



Geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal

Madhav Thapa, M.Phil-led PhD Student

Central Department of Political Science, Tribhuvan University

Author mail: madhavthapa424@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v3i1.75578>

Abstract

Nepal as a small Himalayan nation lying between two Asiatic giants India and China, has a unique geopolitical location. The study examines the geopolitical rivalry between India and China over Nepal through the security interests, connectivity issues and natural resources aspects of Nepal. The study also analyzes the challenges of Nepal's foreign policy considering the geopolitical perspective of India and China. The study is qualitative research focusing on content analysis, and the study centers on the realist approach. The study describes geopolitics as an independent variable and the three major sub-variables for the study of geopolitics are security, connectivity, and natural resources. The contradicting security perceptions and connectivity interests of India and China regarding Nepal have sometimes heightened Nepal's challenge to balance her immediate neighbors. The unstable government, weak diplomatic mechanism, and existing trust deficiency of neighboring nations towards Nepal have raised geopolitical challenges as high as the Himalayas.

Keywords: Geopolitics, rivalry, connectivity, security perception, tri- lateral cooperation

Copyright (c) 2025 by [Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal](#). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).



To Cite this article:

Thapa, M. (2025). Geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal. *Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal*, 3(1), 106–122. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v3i1.75578>

Introduction

The geopolitical importance of Nepal envisaged by Great King Prithivi Narayan Shah two and half centuries ago is still relevant for the present policymakers and strategic thinkers of Nepal. The recent military and economic rivalry between the two stones has again magnified the geo-strategic importance of yam (Nepal) to two boulders (India and China). Similarly, the shift in the global balance of power from unipolar to multipolar has not limited the geo-strategic importance of Nepal only to her immediate neighbors India and China but also intensified its geo-strategic importance to the USA and Western world.

Nepal is located between two Asiatic giants India and China which are two distinct civilizations following different political systems and rivaling each other for regional and global power. The highly populated and industrially emerging India and China can accelerate their economic progress and expansion by using Nepal's unexplored natural resources to some extent. The survey has confirmed the availability of high-quality uranium in upper Mustang, a bordering district to China (Parashar, 2014). Similarly, the richness of renewable energy (hydropower) in Nepal has been attracting two neighboring countries, which is important for their economic development. Nepal has a high potential as a transit place between India and China, and the connectivity issue is apparent. However, Nepal faced political instability for decades and has less attention towards geopolitics issues. The power politics, extreme political polarization, and frequent changes in the government and political system are the major causes of political instability in Nepal. The political instability has not only stalled the economic progress of the nation, but the immediate neighbors have also shown their keen security interest in Nepal (Thapa, 2012).

The standoff between the Indian and Chinese military in Doklam in 2017 and the military confrontation in Ladakh has intensified Nepal's geo-strategic importance to its immediate neighbors. Both the neighboring nations India and China have been showing keen security interest in Nepal for decades. In this context, the study examines the conflicting security interests of India and China over Nepal, the contradicting connectivity issues through Nepal, and the unexplored natural resources of Nepal.

Methodology

The study aims to examine the conflicting security interests of India and China over Nepal, the contradicting connectivity issues through Nepal, and the unexplored natural resources of Nepal to explain the geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal. For this purpose, secondary data are used for research which are collected through various journal and news articles, books, and websites. The study is qualitative research, and it also focuses on content analysis. The study centers on the realist approach. It defines geopolitics as an independent variable and the three major sub-variables for the study of geopolitics are security, connectivity, and natural resources.

Results and Discussion

Conceptual Issues

According to Deudney (2024), Swedish political Scientist Rudolf Kjellén first coined the term ‘geopolitics’ to analyze the influence of geography in international relations which was popularly used during world wars throughout Europe. However, geopolitics matters have been seen in ancient histories such as the Greek, Chinese, Maurya(India), and Mithila, Lichhchavi and Malla(Nepal) Empires and regimes. However, geopolitical theories were mainly reinforced during the Cold War and are very relevant in the changing balance of power in world politics (Deudney, 2024). Evans and Newnham (1999) define geopolitics in international relations as a method of studying foreign policy through geographical variables. The geographical variables include natural resources, climate, demography, area studies, and topography. The study of geopolitics helps to understand, explain and predict political behaviors.

Geopolitics refers to the interplay between geographical factors and political processes which are dynamic in nature and influence each other (Cohen, 2003). Flint (2016) defines geopolitics “as the struggle over the control of geographical entities with a global dimension, and the use of such geographical entities for political advantage”.

India and China have been directly competing over their interests in Nepal since the 1950s. Nepal signed a treaty of peace and friendship with India in 1950 and signed Sino-Nepalese treaty of peace and friendship

in 1960. Nepal also signed China's connectivity project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017 and member of the BMISTEC sub-regional organization led by India. It shows that Nepal keeps great geopolitical importance to India and China in the present and future as well. This instance is related to connectivity concerns.

Nepal's neighbors India and China are emerging as well as rivaling powers whose national security interests over Nepal are contradicting because of the geopolitical location of Nepal. Mao's 'five finger policy' and Warren Hasting's 'Ring-fence policy' are conflicting national security policies of the two neighbors of Nepal. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru addressing the Indian Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) on 6 Dec 1950 stated "... *The Himalayas have provided us with a magnificent frontier. We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India.*" (Khanal and Adhikari, 2009). Premier Zhou En Lai mentioned Nepal-China relations as 'Blood-ties' and Marshal Chen Yi said that "*China will side with Nepal in case of any foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal by foreign army*" (Bhatrai, 2018). These instances are related to security concerns.

In the promulgation of the Constitution, China immediately welcomed the constitution of Nepal 2015 promulgated by the constitutional assembly. However, India expressed its grave concern about the constitution of Nepal and imposed an undeclared economic blockade over Nepal after its promulgation. On 13 Oct 2019, President Xi Jinping during his state visit to Nepali said, "*We will develop Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network and help Nepal to realize its dream to transform itself from a landlocked country to a land-linked country*" (Koirala & Dahal, 2019).

It is very crucial for Nepal to understand the security and connectivity interests of India and China from their geopolitical perspective. It also implies the importance of Nepal to India and China in the present regional and global context. It will also focus on analyzing the impact of India-China rivalry on the international relations of Nepal. Nepal can't change her neighbors India and China. Therefore, Nepal should be able to maintain cordial relationships with her neighbors for the preservation of her physical, political, and cultural identities. Nepal can be able to protect and promote its national interests only after understanding

the interests of India and China from a geopolitical perspective. The correct understanding of the rivalry between India and China in Nepal will help to balance India and China as well as enhance the development of Nepal through the effective implementation of diplomatic means. Nepal's development cannot be imagined without the support and cooperation of her immediate neighbors. Similarly, the failure to understand the interests of India and China may jeopardize the national security and sovereignty of Nepal. The rivalry between India and China over Nepal seems a permanent phenomenon in the international relations of Nepal. The security interests of India and China over Nepal are conflicting which intensifies diplomatic challenges to balance her immediate neighbors to Nepal.

Empirical Dilemmas

Liang (2022) mentions about Nepal's geopolitical dilemma on the rivalry between the USA and China considering India's relationship with Nepal. He also mentions the USA's four-point programs to support Nepal and highlights the US intent on preventing Chinese influence in Nepal. Liang also states that the Biden Administration considered China as a major competitor of the USA, and the Indo-Pacific strategy listed Nepal as a critical partner of the USA to counter China. Nepal is a signatory of the USA's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Similarly, Nepal signed China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Geographically, Nepal is a gateway to the Indian sub-continent, and it provides favorable conditions for the prosperity as well as stability of the western part of China. On the other hand, Nepal can't ignore her traditional southern neighbor India which is suspicious towards the USA and highly concerned regarding China's presence in Nepal. On the geopolitical rivalry between the USA, China, and India, Nepal is forced to walk on a tightrope with a heavy load. Nepal has been facing great diplomatic dilemmas to balance the USA and China (Liang, 2022).

According to Jaiswal (2023), India is the largest trading partner of Nepal and has deep cultural and historical ties with Nepal. However, China has become an important factor in Nepal-India relations because of its continuous spreading influence on various sectors of Nepal. China and India have been competing in the trade, development, security and infrastructure sector in Nepal. China has adopted a proactive policy

towards Indian influence in Nepal. A clear competition is also visible in air and railway connectivity between India and China in Nepal. The rising influence of China on various sectors of Nepal has been directly threatening the traditional influence of India in Nepal which has intensified the geopolitics of Nepal (Jaiswal, 2023).

Bhattarai (2024) mentions that India, China and USA are rivaling in Nepal to influence economic, ideological and military spheres. India and USA are in favor of democracy in Nepal and aim to prevent communism and Chinese influence in Nepal. However, BJP-led (Bharatiya Janata Party) India is also suspicious towards the growing Christianity and Western influence in Nepal, and the USA is concerned about the BJP's agenda of restoring the Hindu state in Nepal. China also supported communist leaders to form a strong communist party by merging key communist parties of Nepal. Geopolitics has created division in Nepali society and internal political instability has fueled it. It shows that Nepal has been already in the geopolitical trap of big powers (Bhattarai, 2024).

Thapa (2022) states that one boulder is added to the traditional two-boulder geopolitics of Nepal. He mentions India as the first boulder, China as the second boulder, and the USA as the third boulder which are competing in Nepal for their own national interest. It has heightened the geopolitical stakes of Nepal as high as the Himalayas. It seems very challenging to Nepal to balance India's 'neighborhood-first' policy, the BRI project of China, and the MCC of the USA. The security concern of China, the USA's democratic concern over Chinese influence, and India's traditional leverage on Nepal's affairs are the pertinent geopolitical stakes of Nepal. It seems a great challenge for Nepal to balance the three boulders (Thapa, 2022).

Sritharan (et al., 2023) try to analyze Nepal's geopolitical importance from the hydro energy resources. Nepal's immediate neighbors India and China have been rivaling to gain access to hydro energy of Nepal and the USA has been closely monitoring the rivalry for regional energy security. India and China are competing to acquire contracts for the construction of hydropower projects. India has introduced its hydropower policy to prioritize basically Indian Investors and avoid Chinese influence so far in the hydro sector in Nepal. China also envisages the viability of Nepal's hydropower to fulfill its energy demand in its western region.

Similarly, China envisions Nepal as an important geography for its global connectivity plan. India is not a signatory of BRI and is very cautious about China's connectivity projects to the Indian subcontinent. The USA has been supporting India in the geopolitical rivalry between India and China (Sritharan et al, 2023).

According to Dahal (2018), Nepal is strongly obliged to the 'One China Policy' and signatory of the Belt and Road Initiative of China. China has been supporting the economic and infrastructure development of Nepal and supported Nepal's 'Zone of Peace' proposal forwarded by the late King Birendra. The diplomatic relations between Nepal and India have passed through various ups and downs. The bedrock of Nepal-India relations is the 'Treaty of Peace and friendship-1950' has been controversial to some extent. There are border disputes between Nepal and India. India just showed its grave concern on the promulgation of Nepal's Constitution 2015 while China wholeheartedly welcomed it. Both India and China have been providing economic, educational, and technical assistance for the development of Nepal. Nepal can take economic advantage from the rivalry of its neighbors. Nepal has a great challenge to balance India and China and keep equidistance with her neighbors (Dahal, 2018).

According to Nepal (2021), India and China have keen security concerns in Nepal and are worried about the probability of using politically fragile Nepal against their national interest. Despite the various issues between India and China, and ideological and cultural differences, the annual trade between India and China is considerable. Nepal can benefit from the economic growth and technological development of its giant neighbors.

According to Global Times (2024), the geopolitical game on the hydropower of Nepal between India and China has jeopardized the hydro production of Nepal. India's power trade policy is targeted towards China, and it is a strategy to control the hydropower of Nepal. Therefore, Chinese companies were out of six significant hydro projects in Nepal and four of them were awarded to India later. Similarly, India got the contract bid to build ten hydropower projects in Nepal and China only received five. It proves the rivalry between India and China in Nepal and India is on the upper hand as well.

The reviewed literature proves that there are the conflicting security interests of India and China over Nepal, the geographical connectivity capabilities of Nepal, and the unexplored natural resources of Nepal which have added geopolitical challenges to Nepal.

Contested Issues

Chairman Mao introduced his five-finger policy which considered Tibet as the right-hand palm of China (Chellaney, 2020), and Nepal and Bhutan as independent nations. After the expulsion of the Dalai Lama, Tibet has become more concerned (security) for China. In the decade of 70s, the Khampa rebellion started to use adjoining Nepali territory for their movement which was objectionable to China. Later, the Khampa rebellion was neutralized by the Nepali army. There are still about 20,000 Tibetan refugees residing in Nepal and their anti-China activities are another major security concern of China over Nepal (Basnyat, 2019). The illegal movement of Tibetan refugees to third countries via Nepal has become a serious issue between Nepal and China. According to the report of UNHCR, in Kathmandu every year approximately 2500 Tibetan refugees travel to Nepal and unspecified numbers move to a third country (Dolma et al., 2006).

The shift in the global balance of power from unipolar to multipolar, the decreasing influence of USA and the increasing influence of China in global affairs, and the shifting of global leadership from the West to Asia has surfaced various frictions in various theatres of the world. The trade war between the USA and China, US-China tension in the South-China Sea, China-Taiwan tension, India-China military confrontation along the Himalayan frontier, Russia-NATO tension, Iran-Israel growing tensions in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine war are believed to change the global balance of power. USA, India, Japan, and Australia have formed an informal security dialogue named Quadrilateral Security Group (QUAD) with the aim of checking China in the Pacific (AFP, 2022). Being a Himalayan nation and gateway to Tibet from the South, Nepal keeps greater significance on the security of China. The role of small nations will be more essential in a multipolar world rather than in a unipolar one.

The Biden-Harris administration of the USA has introduced the Indo-Pacific Strategy to restore American influence and leadership in the

Indo-Pacific region. The document has clearly mentioned that the USA will support India's rise and regional leadership and strengthen the Quad (The White House, 2022). Indo-Pacific strategy is considered to be targeted toward China to contain China's rise as a geo-political power in the Pacific (Chen, 2018). Nepal, a small nation in South Asia is also included on the map of Indo-Pacific strategy (Camroux & Jaffrelot, 2021). Here, the geo-strategic importance of Nepal is not limited only to its immediate neighbors and in Asia, however, it is stretched too far west.

Geographically, Nepal doesn't divide South Asia and East Asia, especially China, it bridges the two regions of Asia by providing various passes in the high Himalayas. Most of the Trans-Himalayan trade used to be conducted via Nepal in the medieval period. The traders of the Indian sub-continent and Tibet used various trade routes of Nepal for their trades (Sangraula, 2018). Nepal provides trans-Himalayan routes to two economically emerging nations India and China. Nepal is not only an entry point to Tibet, but also a gateway to South Asia. Nepal keeps the capability of linking two main economic powers India and China through land routes which amplifies the economic importance of Nepal in the Himalayan region. The trilateral cooperation between India, Nepal and China has been prioritized by Nepal and China impressively after 2010. However, India has remained silent on the trilateral cooperation proposal which has stalled the connectivity across the Himalayas through Nepal (Singh, 2018).

On May 12, 2017, Nepal officially became a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China and signed the BRI framework in 2024 with the aim of developing connectivity, the development of infrastructures, railway, transmission lines and electricity in the trans-Himalayan network. The USA and India are defining BRI as a debt trap for the signatories' nations. India is not a part of BRI and consistently opposes BRI mentioning that it passes through the disputed territory between India and Pakistan (Hindustan Times, 2020). India forwarded the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) to materialize its neighborhood-first policy and act East policy and to counter China's influence in its neighborhood (Induja, 2021). The geo-strategic importance of Nepal in South Asia seems more critical because Nepal is the chair nation of SAARC at present. On 27 Feb 2022, the House of Representatives of Nepal ratified the Millennium Challenge

Corporation Nepal Compact, an economic grant of USA. The grant is provided for infrastructure development, especially road networks and electricity transmission lines in Nepal. There was a huge debate regarding MCC and a clear division among the political parties was observed during the ratification process (Pradhan, 2022). China understands the MCC-Nepal compact as an instrument of the US' QUAD strategy and warned USA not to use "coercive diplomacy" (Kalita, 2022). The big powers are providing economic assistance and development projects to Nepal with specific interest and considering the geo-strategic significance of Nepal.

Socio-culturally, Nepal lies between two great civilizations Indian and Chinese. Geographically Nepal is a yam between two boulders. Politically, Nepal is sandwiched between the two nations which follow two contradictory political systems communism and liberal democracy. India is the world's largest democracy and China is the world's biggest communist. The internal politics of Nepal is highly inspired by both ideologies of communism and liberal democracy. Nepal is a democratic nation dominated by the communist ideology politically. Naturally, Nepal possesses important minerals and Uranium in some parts and has huge potential for hydroelectricity. The rivalry between immediate neighbors is to be moved up for the maximum utilization of hydroelectric resources and other natural resources of Nepal. The security perception of India and China over Nepal, political ideological differences between India and China, economic rivalry and the present military confrontation between India and China in the Himalayan frontier have magnified the geo-strategic importance of Nepal to her immediate neighbors. China has been spreading its influence in South Asia through economic and developmental projects which irked India because India has been losing its traditional sphere of influence. China's BRI, USA's MCC Nepal Compact project and India's neighborhood first policy are proposed considering the geo-strategic importance of Nepal.

Warren Hastings, British Administrator of East India Company introduced the Ring-Fence Policy which focuses on the protection of neighbor's frontier for the protection of own territory (Grover, 2022). The continuation of the Ring-Fence policy of modern India is clearly visible with the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship by India with Bhutan in 1949 and Nepal in 1950. Indian strategic thinkers consider that

Nepal-India are not naturally separated and the probable entrance of any power into Nepal will have a direct impact on the national security of India, and the political and economic instability of Nepal will add more vulnerability to Indian Security (Murthy, 1999). The five-finger policy of China and the ring-fence policy of India both include Nepal inside their security sphere which is the clear message of the geo-strategic importance of Nepal to the immediate neighbors.

Policy Issues

The Constitution of Nepal 2015-part IV, Article 50 (4) states that the international relations of Nepal should be directed to strengthen the dignity of the nation in the international community safeguarding the territorial integrity, independence, freedom, sovereignty and national interest of Nepal. Similarly, article 51 (m) states policy relating to international relations and foreign policy is conducted based on the principles of Panchsheel (five principles), non-alignment, the charter of the United Nations, international laws, and norms of world peace. Nepal's foreign policy 2020 envisages that the fundamental national interests are the permanent interests in international relations. However, the priorities of foreign policy can be changed based on regional, international and geopolitical dynamism and circumstances (Acharya, 2024).

There is a clear constitutional provision regarding the objectives of the international relations of Nepal. The constitution has also provided guiding principles on the international relations of Nepal centering the national interests of Nepal. Nepal has been adopting the principles of *Panchsheel*, the charter of the United Nations and non-alignment in her international relations. However, Nepal's foreign policy in 2020 has provided leverage on the determination of priorities based on global and regional dynamism. Competent diplomatic mechanisms can achieve strategic autonomy and secure national interest in international politics.

Discussion

The study explores the geopolitical importance of Nepal to her neighbors India and China, and the rivalry between India and China from a geopolitical perspective. The paper analyzes the geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal using three sub-variables: security,

connectivity, and natural resources aspects. The research seeks to analyze the challenges of Nepal's foreign policy considering the geopolitical perspective of India and China. The study confirms the views of other scholars especially Jaiswal(2023), Dahal(2018), and Nepal(2021) regarding the competition between India and China to spread their influence in Nepal to fulfill their national interests. The research also supports the idea of Liang(2022), Thapa(2022), and Bhattra(2024) regarding the rivalry between India, China and the USA in Nepal because of the geopolitical location of Nepal. The contradicting interests of India, China, and the USA have added more complexities to the diplomacy of Nepal which has a chance to be trapped in the geopolitical.

The study proves the contradicting security perceptions of India and China regarding Nepal. Mao's 'five-finger policy' has kept Nepal within its security border. British Administrator of East India Company, Warren Hastings introduced his 'ring fence policy' and Lord Curzon's security strategy has been followed by present-day political leaders and military strategists in India, and the Himalayas are considered as the natural northern boundary of India. The security perceptions of India and China overlap over Nepal which is one of the main causes of geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal. Interestingly, the third important power USA is involved in Nepal to succeed in its Indo-Pacific strategy.

The research explains the contradicting connectivity interests of India and China over Nepal. China aims at spreading connectivity through BRI to the Indian sub-continent via Nepal. Nepal and China advocate for trilateral cooperation regarding the connectivity between India, China, and Nepal. However, India is worried about the Chinese spreading market and its adverse impacts on India's trade and economy. India remained silent regarding the tri-lateral connectivity between India, Nepal, and China, suspicious regarding the BRI project of China, and it made India uncomfortable. It suggests that India and China have contradicting connectivity interests over Nepal which has heightened Nepal's challenge to balance her immediate neighbors.

India and China need more energy for their economic growth and development and eyeing Nepal's unexplored natural resources for the fulfillment of their industrial development. Especially, India is a prime market of energy for Nepal, and China also wants to sell to India by

producing hydropower generation in Nepal. Nepal has great hydro potentiality as it has more than 42000 MW hydropower generation capacity to be feasible economically. Despite these potentialities and importance, Nepal could not harness resources enough and there is poor connectivity. The connectivity is still taken as a security concern in the context of geopolitics. For instance, the announcement of a rail link from the China-Nepal (Rasuwagadhi) border to Kathmandu attracted many and India also made a feasibility study of a Train route from the Indian border (Raxaul) to Kathmandu. However, this connectivity matter cannot be sustained without economic viability connecting China and India.

India has more concerns about security interests over economic engagement with China until the border disputes (The Statesman, 2025). Due to the unresolved border issues between India and China, they may not link directly, and the role of Nepal in connectivity may be vital. Pragmatic geopolitical cooperation for economic development and society welfare is required despite certain sensitive issues involving China, India, and Nepal; the success of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) geopolitical cooperation serves as an example (Chaudhary, 2022). Nepal should not forget its own diplomacy history as how ancient rulers maintained geopolitics balance. According to Kissinger(2014), Nepal, for centuries, skillfully balanced its diplomatic posture between China and India based on equal exchange of respect securing its own independence. However, Nepal currently faces various challenges due to political instability and a lack of clear and common vision in political parties and leaders towards geopolitics cooperation.

The ineffective diplomatic and bureaucratic mechanism and practices of power-sharing among the political parties on diplomat appointments have adversely affected the foreign policy of Nepal. The legal constitutional provisions regarding the conduct of the international relations of Nepal seem relevant. However, the malpractices on the appointment of diplomats, and lack of consensus among the major political parties regarding the priorities of foreign policy have increased challenges to the foreign policy of Nepal. The frequent changes of the government have intensified the incompetency of the government in implementing the signed agreements with India and China. Nepal has been losing diplomatic trust with her immediate neighbors India and China. The so-called

closeness of the political parties based on their ideologies with the neighboring nations has also created a trust deficiency in Nepal. The improvement of domestic politics paves the sustainable and successful foreign policy.

Conclusion

The research focuses on defining the geopolitics and explaining the rivalry between India and China in Nepal from geopolitical perspectives. The study confirms the rivalry between India and China over Nepal using geographical variables-security, connectivity and natural resources. Mao's 'five finger policy' and India's security perception of the Himalayas as a northern security border are contradicting. India and China are contesting in Nepal because of their contradicting security perceptions towards Nepal. Trilateral cooperation on the connectivity between India, Nepal, and China is essential for economic development, and Nepal can benefit from this. China intends to secure its access to the Indian sub-continent through Nepal whereas India is skeptical about China's connectivity project analyzing the trade deficit and probability of losing its own market. India and the USA's concern towards China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's concern of Tibet movements and USA influence have been the major factors that influence the relationship between them, and these factors are responsible for geopolitical complexity.

The political polarization during the approval of Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) also justifies the US involvement in the geopolitical rivalry in Nepal. India and China are also rivaling in the hydro energy sector of Nepal which may jeopardize the hydro energy development of Nepal. The frequent changes of the government have adversely affected the competencies of the government to implement the signed agreements with India and China. 'Trust' is important in this regard. The contesting security perception, contradicting connectivity strategies and competition on controlling natural resources over Nepal has intensified the geopolitical challenges of Nepal. The unstable government, weak diplomatic mechanism, and existing trust deficiency of neighboring nations towards Nepal have raised geopolitical challenges as high as the Himalayas. The geopolitical rivalry between India and China in Nepal is a long-contesting phenomenon in the regional politics of South Asia.

Therefore, further academic research should be conducted in the changing context of regional and international orders.

Conflict of Interest: The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declares the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

References

- Achrya, M. R. (14 March 2024). *'Madhu Raman Acharya: Foreign Policy Blueprint of Nepal'*. The Annapurna Express.
- AFP. (11 Feb 2022). *'Checking China: What is the Quad alliance?'* AFP.
- Albert, E. (15 Oct 2019). *From 'Land-Locked' to 'Land-Linked': China's Xi Goes to Nepal*. Washington D.C.: The Diplomat.
- Basnyat, P. S. (June 22 2019). *A forgotten history. A forgotten history*. Kathmandu, Bagmati, Nepal: My Republica.
- Bhattarai, K. B. (2024). *'Is Nepal already in a geopolitical trap?'* The Annapurna Express.
- Bhattra, S.N. (2018). *'Nepal-China Sixty Years of Good Neighborliness'*. *Friendship journal of Nepal and China studies*. China Study center, CSC, April 10, 2016.
- Camroux, D., & Jaffrelot, C. (2021). *The Concept of the Indo Pacific in the Geostrategic Discourse*. *SciencesPo Center for International Studies*.
- Chaudhary, D. (2022), "Challenges and Potential of SAARC in Comparison with ASEAN", *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 107-121. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SEAMJ-02-2022-B1008>
- Chellaney, B. (22 July 2020). *'China's five-finger punch'*. Australian Strategist Policy Institute.
- Chen, D. (27 Apr 2018). *'What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy'*. The Diplomat.
- Cohen, S. B. (2003). *'Geopolitics of the World System'*. Rowman & Littlefield Press.
- Dahal, G., (2018). *'Foreign Relation of Nepal with China and India'*. *Journal of Political Science*, Volume XVIII, Pp. 46-61.
- Deudney, D. H. (2024). *Geopolitics*. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Devetak, R., Burke, A., & George, J., (2017). *An introduction to international relations (Second Ed.)*. Cambridge University press. Cambridge.
- Dolma, S., Singh, S., Lohfeld, L., Orbinski, J. J., & Mills, E. J. (2006, November). *Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees*. *Am J Public Health.*, pp. 96(11): 2061–2064.

- Evans, G.& Newnham, J. (1999). *The Penguin dictionary of international relations.* Penguin Books; First Edition (January 1, 1999).
DOI:10.5860/choice.36-4256
- Flint, C., (2016). *Introduction to Geopolitics (Third Ed.)*. Routledge, London.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315640044>
- Global Times. (16 Jan 2024). 'GT Voice: India's geopolitical game hurts outlook for Nepal's hydropower'. Global Times.
- Grover, N. (3 March 2022). *Policy of Ring of Fence (1765-1813) - Modern India History Notes*. Prepp.
- Hindustan Times. (2020). *India refuses to support China's Belt and Road project at SCO meet*. Hindustan Times.
- Jaiswal, P. (9 Dec 2023). *The China Factor in Nepal-India Relations*. Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement.
- Indus, J.S. (29 May 2021). *The Growing Significance of BIMSTEC in India's Foreign Policy*. The Geopolitics
- Kalita, J. (22 Feb 2022). *US-China Power Struggle In The Himalayas: Why A \$500M Foreign Grant Has Triggered Political Storm In Nepa'l*. The Eurasian Times.
- Karki, K. K., & K C, H. (2020). 'Nepal-India Relations: Beyond Realist and Liberal Theoretical Prisms'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 84-102. DOI:10.3126/joia.v3i1.29085
- Kissinger, H. (2014). *World Order*. Allen Lane
- Khanal, R. & Adhikari, P. (2009). *National Security of Nepal*. Sangam Institute.
- Koirala, K.R. & Dahal, A. (2019). China will help transform Nepal from 'landlocked' to 'land-linked': Prez Xi. Republica.
- Liang, G. (17 July 2022). *Nepal's geopolitical dilemma*. The Kathmandu Post.
- Murthy, P. (1999). India and Nepal: Security and Economic Dimensions. *Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA*, Vol. XXIII No. 9.
- Nepal, D. (2021). 'Nepal's Relationship with India and China in the Changing Context'. *Mangal Research Journal. Vol. 2*
- Parashar, U. (10 June 2014). *Scientists finds large uranium deposit in Nepal*. Hindustan Times.
- Pradhan, T. R. (28 Feb 2022). *Parliament ratifies MCC compact after years of delay*. The Kathmandu Post.
- Sangraula, Y. (2018). *South Asia China Geo-economics*. Bhaktapur: Lex & Juris Publication.
- Singh, P. K. (15 Jun 2018). *Can India Stomach an India-Nepal-China Trilateral?* Australian Institute of International Affairs

- Sritharan, N., Jothishankar, K., & Wozniak, S. (2023). 'The Great Himalayan Chessboard: China, India, and the Geopolitical Gambit in Nepal' *Foreign Policy Research Institute*.
- Thanju, J. P. (2013). 'Hydropower promise in Nepal'. *International Water Power & Dam Construction*.
- Thapa, G. S. (14 April 2022). Nepal's geopolitical stakes are as high as the Himalayas. *East Asia Forum Quarterly*, 'East Asia's Economic Agreement', Vol 14, No 1.
- Thapa, M. (2012). *Indian Influence in Nepal after People's Movement II-2006 (Unpublished Master's Dissertation)*. Kirtipur: Tribhuvan University.
- Thapa, M. (2022). Open border: An apparent challenge for national security. *Sipahi Annual*, 114-124.
- The Statesman. (5 February, 2025). Derred China. *Deterring China - The Statesman*
- The White House. (2022, Feb 11). 'Fact Sheet: Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States'. The White House.