a prudent foreign policy strategy by placing diplomacy and diplomatic procedures at the center of its domestic agenda while also adjusting to the changing geopolitical environment and power dynamics around the world.

Nepal's foreign and national security strategy needs to prioritize maximizing its benefits from strong and impartial partnerships with both regional and global powers. Nepal should avoid showing any bias towards any particular power concerning bilateral, regional, or

Global Power Shift and Nepal's Geopolitical Complexity India

multilateral security arrangements. To achieve its objectives, Nepal should give priority to regional frameworks, with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) being particularly important, followed by bilateral inter-ministerial and multilateral cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Shanghai Cooperation, among others. In addition, Nepal should keep a global perspective in its external policies.

Note: The aforementioned speech was composed based on his extensive teaching experience in the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Kirtipur.