

## **Nepal-China Military Relation**

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### **Abstract**

*Any military relation with government to government or International or Regional Organizations would be the part of National Diplomacy and interests. In other words, it is Track Two diplomacy after Track One Diplomacy of the government. Bilateral Military relations consists of those activities of a government which are primarily concerned with its armed forces and development assistances too. The histories of bilateral military relations would be sweet and sour. Accordingly, Nepal-China military realties consists of many confrontations and supports. Nepal-China relation is a milestone in the diplomatic history of Nepal. Diplomatic relation is the combination of economic, trade and transit, cultural, military and many more aspects. Nepal – China (Sino-Nepal) Military Relation also begins since our diplomatic history with China. Any diplomatic movement and strategy directly relate with personal security and National security. Nepal – China Relations has two folds; Nepal used to have separate diplomatic relations with China and Tibet up to October 1950. So far, China claims that Tibet was its own part always and never an independent. We could find some events in Sino – Nepal Military relation. Which have been written in many documents, books, and journals. However, an exact document, proofs, archives lack to cover Sino-Nepal Military Relation from ancient period onwards. Background of Sino - Nepal relation, Nepal –Tibet Wars, Nepal –China War, are the main aspects to be highlighted. This article would be based on Qualitative research design applying secondary sources and interpretation of data is content analysis as well as based on Bilateral Relation Theory. Finding of the research paper is to create the separate domain as Nepal-China military relation based on military perspective. The limitation of this paper would be the only major bilateral military confrontations after 1744.*

**Keywords:** *Bahadur Shah, Nepal-Tibet war, Sino- Nepal war, Junga Bahahdur.*

### **Introduction:**

#### **Importance of Military Relation and War**

When bilateral peace breaks up by using all the means and methods then war or military disputes begins as political tool. Finally, the war or dispute ends with beginning of peace. In this regard, war does not relate with military destructions only and brings peace as well. On the other hand, the histories of bilateral military relations would be sweet and sour. Because in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries there used to be many wars rather bilateral or multilateral supports. Especially, after the World War II the paradigm of bilateral military relation has been shifted into human welfare except some wars or disputes. Accordingly, Nepal China military relation consists of many confrontations and supports as well. Bilateral or multilateral military relation with government to government would be the part of National diplomacy and interests. It is tracking two diplomacies to support track one diplomacy of the government. Bilateral Military relations consists of those directed activities of a government which are primarily concerned with its armed forces and development assistances too. In present context, the military relations with the globe are essential as per own national interests. For an example the United States and its army. The US being

Super Power and to maintain this position in a new era of great power competition today, the United States needs to continue to invest in the world and commit to the growth of security and stability abroad (Ebitz, 2019). It is also true to note that present military relations have been used for other country's developments too, which calls defense diplomacy. In other words, defense diplomacy provides forces to meet the varied activities ordered by the Ministry of Defense to dispel hostility establish and maintain trust and support in the development democratically accountable armed forces at home and abroad. Finally, a nation's bilateral relations consist of economic, commercial, cultural, military, religious, and many more. So that, bilateral military relations boosters to national diplomacy and it remains part of national interest, always.

### Bilateral Relations in the History

The history of Nepal-China relations spans centuries and ages. In this regard, some written historical accounts show that during the prehistoric time, Manjushree, a sage, came to Nepal and cut open the Chobhar gorge of Kathmandu to drain the water from Kathmandu, which used to be a huge lake, thereby making the Kathmandu Valley suitable for human settlements and human habitations (Shrestha, 2015). Having drained the water from the lake after cutting open the Chobhar gorge, human settlements started, and the place was given the name of 'Manjupattan'. Historical evidence shows that hundreds of years after the spread of Buddhism in China, Nepal and China enjoyed relations at the non-governmental level for centuries. But the diplomatic including trade, military, pilgrim relations between the two countries started after the rule of Thang dynasty in China (Sharma, B.S. 2033). Diplomatic, or political relation is the spinal cord between any two countries. All other relations like trade and transit, cultural, historical, military, academic fall under the diplomatic relations. So that, the background of the Sino-Nepal military relation should be mentioned beforehand. It is also true to note that Sino-Nepal Military relation is one part of Nepal - China diplomatic relation, among many.

Firstly, there was a tradition of sending religious envoys to the countries back then. As such, Tsen Tsai from China was delegated to Nepal as a religious envoy in 306. He came to Nepal met the then king (Sharma, B. S. 2033). In 406, another Chinese citizen, Fahien, had come to Nepal as a religious envoy of China to Nepal (Sharma, B.S. 2033). Then in 636, Hu Wen Sang came to Nepal as a religious envoy and stayed as a guest in the then royal palace. As per available records as of now, he was the first foreigner to describe Nepal, including its size and area. Hu Wen Sang has recorded Nepal's total area as being 4000 square li (one li being one mile) (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049).

Secondly, around 647, during the rule of King Narendra Dev, two Chinese envoys—Li Pyao and Wang Chhen-Se—had gone to the palace of Harshabardhana, the king of Kannauj of India. King Harshabardhana was immensely happy with them and showered them with a lot of wealth before bidding them farewell. Soon after, Harshabardhana was assassinated by his commander -In -Chief Arunaswa (Arjuna) and usurped the throne. Then he looted the wealth of the Chinese envoys, humiliated them, and chased them away from the country. They somehow managed to save their lives and entered Nepal. When the Chinese emperor came to know about it, he appealed for military support from Nepal and Tibet and appealed these two countries for revenge against Arunaswa. Accordingly, Nepal sent 7000 troops on horseback cavalries' troops and Tibet 1200 infantry troops to help China. So far, that was the first Sino-

Nepal bilateral military alliance for a cause (Sharma and et al, B.S. 2049). The joint forces of Nepal and Tibet reached Kannuj of India and defeated his army and took him captive. He was then extradited to Tibet, where he was executed.

Thirdly, Nepal and Tibet had wedding relation too. During the Lichhawi Rule in Nepal, the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, who had a very good relationship with and access to China, married Nepali princess Bhrikuti, the daughter of King Amsubarma. On the next hand, during the rule of Lichhabi king Jaya Bhimdev, the Tibetan king asked for assistance from Nepal to send sculptors to build a monastery and Chaityasin Tibet. Nepal sent Balabahu Lachhime, who later became famous as Araniko, led a group of 80 masons and carpenters (Neupane, B. S. 2064). After an exemplary work in Tibet, Chinese emperor Kublai Khan called Araniko in Peking. The team led by Araniko reached Peking in 1262 and in 1271 it completed the White Pagoda which stands with pride in Peking (Beijing) even today (Neupane, B.S. 2064). The team is said to have built several Chaityas in various places of China.

Finally, *Kazi Bhim Malla* was a ministerial level Commander-In-Chief during the reign of King Laxmi Narsimha Malla 1620-1641 and his son, King Pratap Malla 1641-1674 of Kantipur. He marched to Tibet with his armies to secure a trade treaty that led to much prosperity in the nation. For sure, Malla armies were along with Kazi Bhima Malla for his personal security and show of forces to Tibetans. Himself led the war with Tibet in a Tibetan village and Kerong, a frontier pass that was a main link to Tibet, under Nepal's control. He captured Kuti too (Shakya, 2021). So far, it was the first military confrontation between Nepal and Tibet. Nepalese trade hegemony started up to the Treaty of Betrawoti, which ended the Sino-Nepal War (Nath, B. S. 2022).

## Statement of Problem

Gorkha kingdom initially established at the Lig Lig Kot in 1559 by the king Drabya Shah, later named Gorkha, first time in the history (Nath, B.S. 2022). Gorkha's geographical map began to be expanded further and further. After achieving victory over Nuwakot in 1744 and over Kantipur in 1768, all the trade and diplomatic relations that earlier used to be conducted by Kantipur kingdom with Tibet fell under the jurisdiction of the Gorkha Shah dynasty. The Gorkha named as the kingdom of Nepal after 1768. At that time, Tibet was not directly under suzerainty of China, but the state affairs were managed by the joint consultations of Nepali *Vakils* and Chinese *Ambas* (Mishra, 1987). It is true to note that many scholars have authored books and articles, done PhD in Nepal- China relation, which are great assets. However, author could not find Sino-Nepal military relation independently. In this regard, author has focused especially from military viewpoint on Sino-Nepal military relation. How happened the major military confrontations between Nepal and China in Sino-Nepal Military relation?

## Research objectives

To analyze on major military confrontations between Nepal and China as Sino – Nepal military relation.

### **Literature Review**

It highlights the episodes; Tibetan Khampa disarming work, the Bajhang armed uprising, the Timurbote, Okhaldhunga armed insurgency and the Hindu- Muslim fights in Bhusaha, Bara District, all were carried out by the Nepalese army. The remarkable aspect it contains many valuable pictures of Tibetan Khampas and then Nepalese Security forces. It supports in Nepal – China relation since the Khampa disarming mission has been mentioned. However, it does not mention of other episodes in Nepal – China relation (Basnyat, 2007).

It explains of Nepalese military histories and several military heritages. It mentions about Nepal Tibet wars and Nepal China wars too. The Tibetan supports in uprising in Achham and Chainpur of Sankhuwasabha of 1784-85 are interesting. It is good for military histories. However, the histories are in short form and not in details for academic research. (Basnyat,2021).

It highlights about Nepal China relation in brief. It has covered bilateral cultural and social relationship, economic and commercial relationship, political and security relationship, military relationship, Boao Forum and Nepal and bilateral visits of many leaders. It also contains the Nepal and China in UN role, Nepal and China in Third world movements with many copies of bilateral treaties and agreement. It is good for the foundation in research in Nepal China relation. However, it describes in very brief on Nepal China Military relation (Shrestha, 2015).

It analyses the Nepalese histories since Lichchhawi period onward, especially explained in military aspects. History of the formation of armies in Nepal, Nepal Unifications campaigns, wars against Mughal empire, Sikh troops, Captain George Kinloch, the Anglo- Nepal war, Nepal Tibet wars and Nepal China war. It is good for research work. However, it lacks the economic and diplomatic outcome and people to people relations after Nepal Tibet wars and Nepal China war (Sharma et al., B.S. 2049).

It explains about interrelationship, China containment strategy and impacts on Nepal, Sino Nepal relations, China – South Asia connectivity, etc. It covers all bilateral military disputes too. However, it lacks clear pictures about Nepal China Military relations or confrontations. It explains everything from political viewpoints, not from military perspectives (Sangroula, 2018).

### **Research design**

Qualitative research design has been applied in this article and secondary sources like published books, journals, articles, newspapers, and electronic Medias have been used. Descriptive and analytical methods have applied in order to analyze in depth.

### **Discussion and Result**

This paper would be discussing on Nepal China military confrontation, mainly on the First Nepal – Tibet War, Second Nepal Tibet War, Nepal –China War and last Nepal Tibet War as Nepal China military relation.

The bilateral relation would be consisted of sweet and sour events in the histories. In this regard, the Nepal China military confrontations too fall under bilateral relations. This paper would be highlighting on Nepal China military confrontations as our relations in simple forms. Confrontation and support are the two parts of coin.

### **First Nepal- Tibet War**

Nepal prospered during the Malla period. Tibet herself had not a coin minting system and Nepalese silver coins were used there as running currency (Sharma and et al, B. S. and so, the Tibetans were unhappy over those issues. King Prithvi Narayan Shah instructed the minting of pure silver coins after his conquest of the Kathmandu valley. However, Tibetans refused to accept those new coins until Prithvi Narayan Shah accepts the Tibetan demands of same values of Mall's impure silver coins and Shah's pure silver coins (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). That case remained in pending due to untimely demise of the King Prithvi Narayan Shah. But the coin conflict reached in culminating point in 1788 and it was the main cause of war. Similarly, next cause of the Nepal Tibet war was the giving of asylum to Syamarpa Lama with his 14 followers of Tibet, by the Nepalese government (Sharma and et al, B.S.2049). He fled from Tibet to Nepal on religious and political pleas. Finally, the immediate cause of war was the low-quality salt provided by the Tibetans to Nepal (Sharma and et al, B.S. 2049). Then, Tibet was given the ultimatum for solving the problems. However, Tibet did not response to the Nepalese ultimatum and Tibet started preparation of war instead of making compromise with Nepal. In this regard, Nepalese government decided to launch multi-directional attack from Kerung, Kuti first and Kuti second axis.

Nepalese troops captured Chhochyang in the first week of June, Kution June20, and Sikarjongon August 3, 1788. The Nepalese troops had many difficulties at the war due to the lack of logistic support. However, the regent Prince Bahadur Shah was a real military commander too to provide reinforcement and logistic supports. So, they could forward their offensive slowly. When the Nepalese were about to capture Digarcha form Kuti and Kerung axis, Dalai Lama was disappointed and started asking for peace. Bahadur Shah was feeling tired from the unification battles already and from this war itself too. So, negotiations started from both sides, and they arrived at a point of solution. The Tibetan Prisoners of War (POW) were handed over to Tibet by the Nepalese army. Tibet was ready to pay tributes of Rupees 50,000 in silver coins per annum to Nepal and a treaty was signed on June 2,1789, in Kerung and it is called the "Treaty of Kerung" and ended the war (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). It seems that it is a great achievement due to time and space (geography).

### **Second Nepal- Tibet War**

Tibetans were compelled to sign the Kerung Treaty due to their own difficulties, main was the being failure of Dalai Lama to get help from China. So that Tibetans were ready to pay Rs. 50,000 silver coins per year and they paid immediately too. After one payment, they refused to pay the tribute. So, the regent Prince Bahadur Shah prepared the next war against Tibet. Syamarpa Lama helped a lot in this purpose. Many followers of Syamarpa Lama were in different parts of Tibet and much information were provided secretly to Nepal. The Kerung treaty did not remain effective for more than a year; there was an increasing deterioration in Nepal-Tibet relations after autumn 1790, which finally resulted in the outbreak of hostilities in August 1791, leading eventually to a Second Nepal-Tibet war the following year. The offensive plan was made as multidirectional attack from Kuti, Kerung, and Kharta (advanced via Chainpur, now in Sankhuwasabha district) (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). All commanders succeeded in completing their missions. Digarcha was badly destroyed, and Lamas retreated to Lhasa. Nepal was very happy about the successful Nepalese offensive against Tibet. Bahadur Shah became more popular in Nepal, and he was praised as "worthy son of a worthy father." Some of the Nepalese armies returned Nepal and many of them were occupying the Tibetan lands since treaty was not made till that time.

### **Nepal –China War 1791-92**

Nepalese army defeated Tibetans and occupied main parts of Tibet and demanded 50 *dharni* (120kg) gold and 100 thousand rupees with Tibetan authority of Digarcha (Sharma and et al, B.S. 2049). The *Lamas* refused to pay the demands and the Nepalese troops plundered including Digarcha monastery and collected many valuable items such as gold and silver. Plundering at the war or battle was the global war culture of that arena. Then some of the Nepalese troops partially returned to Nepal with those plundered property. Major portions of troops were remained in Tibet, deploying in several areas. In the meantime, the Dalai Lama and Chinese Ambassadors forwarded a secret letter of complaint to the Chinese Emperor referring the Nepalese invasion and plundering including of Digarcha monastery, sought military help from China (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). Nepal was unaware of it. After few months, a bitter news received by the Nepalese government was that Chinese army had reached Lhasa on March 8, 1792, to fight against Nepal (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). It was big surprise for Nepal. Now the huge Chinese and Tibetan troops were jointly marching for the exfiltration of Nepalese troops from Tibet. Fu-Kang– An or Thung Thang Chan Chun was the main Commander of Sino–Tibet joint forces. Both names belong to the same person. He was leading approximately 11,000 Chinese troops, in addition, 3,000 Tibetan troops totaling 14,000. They had 3000 troops as reserve. By that time Tibet prepared 10,000 local troops more under Kalong Hor Khang. Therefore, the total strength of enemy was approximately 17,000 (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). But Nepal received information that the invading joint force was 60,000 to 70,000. That seems to be a wrong information. They started multidirectional counter attacks plan via Kerung, Kuti and Kharta axis. Later they discarded the Kharta axis due to logistic problem. Finally, the Chinese Commander decided to launch multidirectional attack from two main axes, they were Kuti axis under command of Cheng-Tse and Kerung axis. Again, the Kerung axis was divided into two sub axis's one under Fu-Kang-An and another under Kalon Horkang. At the end, Chinese and Tibetan troops pushed back to Nepalese troops up to Betrawoti River of Rasuwa, Nepal. It was great loss for Nepal. In the meantime, Chinese army was willing to end this war due to several difficulties. Then Chinese army commander approached for a treaty and Nepal accepted the proposal and they decided for a friendly treaty with many provisions including a **Quinquennial** Diplomatic Mission had to be sent to China by Nepal. The Treaty was signed in Betrawati on October 2, 1792. However, it seems great bravery of our forefathers and foremothers who devoted their lives for the sake of motherland.

### **Last Nepal -Tibet War 1855-1856**

The 'Treaty of Betrawoti' was big humiliation for Nepal, Tibet started maltreatments to the Nepalese in Tibet. Problems addressed to solve through diplomatic way. But the Nepal-Tibet border dispute was still in existence and the Tibetans were harassing the Nepalese traders in some parts of Tibet, mainly in Lhasa. Nepalese diplomatic delegation was in Tibet but drove out them from Lhasa without good reason (Sharma and et al, B.S.2049). The Tibetans perpetrated many insulting activities. Then Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Kunwar Rana was waiting for a good reason to launch an offensive against Tibet, for a revenge. At that time Nepal's, two neighbors were engaged in different problems. China with Taiping uprising, Britain with Russia at the Crimean war. Tibet also had many challenges internally. But Nepal was in a period of good political stability and Jung Bahadur was able to control the domestic and external situation.

## **Main Reasons of War**

On the first hand, according to the Quinquennial Diplomatic Mission set in the Betravati Treaty - October 2, 1792, Kazi Gambhir Singh Adhikari was the chief of this mission, left Kathmandu in August 1852. In Peking it was received with the usual formalities and friendliness. Unfortunately, Kazi Gambhir Singh Adhikari and Sardar Samsher Thapa died in Peking due to illness. Subedar Kalu Khatri too died after a severe illness of twenty-two days. Then Lieutenant (Lt) Bhimsen Rana led the mission. Many more in the team died. Lt. Rana was the sole survivor of the 1852 diplomatic mission (Sharma and et al, B. S. 2049). It was due to maltreatment and obstruction done by the Tibetans on the return journey, especially in the Kham areas of eastern Tibet. The mission had taken almost two years to complete the round-trip, but normally it used to be taken more than eighteen months. Then after, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur wrote a letter to the Chinese Amban in Lhasa asking of not providing security of the lives and properties of the diplomatic mission.

On the other hand, Nepalese merchants and traders in Tibet had often been treated unlawful doings by Tibetan authorities and denied equal treatment in Tibetan courts. There were instances in which the Nepalese merchants were assaulted, and the Tibetans boycotted their shops. Several Nepalese merchants had been killed in 1852 and 1854 (Sharma and et al, B.S. 2049).

There were many boundary disputes in Kerung, Kuti, Atthara Saya Khola and many more areas. According to Nepalese sources, the Nepalese subjects of Atthara Saya khola had set up a cowshed at the Nepal-Tibet border area, paying rent to the Tibetan officials. It was reported that in 1854, December 25 Tibetans went there and made an attack on the Nepalese cowherds in which one was killed, four wounded, and four were forcibly taken over to Tibetan territory where they were tortured. Besides that, the Tibetans plundered the property of these cowherds, immediately after Nepal became aware of this incident.

## **The War**

Nepal confirms war against Tibet from Kerung and Kutiaxis. The first Division marched on 1855, March 06 from Kathmandu under the command of General Bam Bahadur Kunwar Rana via Kerung axis. The major battles were fought at Gunta Fort and Jhunga Fort. Similarly, General Dhir Shumsher Kunwar Rana was leading the troops via Kutiaxis. He conducted battles in Chusan in April 1855 and many more. Kuti was already captured. His under commanded troops also were very successful at the battles. Tibetan lost battles everywhere. This time, they did not have hope of Chinese military support. So that, Tibet made request for a treaty and end of war.

## **Diplomatic Steps for Treaty**

A Tibetan diplomatic mission, led by the Chinese leader, arrived in Kathmandu in 1855, August 13. They had brought many gifts too and the discussion took place from both sides but no final solution being made, and they returned to Tibet without any agreement. Kazi Til Bikram Thapa and his team left from Nepal along with that Tibetan mission. At that time, the Nepalese troops were being deployed in many parts of Tibet. The next meeting took place in Sikarjong, Tibet and the Nepalese asked for 90,000 rupees – silver coins as war compensation. Again, the Tibetans refused to pay the money instead they were secretly reorganizing many troops to counterattack against the Nepalese troops (Sharma and et al, B.S.2049). Consequently, the Tibetans launched a big counterattack with 1500 troops against Nepalese

position in Kuti on 1855, November 01 (Sharma and et al, B.S. 2049). The Nepalese fought there from their level best. Jung Bahadur got the message in Kathmandu, and he immediately sent reinforcement of troops to Jhunga and Kuti. He himself left for Tibet to conduct the War. This time, General Dhir Shumsher was again leading at the battle of Kuti fort, and he launched multi-directional attacks against the Tibetan army. The Tibetans lost the battle. They attempted to stop the Nepalese offensive by proposing a treaty again. The Tibetans team arrived in Kathmandu in January 1856 and long discussions took place. Finally, the Treaty of Thapathali was signed between Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana and Kalon Shatra of Tibet after a month in Nepal. Finally, a ten-point peace agreement was signed at Thapathali, Kathmandu in 1856, March 24, and ended the war (Sharma, B. S. 2033).

### **Analysis**

Global tendency before World War II was like “big fish and small fish” and military might be big asset to conquer geographies. Nepal (Kantipur) too applied same principle in Tibet to control over many parts of Tibet by Kazi Bhim Malla, during the regency of King Laxmi Narsingh Malla with military expedition (Sharma, B.S.2033). That was for strengthening of National economy. The dreams came true and Kantipur and Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu valley became rich. The Nepalese and Tibetan trade kept running for long time up to king Rana Bahdadur Shah’s time. The dispute began for Nepalese impure silver coins in Tibetan market from king Prithiwi Narayan Shah and reached at culminating point as dispute under the king Rana Bahdur’s regent Prince Bahdur Shah’s time. The diplomacy failed and the last means; military offensive used against Tibetan undiplomatic behaviors. It is obvious to note that launching military offensive was justifiable at that time, it was second military offensive after Kazi Bhim Malla. In this regard, any war either at home or abroad not desirable for a nation, it becomes as compulsion. The Nepal Tibet and Nepal China wars were not desirable for Nepal, and it was state’s compulsion. In other words, Nepal China (including Nepal Tibet) wars resulted many pros and cons in bilateral relations. That was the period of war to save national prestige and power. Accordingly, Nepal launched offensives many times and China launched one time against Nepal to save her national interest. Finally, the last Nepal- Tibet war: 1855-56 saved Nepalese prestige since Nepal was victor. Finally, Nepal China military confrontations are histories and bilateral military relation, those are our historical properties.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, Sino- Nepal military relation is a part of Nepal - China relation. It consists of all the factors including cultural, religious, trade and transit, pilgrim trips, etc. Nepal and China have maintained cordial relationship since ancient time to modern time. However, there were some major military confrontations as well as military support. One of the major military supports from Nepal provided to China is Khampa disarming mission which is internationally renowned. At the end, it is important to note that bilateral and multilateral relations among an independent nation binds with three folds, as: diplomatic/political impacts, economic impacts and strategically impacts or military diplomacy. In this regard, there are several published book, articles, and interviews on Nepal –China Relations. Especially, it lacks many more clarities in Sino –Nepal Military Relation, in comparison with Anglo- Nepal military Relation and Indo – Nepal Military Relation. The aim of this paper is to bring into light the Nepal-China relation from military perspective.

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**Voice of History, Vol. XXXI (Apr. 2023)**

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