

State Visit of King Birendra to the United States of America and the Endorsement of the Peace Zone Proposal (1983)

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Abstract

Background: Nepal's foreign policy shifted from pro-British isolation under the Ranas to global diplomatic engagement. The state visit of King Birendra to the USA in 1983 was a pivotal event, but detailed scholarly analysis of its objectives and achievements remains limited.

Research Objectives: This article examines the king Birendra's first state visit to the USA and endorsement of Nepal's peace zone proposal in 1983. However, the objectives adopted by this article are as follows:

- (a) To present details of King Birendra's state visit to the United States and to highlight the acceptance of Nepal's Peace Zone proposal.
- (b) To highlight on the diplomatic and political significance of the visit.
- (c) To provide information about the economic importance of the visit.

Methods: This historical research employs a descriptive and analytical methodology. It sequentially organizes events from contemporary sources (e.g., Gorkhapatra, The Rising Nepal) and government records, followed by a thematic analysis of their political, diplomatic, and economic outcomes. Gregorian (A.D.) and Bikram Sambat (B.S.) date systems are used in the main text of the books, journals, newspapers etc. However, A.D. has not mentioned in English dates and B.S. has been referred in Nepali dates. The main achievement of this article lies in clarifying the king Birendra's state visit to the USA and endorsement of peace zone proposal. To prepare this article, newspapers published in Nepal at the time and books written by various authors have been used.

Results: The visit successfully achieved its primary objectives. Most significantly, the USA officially endorsed Nepal's Peace Zone Proposal. The visit also secured commitments for annual development aid (approx. \$150 million) and strengthened bilateral diplomatic rapport, with US officials praising Nepal's Panchayat system and non-aligned foreign policy.

Conclusion: King Birendra's 1983 state visit was a landmark diplomatic success. It solidified Nepal-US relations, legitimized Nepal's peace advocacy on a global stage, and secured crucial economic support, reinforcing Nepal's non-aligned identity and leadership capacity.

Novelty: This paper provides a focused, source-based analysis of the 1983 visit, detailing its specific diplomatic negotiations and outcomes, which is underrepresented in existing foreign policy literature on Nepal.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, State Visit, Peace Zone Proposal, Birendra, Ronald Reagan

Introduction

After ascending to the throne in 1972 ([Khanal, 2019](#)), King Birendra undertook state visits to various countries, including India, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Bangladesh, Japan, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, Egypt, and Spain. In continuation of these visits, he accepted an invitation from U.S. President Ronald Reagan and made his first state visit to the United States from December 5 to 13, 1983 ([Pandey, 2024](#)). This marked the third state visit by a Nepalese king to the U.S., and it was King Birendra's eleventh state visit overall ([Lumbinidoot, 1983, December 8](#)).

According to the itinerary, the visit included unofficial stops in Switzerland and Luxembourg on the way to the U.S., and Japan on the return journey. Accompanying King Birendra on this visit were Queen Aishwarya, Foreign Minister Padam Bahadur Khatri and his wife, Princess Shanti Rajyalakshmi Devi Singh, and Prince Deepak Jang Bahadur Singh ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, November 21](#)). The key objectives of King Birendra's state visit to the United States were as follows:

- (a) To seek U.S. endorsement of Nepal's peace zone proposal.
- (b) To further strengthen the cordial and friendly relations between Nepal and the U. S. through diplomatic engagement.
- (c) To discuss contemporary international issues and concerns with the U.S. President.
- (d) To secure American financial aid to support Nepal's economic development.
- (e) To clarify Nepal's foreign policy and worldview to the American audience.
- (f) To discuss on the existing challenges in Nepal's water resources, agriculture, irrigation, rural development, and forest conservation ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, November 25](#)).
- (g) To explain Nepal's political reforms after the referendum to the U.S. government and people.
- (h) To discuss, apart from internationally significant questions, the establishment of permanent peace in the region ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 1](#)).
- (i) Conversing with the U.S. President on bilateral interests and strategies to strengthen global peace and stability. Additionally, discussing the economic difficulties faced by Third World nations and other complex international challenges ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 1](#)).

- (j) Holding separate meetings with U.S. officials to explore potential collaborations in different sectors and engaging personally with the American business community ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, November 25](#)).

Departure from Nepal and Official Meetings

King Birendra departed from Kathmandu for his state visit to the United States on December 1, 1983 ([Bhattarai, 2025](#)). On the same day, he addressed the nation; expressing his vision that Nepal's pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy and its aspiration to be recognized as a peace zone would facilitate Nepal's uninterrupted holistic development. He emphasized that his discussions with U.S. leaders would prove beneficial given America's global influence ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, November 25](#)).

According to the itinerary, King Birendra departed from Kathmandu on December 1 and reached in Zurich, Switzerland, on December 2. His visit to Zurich was informal. King Tribhuvan had passed away while undergoing treatment at the Canton Hospital in Zurich. Upon arriving there, King Birendra visited the hospital and offered a floral tribute at the memorial dedicated to King Tribhuvan ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 3](#)). After his visit to Zurich, he traveled to Luxembourg on December 3 for a three-day friendship visit. Nepal had established diplomatic relations with Luxembourg in 1975 ([Baral, 2025](#)).

After completing a three-day visit to Luxembourg, King Birendra departed for the United States. On December 6, 1983, he reached at the Air Force base in the state of Maryland, where he was warmly received by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 7](#)). On December 7, President Ronald Reagan hosted King Birendra at the White House with a ceremonial welcome. On this occasion, President Reagan acknowledged the strengthening of Nepal-U.S. relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1947 ([Khadka, 2000](#)). He pledged to continue American investments in Nepal, particularly in agricultural research and training programs ([Nepal Press Digest, 1983, December 12](#)). Additionally, Reagan praised Nepal's condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Nepal's role in advocating for peace through the United Nations. He stated that nations like Nepal are crucial for promoting global peace ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 8](#)).

King Birendra's Address and Private Discussion

In response to Reagan's remarks, King Birendra expressed the natural expectation that a country like the United States, capable of bringing significant global change, would play a vital role in fostering a new era of peace, understanding, friendship, and prosperity. He also conveyed his desire to engage in discussions with the U.S. President and other officials to strengthen Nepal-U.S. relations for mutual benefit ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 8](#)). After the formal welcome, King Birendra and President Reagan held an informal one-hour discussion in the Oval Office of the White House. During this meeting, they openly discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations, Nepal's economic development, particularly in water resource management, and contemporary international affairs ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 8](#)). The discussion between the leader of a global superpower and the head of a smaller nation like Nepal was a significant diplomatic engagement, highlighting the importance of Nepal's role in international affairs.

Vice President George Bush's Luncheon in Honor of King Birendra

On the same day (December 7), U.S. Vice President George Bush and Mrs. Bush hosted a luncheon in honor of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya. During the event, Vice President Bush acknowledged Nepal's contributions to global peace through its involvement in the United Nations. He also expressed support for the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and pledged U.S. assistance toward its formation. Furthermore, he praised Nepal's successful adoption of a non-aligned foreign policy, which had allowed the country to carve out a distinct international identity ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 9](#)). Vice President Bush's endorsement of SAARC as a positive initiative demonstrated his recognition of Nepal's regional diplomatic efforts. In response, King Birendra expressed appreciation for U.S. contributions to Nepal's infrastructure development, particularly in education, agriculture, administration, and management, and voiced his confidence that Nepal would continue receiving similar support from the United States in the future ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 9](#)). Later that day, King Birendra gave an interview to The McNeil/Lehrer Report, a program aired on the U.S. Public Broadcasting System (PBS), where he elaborated on the significance of Nepal's peace zone proposal and expressed his optimism that the U.S. would extend its official support to the initiative ([Gorkhapatra, 1983, December 8](#)).

Endorsement of the Peace Zone Proposal

When King Birendra ascended the throne in 1972, the Cold War had reached its peak ([Subba, 2021](#)). As a response, he urged all nations to recognize Nepal as a peace zone ([Acharya, 2001, June 15](#)). On the evening of December 7, President Ronald Reagan hosted a formal state dinner in honor of King Birendra. During his speech, President Reagan affirmed U.S. support for Nepal's peace zone proposal, stating, "We Americans endorse and approve the objectives of His Majesty's peace zone proposal." He further emphasized Nepal's progressive vision of peace and development, suggesting that it could serve as a foundation for stability across the region. President Reagan expressed his belief that Nepal's designation as a peace zone could pave the way for a future where the entire world embraces peace as a universal principle, which was as follows;

...Through this proposal, His Majesty is seeking to ensure that Nepal's future will not be held back by using scarce resource for military purposes. We Americans support the objectives of Your Majesty's Zone of Peace proposal and we endorse it. I can only hope that one day the world in its entirety will become a Zone of Peace. Nepal should work closely with her neighbours to make the Peace Zone proposal a reality. Nepal's innovative approach to peace and development could be a foundation for progress throughout the region... ([Nepal Press Digest, 1983, December 12, p. 485](#)).

On this occasion, President Reagan stated that King Birendra's visit had provided an opportunity to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries and international issues. He also expressed his belief that Nepal, though located in another corner of the world, was a neighbor to the United States ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 9](#)). Thus, the key achievement of King Birendra's visit to the United States was securing U.S. endorsement for

Nepal's peace zone proposal ([Lamichhane, 2025](#)). The United States became the 38th country to endorse Nepal as a peace zone.

In response speech, King Birendra expressed deep gratitude on behalf of the Nepalese government and people, thanking President Reagan for endorsing Nepal's peace zone proposal. He stated that the endorsement reflected America's commitment to liberty, stability, and global peace ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 9](#)).

On December 8, in Washington, during an interview with the National Press Club, King Birendra clarified that he and his predecessors had always governed in accordance with public opinion and aspirations. Three years before the visit, in 1980, King Birendra held a referendum in Nepal to choose between a reformed Panchayat system or democracy ([Thapa, 2026](#)). He explained that the nationwide referendum of 1980 had granted the people the right to make political decisions, and since the public sentiment favored the Panchayat system, its continuation in Nepal was ensured. He also expressed appreciation for the U.S. government's support in developing Nepal's infrastructure and highlighted the significance of Nepal's water resources. During the conversation, he further emphasized the relevance and importance of Nepal's peace zone proposal ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 10](#)).

On December 9, King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya visited Florida as part of their tour. On December 11, in an interview with Voice of America in Washington, D.C., King Birendra expressed his happiness that the United States had endorsed Nepal's peace zone proposal and extended his heartfelt gratitude for the support. On the same day, King Birendra held a cordial discussion with former U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. During their conversation, Kissinger praised King Birendra's diplomatic vision, describing Nepal's foreign policy as highly competent and strategic. He noted that since Nepal was surrounded by two major world powers, China and India, the peace zone designation was essential for maintaining stability ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 11](#)). On December 12, former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon hosted a luncheon in honor of King Birendra in New York. During the event, Nixon commended Nepal's non-aligned foreign policy ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 14](#)). As part of his official visit, King Birendra toured several U.S. cities, including Dallas, New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Address at the World Affairs Council

On December 16, King Birendra addressed the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, where he spoke about Nepal's deep-rooted commitment to freedom. He also discussed Nepal's historical diplomatic relations, emphasizing its long-standing friendly ties with neighboring India and China. During his speech, he stated; "Nepal is a non-aligned nation. Accordingly, Nepal has maintained friendships not only with Arab nations but also with Israel, and likewise, it has fostered relationships with both Eastern and Western countries." Furthermore, he explained that Nepal's internal and external pursuit of peace reflects the core principles of its foreign policy ([The Rising Nepal, 1983, December 17](#)).

Diplomatic and Political Significance of the Visit

King Birendra's state visit to the United States carried profound diplomatic and political importance, which can be summarized as follows:

- (a) This visit added new and beneficial dimensions to Nepal's international relations. It enhanced the global recognition of Nepal and the prestige of the Nepalese people, elevating the nation's standing in the international arena.
- (b) American officials and citizens gained deeper insights into Nepal's foreign policy and its relationships with neighboring countries.
- (c) The U.S. President and other senior officials of US acknowledged King Birendra's capability to lead Nepal both domestically and internationally.
- (d) President Reagan's remarks during King Birendra's welcome speech in White House indicated that the U.S. viewed Nepal's Panchayat system positively. For example;
...in the political arena, your reforms are enlisting. Public participation is indentifying national goals, thus guaranteeing that your people have a stake in their future. The United States respects these and other initiatives your majesty is making to develop popular institutions consistent with the spirit of the Nepalese people. There is every reasons to be confident that your goal of economic progress. Political stability and national security will be reached. America is happy to offer encouragement and support in these noble efforts... ([Nepal Press Digest, 1983, December 12, p. 483](#)).
- (e) Securing U.S. approval for Nepal's peace zone proposal was a key diplomatic and political achievement of the visit.
- (f) The endorsement of Nepal's peace zone proposal by the United States, a global superpower, demonstrated recognition of the Nepalese people's desire for peace.
- (g) By endorsing the peace zone proposal, the United States strengthened its cordial and profound relations with Nepal, deepening and expanding diplomatic ties.
- (h) The designation of Nepal as a peace zone reinforced American trust and goodwill toward Nepal, affirming mutual understanding and sincere friendship between the Nepalese government, people, and the United States.
- (i) At the time, Nepal's foreign policy priority was to secure global recognition of Nepal as a peace zone, which the United States officially endorsed during this visit, making it a historic milestone.
- (j) The visit provided King Birendra and President Reagan their first direct interaction, fostering personal rapport between the two leaders and elevating bilateral relations to a higher strategic level.
- (k) King Birendra elaborated on the essence of the peace zone proposal, clarifying that it symbolized non-alignment, non-aggression, peaceful resolution of disputes, and Nepal's economic and social progress. He also expressed Nepal's hope for broader international recognition, helping the U.S. government and the global community better understand Nepal's vision.
- (l) King Birendra's visit was viewed as a peace initiative, marking a major diplomatic success for Nepal's peace zone proposal ([Sunlight, 1983, December 29](#)).

Economic Significance of the Visit

- (a) While welcoming King Birendra at the White House, the U.S. President expressed his commitment to continuing American investment in Nepal, particularly by providing grants for agricultural research and training programs ([Nepal Press Digest, 1983, December 12](#)).
- (b) During the visit, King Birendra expressed his expectation of U.S. support for the development of Nepal's water resources. The U.S. government had responded positively to his request.
- (c) During discussions, President Reagan committed to provide \$150 million annually for Nepal's development until 1989 ([Regmi, 1986](#)).
- (d) The U.S. President, Secretary of State, and aid administrators agreed to provide at least a \$75 million package, with a long-term plan to increase it by 10%. This was one of the key economic achievements of the visit ([Thapa, 1984](#)).

Conclusion

King Birendra's state visit to the United States in 1983, upon the invitation of President Ronald Reagan, is regarded as a significant milestone in Nepal's foreign policy and Nepal-U.S. relations ([Schaffer, 2000](#)). During his discussions at the White House, King Birendra and President Reagan focused on strengthening bilateral relations, fostering mutual cooperation, and promoting development ([Thapa, 2020](#)).

King Birendra emphasized Nepal's independent foreign policy, the concept of the peace zone proposal, and the necessity of international partnership for development aid. His meeting with President Reagan generated new enthusiasm for mutual trust, collaboration, and development-oriented partnerships between the two nations.

This visit helped Nepal establish its distinct identity on the global stage while successfully expanding balanced diplomatic ties with a powerful nation like the United States. It was a diplomatic success, strengthening long-term Nepal-U.S. relations.

Additionally, the visit reinforced Nepal's bilateral relations by solidifying diplomatic, economic, and developmental cooperation. King Birendra effectively presented Nepal's non-aligned foreign policy, affirming Nepal's commitment to independent decision-making, free from power blocs. During this visit, the U.S. officially endorsed Nepal's peace zone proposal, highlighting Nepal's dedication to peace.

Moreover, the visit sent a strong message to the international community about Nepal's stability, leadership capacity, and diplomatic maturity. It remains a pivotal event in Nepal's diplomatic history, showcasing its non-aligned foreign policy and balanced relations with global superpowers. Through this visit, Nepal-U.S. relations were further strengthened, reaching new heights of friendship and cooperation.

Author's contribution: The author himself is responsible for the overall research work; from conceptualization to final representation of the manuscript.

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