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Research Article

Challenges to Diplomatic Efforts in Resolving Nepal-India Border Problems in the Himalayas: A Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

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Abstract

The Constitutional Provision on Nepal's Foreign Policy has emphasized securing Nepal's international borders. Nepal's Foreign Policy-2077 also demands Nepal's border to be kept intact by protecting international border points and resolving boundary issues via the means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, based on historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence. Despite the constitutional provision and foreign policy directives, Nepal's border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved. Despite having friendly bilateral relations, and cross-border civilizational linkages, Nepal-India relations are not free from border problems. Even during the pandemic, when both countries closed their borders to contain the spread of the coronavirus, they resorted to border confrontations taking the bilateral relations into the low ebb. This study examines the border problems between Nepal and India during the time of COVID-19 with a focus on Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. Largely concentrated on identifying assorted challenges in resolving Nepal-India border problems, when Nepal faced India with its new map against the latter's new route to Mansarovar, Nepal's self-help that is limited to diplomatic talks with India has been elaborated along with Indian and Chinese responses to Nepal's new map and India's opening of a new route to Mansarovar, respectively. By using Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as a tool, this article discusses why diplomatic negotiations haven't found a headway in the Nepal-India context, despite Nepal's repeated calls. It is a qualitative study that uses data from both primary and secondary sources that include government reports, historical documents, archives, statistics, and treaties. Media sources have also been reviewed to understand various issues of Nepal's border problems with India. After the coding and familiarisation of the data, analysis and interpretation were done. Highlighting the interconnectedness of the Himalayan geopolitics and India's securitization of the Himalayan frontier, the article concludes that Nepal's diplomatic initiative on resolving the border problem has been impacted by power condensation in the Himalaya region and India's lack of interest.

Keywords: Nepal, India, border problems, new map, Mansarovar route

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1. Introduction

Nepal-India border is distinctively unique, not only because it is open. The historical and cultural linkages established by cross-border ties have also played a part to make the borderlands special. Nepal-India border length is about 1880 km, and people of both countries can cross it from different points (Shrestha, 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, only a few border entry points were patrolled by the security forces of either country (Shrestha, 2020 & Kansakar, 2001). During the pandemic, however, the number of armed police personnel patrolling the borderlands increased to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and prevent the entry of unwanted elements infiltrating the porous borders (Shrestha, 2020). Notwithstanding the securitization of borderlands during the pandemic, Nepal-India borderlands symbolize deep-rooted socio-cultural, emotional and economic inter-linkages among the people of the two sides that have been strengthened by cross-border mobility. As a long tradition of the free movement of people across the borders, Nepali and Indian citizens have unrestricted access to the opportunities available in both countries as per Article 7 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950. Under the Treaty, both the governments are bound to reciprocally “grant to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.”¹

Nepal shares not only open borders but also strong ties with the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Sikkim (Bhattarai, 2016). Unlike India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are extremely and moderately militarised respectively, Nepal-India borderland is an interdependent borderland (Gellner, 2013). Despite having such a cordial and intimate relationship, quite often Nepal-India relations enter into uncharted terrain. Border problems existing between the two countries top the list in impacting the ambience of affinity triggered by cross-border ties (The Kathmandu Post, 2020a).

The practice of keeping the borders with Nepal open was a British legacy (Dahal, 1978). During the time of British colonialism in South Asia, the East India Company kept the Nepal-India border open with three objectives: to maintain unrestricted migration of the Nepali hill people to India and to procure them for recruitment in the Indian army; to have easy and free access of British and Indian manufactured goods into Nepal as well as to Tibet wherein Nepal was the only easy and accessible route from India before the discovery of Chumbi valley route from Sikkim; to have a secure and easy supply of raw materials from Nepal into India such as timber and forest produce, herbs and medicinal plants, hides and skins etc. (Kansakar, 2001). Today, while an open border with India offers Nepal both a challenge and opportunity to Nepal’s security, Kathmandu needs to effectively manage and regulate its border with India. But, while taking measures for border security to prevent unwarranted infiltration, the free flow of people and goods shouldn’t be impacted. Amidst such complexities characterising Nepal-India borderlands, the Himalayan country faces border problems with India at many places. Border issues of Kalapani, as well as Susta, often rivet Nepal-India relations (The Kathmandu Post, 2020b). Kalapani is a territorial issue, which developed due to the differences over Limpiyadhura, which Nepal claims to be the source of the Kali River that serves as the border between India and Nepal. India, however, reckons that the source is a pond by Lipulekh. Kalapani is the territory between these two places.

1 The Treaty is available at: <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6295>

This study, however, focuses only on the border problems that surfaced during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when both the countries should have rather effectively cooperated in containing the spread of the novel Corona Virus, owing to the presence of the porous populated borderlands between them. In 2019, when India unveiled its new map including Nepali territory, Kathmandu sought a diplomatic resolution, but New Delhi paid no attention to Nepal's diplomatic note over the same. Instead, in May 2020, when Nepal had closed its land borders with both of its neighbours, India and China to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, India unilaterally constructed its Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage via the Lipulekh pass, which according to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 between Nepal and British India territorially belongs to the Himalayan country.

Upon the same evidence, Nepal also unveiled a new map on May 20, 2020, incorporating its territory up to Limpiyadhura, against which India has reservations. For New Delhi, Nepal's new map is 'unacceptable' and artificial'. Since then Nepal has been taking diplomatic initiations to resolve the problems between the two neighbouring countries, but to no avail. Thus, it is quite important to discover answers to the few pertaining questions: Why do Nepal's border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved despite the constitutional provision and foreign policy directives to keep Nepal's border intact by protecting international border points and resolving boundary issues via means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations? Is it because of the way India sees China connection in Nepal's new map or it is more because of New Delhi's lack of interest to resolve the border problems owing to its Himalayan frontier theory? By taking the help of the FPA, this article discusses why diplomatic negotiations haven't found a headway in resolving Nepal- India border problems in the Himalayas, despite Nepal's repeated calls. Using data from both primary and secondary sources, this qualitative research aims to discover how Nepal's diplomatic dealings with India are not gaining momentum in the face of geopolitical challenges, resulting in India's reluctance. Thus, government reports, historical documents, archives, statistics, treaties and media reports have been reviewed to understand how Nepal's new map is based on the historical shreds of evidence including treaties, agreements, maps and letters of exchange, and thus there is no valid connection between Nepal's new map and China and doesn't justify India's needless reluctance in resolving the border problems. The issues that emerged from the reviews were thematically ordered and analysed. The thematic analysis focused on the challenges in terms of Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas using the FPA as an analytical tool.

As soon as the interconnected themes of Himalayan geopolitics and India's securitization of the Himalayan frontier are highlighted, it eventually reinforces the major argument on how Nepal's diplomatic initiative on resolving border problem has been impacted by power condensation in the Himalaya region and India's lack of interest. The themes that emerged from the review of data have been separately discussed. For instance, while reviewing the data related to India's response to Nepal's new map, we see the emergence of the theme of the continuity of Himalayan frontier theory in New Delhi's foreign policy. Similarly, while studying the data on Nepal's response to India's Mansarovar route, diplomacy as Nepal's self-help is thematically presented. In the same way, while examining the data on China's response to India's Mansarovar Route, the falsity in exploring China connection in Nepal's new map is thematically discussed. All these themes are interconnected by shedding light on different

actors and factors influencing the foreign policy of a country, which is systematically devised by the countries to achieve their goals in relation to the external environment.

Foreign policy has observable artefacts, which is known as foreign policy behaviour and is explained with the help of the FPA (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), which examines how foreign policy decisions are made and implemented. FPA helps to look below the nation-state level of analysis, build actor-specific theory, pursue multi-causal explanations traversing multiple levels of analysis, and utilize theory and results from across the gamut of social science (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14). While making the FPA of Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas, we see how government organizations, private media, security experts and public opinion influenced the foreign policy decision-making in both countries. But, when we try to understand why Nepal and India have not been able to resolve their border problems, despite having unique cross-border relations, it is realised that geopolitical contestation between China and India in the Himalayan region has severely influenced the foreign policy behaviour, resulting into securitization of their foreign policies towards Nepal. India's Mansarovar route itself echoes the geographical determinism in India's Himalayan frontier theory. But, to make the FPA of India's Mansarovar route and Nepal's new map, it is best to start by shedding light on the foundational works on FPA and how they can be applied in understanding why the two neighbouring countries haven't been able to resolve their border problems diplomatically.

Three important works form the foundation of the FPA: "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy" by James N. Rosenau, "Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics", a monograph by Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin and "Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics" by Harold and Margaret Sprout. As Rosenau's study has contributed to the development of the actor-specific theory (Rosenau, 1966), it helps us to explain the behaviour of specific actors allowing for a richer explanation and prediction of the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal, India and China. Similarly, the emphasis of Synder, Bruck and Sapin on the decision-making process of foreign policy itself, not as foreign policy outputs, but as part of the explanation (Synder et. al., 2002), is appropriate to evaluate the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu, New Delhi and Beijing. Similarly, as Harold and Sprouts believed that foreign policy can only be explained concerning the social, political, situational and psychological contexts of the individuals involved in the decision-making (Sprout & Sprout, 1956), it helps us to understand how public opinion and private media influenced the foreign policy of India and Nepal. Thus, the FPA of India's Mansarovar route, Nepal's new map, China's response over Nepal-India border problems during the COVID-19 pandemic not only helps us to understand why diplomatic negotiations haven't yielded results towards resolving the border problem, but also offers scope in pursuing evidence-based policymaking in dealing with the issue of border security.

Most of the literature available today on Nepal-India borders have been written either from the perspective of national security or human security. Literature endorsing the discourse of national security has touched upon the issues of border security, encroachment, the problem of the riverine border, the disappearance of border pillars, among others, while literature embracing the human security approach has discussed the issues of cross-border migration, livelihood strategies in the borderlands, mobility, work and identity. But, the literature that analyses borderlands from the perspective of foreign policy are not sufficiently available. Not

only from the perspective of knowledge but also in the policies, a gap exists that needs to be bridged. Constitutional provisions on Nepal's national interest and the Government's Foreign Policy-2020 have recommended specific policies on border security and resolving the border problems respectively. But, how far have the actors and factors been impacting the effective implementation of such policies been studied? Hence, this study aims to fulfil the same knowledge and policy gaps. The use of FPA as a tool to analyse Nepal- India border problems can be justified in three ways: firstly, as the provisions of the constitution of Nepal on national Interest and foreign Policy (Article 5.1) has emphasised that border security is a basic element of Nepal's national interest, FPA helps to assess how far the constitutional directives on taking help of diplomacy in resolving border problems have been implemented. Secondly, Nepal's Foreign Policy-2020 requires that Nepal's border be kept intact by protecting international border points. Article 8.1 of Nepal's Foreign Policy-2020 has stated that boundary issues should be resolved via means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, based on historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence. Hence, FPA provides ways to evaluate whether historical documents, treaties, agreements help Nepal in resolving its border problems with India. Thirdly, while Nepal shares a long border with China and India, the recurrent episodes of standoffs, skirmishes and clashes in the Himalayan borders between the two nuclear powers have already multiplied security threats for Kathmandu. When New Delhi tried to explore China connection in Nepal's new map, the geopolitical complications riling Nepal-India border problems was visible. In such a situation, the FPA of Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas offers an evidence-based approach in understanding and accepting challenges to Nepal's efforts in resolving border problems and signals ways to strengthen its self-help by persistently finding refuge in diplomatic efforts and taking decisions accordingly, to reduce the threats emanating from the geopolitical contestations in the Himalaya

1.1 Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) of Nepal-India Border Problems

To resolve the border rows between Nepal and India, as per the policy directives and constitutional provisions, it is best to start by identifying the problems through the perspective of FPA, which includes small-group decision making (refers to the structure and process of groups in foreign policy decision making), organizational process (the influence of the respective organisation on foreign policy decision making), comparative foreign policy (comparing the foreign policy behaviour), and the psycho-societal milieu (role of individual characteristics and societal context). In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the role of various committees and task forces including Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which have been constituted to resolve the boundary issues, can be interpreted from the perspective of group decision making, while the role of administrative structures of the government including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Survey, security bodies, among others are discussed from the perspective of bureaucratic politics. Also, the foreign policy behaviours of Nepal and India towards the disputed territories, and China's foreign policy behaviour towards the bilateral disputes in the different periods are compared. In the same way, understanding the psychology of the foreign policy decision-maker is very important when it comes to resolving border problems. Thus, the social and psychological contexts behind foreign policy decision-making need to be explored. For instance, it is apt to make a socio-psychological interpretation of Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Oli's reference to India's national Ashoka Chakra emblem as "Singham Jayate" rather than "Satyamev Jayate," saying the lions represented India's

“hegemonic” designs. Prime Minister Oli’s allegory needs to be understood in the context of India’s neighbourhood policy towards Nepal and how India’s involvement and interests in the Himalayan state are perceived by Nepali folks. In addition, it is also important to examine how history, geography, economics, culture, political institutions have determined the foreign policy decision making in the context of Nepal-India border problems.

The concept of groupthink owes much to the scholarly contribution of Irving Janis. Today, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of the process, structures of groups (Hermann & Hermann, 1982), and leadership (Hermann et.al, 2001), group conflict and rivalry (Vertzberger, 1990) influencing foreign policy decision making. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the role of groupthink is often constrained by bureaucratic politics in the same way as the role of Eminent Persons Group (EPG) is confined to offering recommendations to the leadership. Other groupthink mechanisms also share the same fate of restrains. The Boundary Working Group, Joint Field Survey Teams and Survey Officials’ Committee—the three teams formed by India and Nepal in 2014 to complete the boundary work, are mandated to work on the bordering areas, except Susta and Kalapani, which are to be resolved at the foreign secretary-level. Thus, the constraint of such groupthink lies in awaiting the foreign-secretary level meeting. Although the third meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission in Kathmandu in 2014 had agreed to resolve the disputes, with the involvement of the foreign secretaries of both countries and the Boundary Working Group was tasked with providing inputs to the foreign secretary-level mechanism, to resolve the border issues, but there has been no major development. Instead, the new map published by India in November 2019 placed the disputed territory of Kalapani within its territory, worsening the problem further.

Officially introduced in 2016, the EPG was mandated not only to evaluate the state of bilateral relations but to come up with key recommendations on the open border and the 1950 treaty (Xavier, 2020). Although the Eminent Persons Group on Nepal-India Relations proposed a ‘smart and regulated’ borderlands (Baral, 2019), India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi hasn’t received the report yet, generating a suspicion that the Modi administration does not agree with the joint report’s recommendations floated by the experts of both the countries. In such a situation, the fate of Nepal-India borderlands remains in limbo: regulated or porous, free and open. Except for the blockades of major transit points by India in 1970, 1989 and 2015 (The Kathmandu Post, 2015), Nepal-India borderlands have always remained open for both countries. But, in 2020, the Nepal-India border remained closed for over five months, from March to August, amidst the fear of Covid-19 spread. But, the entry of people through porous border points didn’t stop, exposing the risk of the spread of the virus. Also, border security was severely affected by such porous routes, as people entered each other’s territory through proxy routes. And, as the migrant returnees didn’t know properly about the quarantine facilities, the risk of an outbreak of coronavirus got higher in the villages adjoining border areas (CESLAM, 2020). Most surprising was No Man’s Land being used as the temporary quarantine facilities (Gahatraj & Sharma, 2020) invoking unprecedented challenges to the border management amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Fearful of the spread of COVID-19, Nepal deployed 6000 Armed Police Force (APF) personnel to stop the flow of people entering Nepal from India in April 2020 (Republica, 2020). Because, the 1880 km long borders are fence-free and porous, the security forces, except the check posts, do not patrol the entire border. Thus, border management became a crucial issue for both countries. Even the EPG report has not

recommended any specific measures regarding which border points should be regulated and which should be kept open (The Kathmandu Post, 2018) for effective border management, although in the period of two years, during their nine meetings held in New Delhi and Kathmandu, experts from Nepal and India intensely pushed for regulated borderlands and urged the governments to determine the number of entry and exit points. But, the EPG's proposal on regulated borderland was reprimanded by the foreign policy experts for ignoring the social reality (The Kathmandu Post, 2018) as the report was prepared without taking feedback from the people living in the interdependent borderlands.

Generally, decision making is characterised by choice behaviour and is necessarily information-dependent (Kirkpatrick et.al, 1976). Hence, it is important to obtain the required information to reduce the group's uncertainty (Robertson, 1980). In the context of EPG's proposal over Nepal-India borderlands, PM Modi not receiving the report has aggravated the climate of uncertainty, paralyzing the policy choice over borderlands. The only information available to the group is that Modi has not received the report "owing to his busy schedule (Baral, 2019)" which has raised doubts over India's commitment to implementing recommendations forwarded by the EPG (Republica, 2018). Nepal even sought ways to submit the report to Modi during the BIMSTEC summit in the August of 2018 in Kathmandu but India refused to discuss any bilateral agenda in a multilateral forum. While the small group dynamic of EPG is confined to making recommendations, it is up to the two governments to further review and implement the recommendations. Most importantly, the recommendations are not binding. On January 16 of 2021, when Nepal and India held the sixth meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission in New Delhi discussing a gamut of bilateral issues, Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali was reported to have raised the issue of the border dispute and early submission of the Eminent Persons Group's report to the Prime Minister of India, but India was reluctant to discuss them saying that the Joint Commission and boundary talks are separate mechanisms (Neupane & Giri, 2021). Thus, it indicates how the groupthink mechanism like EPG is incapacitated by the bureaucratic politics in the context of Nepal-India border problems.

The bureaucratic politics approach doesn't view the state as a unitary actor, as the rational actor model does, rather shows how the rational model of decision making is insufficient in explaining a foreign policy behaviour. Rather, the bureaucratic politics model analyses how foreign policy decisions have to undergo through the competing entities within a particular country, and foreign policy outcome is the result of bargaining among the governmental institutions and actors with various abilities and preferences (Halperin et. al., 2006). Graham Allison (1969) is accredited for introducing the bureaucratic models in the foreign policy decision-making through his 1969 article "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" published in *The American Political Science Review*. In the article, Allison presented the bureaucratic politics model as a tool to interpret how actors often pursue the policies that are advantageous to the organizations they represent rather than the collective interests (Allison, 1969).

In the context of Nepal's response over India's Mansarovar route, we can see the differences in the approaches adopted by different independent organizations, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armed Police Force, legislative-parliament, parliamentary committees, Supreme Court and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal

sought to resolve the dispute diplomatically by handing over a diplomatic note to Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra (The Kathmandu Post, 2020c), while Armed Police Force set up a new border post to monitor Indian activities in the disputed territories (Paudel, 2020). The State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of the House of Representatives, however, directed the government of Nepal to internationalize the issue (The Himalayan Times, 2020a). Amidst the availability of different alternatives, Nepal's parliament issued a new map in June 2020, showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh as Nepali territories (The Kathmandu Post, 2020e), which India's Ministry of External Affairs perceived as an artificial enlargement of territorial claims. In the January of 2020, the Supreme Court of Nepal also directed the government of Nepal to submit the original map of Nepal exchanged with India during the signing of the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, in response to the public interest litigation demanding political and diplomatic attempts to shield Nepali territories (Pradhan, 2020). While both governments are yet to resolve the border disputes diplomatically, the Central Bureau of Statistics, which is responsible for conducting the census, has shown its intention of covering the Kalapani area, but, for many years, Indian authorities have prohibited Nepali folks from entering the Kalapani area (The Kathmandu Post, 2021). The last census that Nepal had conducted in Lipulekh was six decades ago, but after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the area has been under Indian control. Although all the aforementioned institutions and organizations are oriented to an understanding that the dispute should be resolved through the political and diplomatic means, the diverse approaches that have been pursued need to adhere to the directives issued by the new Foreign Policy-2020 that peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues prompted by the historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence, are to be used in resolving the border problems.

While the Bureaucratic model examines different actors, factors and conditions influencing a country's foreign policies, the Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) which is rooted in the discipline of comparative politics, applies comparative methods to the study of foreign policy. Equipped with the legacy of behaviouralism in the genealogy of the FPA, the CFP allows events to be compared along a behavioural dimension (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 21), for instance, whether the impact of foreign policy behaviour was positive or negative, or what kinds of the instruments of statecraft (military, economic, diplomatic, among others) were used (Caporaso et. al., 1987). In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the press statement of India's Ministry of External Affairs over Nepal's new map and Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs over India's Mansarovar route could be compared. Being agent-centric, the CFP examines the influence of both, the international system and domestic political contexts on foreign policy decision making. The objective material conditions and subjective understandings are acknowledged as important factors influencing the policymakers. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the CFP helps us to understand how geopolitical contestation in the Himalayan region has aggravated Nepal's border problems with India. While Nepal protested India's Mansarovar route, Indian army chief General MM Naravane remarked that Nepal was acting at "the behest of someone else" (Source), an indirect reference to China. Nepali security experts and foreign policy analysts not only perceptively condemned Naravane's remarks but also reiterated that it would be unfitting to perceive that Nepal was acting at the behest of China. Precisely, by making a Comparative FPA of India's Mansarovar route, we come to understand how India's foreign policy towards Nepal is driven by an act of securitization and frontier theory, while Nepal's self-help is limited in diplomatically balancing India and China.

To shed light on the same, it's best to begin by identifying challenges faced by Nepal-India borderlands.

While the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic pervaded a grave crisis in human, national and international security, the porous border was exploited as an ideal point for the border crossing at night, eventually impacting the border security, as most of the bordering areas are covered by agricultural fields, forests and rivers and streams. Already, Nepal and India were facing problems related to border demarcation. Equally, outlaws and political terrorists have been misusing territory on the opposite side of the border as a sanctuary. Besides, smuggling of goods from Nepal into India and vice-versa seems to be a perpetual problem (Gaige, 1975). The unrestricted border has resulted in criminal, anti-social and illegal activities such as robbery, theft, murder, and smuggling of goods evading customs duties, narcotic drugs trafficking, arms smuggling, poaching etc. (Shukla, 2006). Encroachment has become a major challenge to border management. Even no man's lands have been encroached. The territorial dispute between Nepal and India in Susta of Nawalparasi district is triggered by the change of the course by the Narayani River (Baral, 2018) which is called Gandak in India. The river has been changing its route because of floods and cutting. Besides the natural cutting of the river leading into territorial dispute, encroachment of fertile land and forest in Susta is another problem.

Another unresolved territorial dispute that Nepal has with India is at Kalapani and Lipulekh, both of which lie on the northwest edge of Nepal. The border problem over the same resurfaced when India published its new political map in the November of 2019, including Nepali territory--Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura—within Indian borders (Press Information Bureau, 2019). Although both the countries had previously agreed to discuss the ways to resolve the disputes through the foreign secretary-level mechanism, New Delhi not only procrastinated talks with Nepal but also announced a new route to Mansarovar, which lies in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, via the same Nepali territories that India included in its new map. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the new route to Mansarovar, without informing Nepal when both the countries were under strict lockdown to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It took Nepal-India relations to a low ebb. Still, Nepal's diplomatic effort was limited in revitalizing its bilateral relations with India, rather than making joint strategies to combat the impact of COVID-19 on their porous and populated borderlands (KC & Bhattarai, 2020). As India hasn't paid attention to Nepal's diplomatic call to resolve the border disputes through diplomatic talks and negotiations, it is best to make the FPA of the entire gamut of problems so that appropriate strategies could be devised through the systematic understanding of the events and chain of activities.

The FPA not only offers us to look below the nation-state level of analysis, but also helps us to decipher the effects of an individual leader's personality on foreign policy decision making, in understanding his/her preference for issues, choice of advisors, and preference for a certain group. It is the Social-psychological approach of Harold and Sprout which helps us analyse the social, political, and psychological contexts of the individuals involved in the foreign policy decision-making over Nepal-India border problems. For instance, while analysing Indian Prime Minister Modi's interpretation of Nepal-India borderlands as of "roti-beti" relations (a bond of family and kinship) during his first visit to Nepal in 2014, the political and psychological contexts should be taken into consideration. As the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal

in 17 years (PTI, 2014) Modi was psychologically aware to present his priorities differently than his predecessors, as he shouldered a political responsibility to effectively implement India's neighbourhood policy. With his visits to major Hindu pilgrimage sites in Nepal, the prime minister of the largest democracy also displayed his religious fascination towards the Hindu religion. To him, the Nepal-India border is an 'interdependent borderlands (Martínez, 1994)' "in which the societies on both sides of the border are linked symbolically, leading to a considerable flow of economic and human resources across the border" (Hausner & Sharma, 2013). It is a big source of opportunities, even during the time of political crisis, which the policymakers in both countries should acknowledge while taking any kinds of policy decisions on the borders. But, India's blockade on Nepal in 2015 ignored the spirit of interdependent borderlands as the landlocked country suffered a humanitarian crisis amidst of shortage of essential goods that enter Nepal through Indian borders. While the blockade had already sullied the image of Modi's administration in Nepal, the inauguration of the Mansarovar route further tarnished it. Responding to the same route Nepal's Prime Minister Oli questioned whether India was embracing "simhameva jayate" (lion shall prevail) instead of 'Satyameva Jayate (truth alone prevails) as inscribed in India's national emblem, which should be understood by examining the social, political and psychological contexts. While the Oli administration was facing immense public pressure to unveil a new map and resolve the border problems with India diplomatically, he was concurrently confronting pressure from his opponents inside the ruling party to step down, citing the government's failure in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

While India's Mansarovar route had already aroused anti-Indian sentiments in the Nepali public, Naravane's remarks on Nepal's protest against the Indian route at 'the behest of other' further aggravated the crisis along with Indian media's sensationalism, overstatement and paranoia over Nepal's displeasure against India's Mansarovar route. In such a political context, Oli questioned Indian leadership on whether lions in the Ashoka Chakra emblem represented India's "hegemonic" designs (Haidar, 2020). At the same time, while open and unregulated borders with India was being perceived as the major source for the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Nepal, Oli had said that the Indian virus was more lethal than the Chinese virus, provoking infuriation and resentment among the Indian public. It took Nepal-India relations to a low ebb until Prime Minister Oli held a telephonic conversation with India's Prime Minister Modi on the occasion of India's Independence Day on 15th August 2020 (MoFA, 2020b). Also, on 17th September 2020, Oli called Modi to extend greetings on the latter's 70th birthday and proposed to work closely "together towards strengthening bilateral relations" (Bhattacharjee, 2020). It was possible because of the good rapport existing between Prime Minister Oli and his Indian counterpart (The Hindustan Times, 2018) which not only paved the way for the visit of General Naravane and Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Nepal in November of 2020 but also helped Nepal-India relations move towards a thaw. However, despite the eagerness of both the countries to resolve the contentious issues between them, India still seems reluctant in resolving the border problems with Nepal. To identify the reason for India's disinclination, it's best to draw the theoretical inputs from Rosenau, Synder, Bruck and Sapin. Because the FPA approach forwarded by Rosenau helps us to examine the behaviour of specific actors influencing the foreign policies, while the emphasis on the decision-making process by Synder, Bruck and Sapin helps us to understand the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu and New Delhi. To get a clear glimpse of the actors and factors influencing

foreign policies and comprehend the policymaking process, it is apt to discuss the three interconnected issues. Firstly, India's Mansarovar route helps us to make sense of how India's foreign policy of securitization towards Nepal vis-à-vis China has aggravated Nepal-India border problems. Secondly, the self-help available to Nepal makes the Himalayan state realise that diplomacy is the last resort for the small powers located between two geopolitical rivals. And thirdly, the responses of India and China offer a clear understanding of geopolitical contestation in the Himalayan region. As a result, we will be in a position to identify various actors and factors influencing the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu and New Delhi over Nepal-India border problems.

1.2 India's Mansarovar Route

While the FPA guides us to make sense of how the situation is framed and represented, (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), it has been understood that India's Mansarovar route is more strategic than what appears to be a connectivity project or pilgrimage route through the Nepali territory to Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Thus, it is understandable how India has securitised its foreign policy towards Nepal when it comes to the Himalayan borderlands. In the quest for sanctuary in the colonial doctrine of the Himalayan frontier, Indian strategic interest in Nepal goes back to 1950, when Indian leadership perceived the Himalayas as the source of defence. It was on the 6th of December 1950, inside the Indian Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru stated, "From time immemorial, 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" (Nehru, 1961). Construction of the road linking Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh with Kailash Mansarovar via the Lipulekh, echoes the same geographical determinism of India's security interests in the Himalayas, although the route is labelled by India as a pilgrimage route, "Kailash Mansarovar Yatra" (Tribune News Service, 2020). The road construction had started much before, without giving any information to Nepal (Gyanwali, 2020). And, it is not a mere coincidence that India decided to announce the inaugurated new road in the middle of the lockdown, when no pilgrimage can take place to Kailash Mansarovar, at least in the foreseeable future.

With India's announcement of the new route for Kailash Mansarovar on May 8, 2020, which lies in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, most of the people in Nepal eagerly waited for China's response over the same. And, only after two weeks of the announcement of the new route, the Chinese foreign ministry diplomatically stated that no unilateral action should be done at Lipulekh, the trilateral junction (Lijian, 2020). Nepal claims that Lipulekh is not a trilateral junction. Rather, Limpiyadhura, the north-western corner of Nepal, is a trilateral junction and Lipulekh, territorially belongs to Nepal under the 1816 treaty with the British East India Company. Based on the same evidence, Nepal also published a new map on May 20, 2020, including its territory up to Limpiyadhura, against which India has reservations. Unlike China's response over India's construction of the road during the pandemic; in 2015, when Nepal was hectically engaged in post-earthquake relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, New Delhi and Beijing, without Kathmandu's consent, had decided to use Lipulekh as a trading point. Before China's response over India's new road, Nepali folks were frantically assuming India's new route via Lipulekh, as the upshot of the 2015 Joint Communique issued by India and China. In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi agreed to use the Lipulekh corridor for their bilateral trade, without Nepal's consent. It not only stirred controversy in Nepal but also raised questions about the intention of its two immediate neighbours. The 41-point Joint Communiqué signed on May 15th, 2015 between China and India called for “enhancing border areas cooperation through border trade, pilgrimage...and expanding border trade at Nathu La and Qiangla/Lipu-Lekh Pass and Shipka La”. Besides fueling anti-Indian sentiments, the public in Nepal wondered how Beijing agreed with New Delhi to use this route given that China's image has always been friendly and welcoming in Nepal (Bhattarai, 2020a).

With the increasing Chinese presence in South Asia through investment and aids, India's claim over its traditional sphere of influence has shrunk. But, the trade volume between India and China has significantly increased, and they are eyeing an all-weather trading route to further expand their bilateral trade via land. Although the two countries sharing a 3,488km land border chiefly utilise marine the trade route, the Nathula Pass is the only functioning land trade route between them, which is not a year-round route. The pass was closed since the 1962 India-China war before it was reopened only in 2006. Hence, Lipulekh is considered as the best alternative to the Nathula pass to increase their trade and connectivity via land. It's also notable that the year 2015 wasn't the first time when both Asian giants agreed upon the Lipulekh route. Here, the ‘historical amnesia’ of Nepal draws flaks. In 1954, India and China had agreed to permit Indian Mansarovar pilgrims to use the Lipulekh Pass for the first time. Several high-level visits between India and China discussed the issue of using the Lipulekh route for trade and pilgrimage. It indicates that India and China do not have divergent views on Nepal's claim to Lipulekh. But, it made Nepali folks wonder why then China is preparing to extend the Qinghai-Tibet railway to Nepal's border with India, as New Delhi and Beijing have jointly decided to use the Lipulekh pass as a trade corridor between them (Bhattarai, 2020a). All the agreements between India and China over Lipulekh in absence of Nepal grimly outline the position of Nepal. It not only adulterates Nepal's claim over Lipulekh but also exposes the limitation of a small state severely, inquiring about the self-help available to Nepal.

1.3 Nepal's Self-Help

While existing scholarship on FPA explores relations between the levels of the FPA analysis and combines that with a search for new methodologies that are more suitable for actor-specific theoretical investigation and multi-causal explanations (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), Nepal's self-help against India's Mansarovar route could be a better example. Given Nepal's concerns over the 2015 joint communiqué between India and China, although the two Asian giants had assured Nepal in the same year that the matter will be resolved through mutual consultation and understanding, until now, there has been no diplomatic settlement of the problem. While Nepal had proposed dates for holding the meeting of the foreign secretaries, it couldn't take place. Particularly, after the Indian government published a political map in November 2019, showing Nepali territory in the far northwest—including Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura—within Indian borders, Nepal started to discuss all kinds of self-help available, to eventually bring back the territories that India has included in its new map.

Settlement through adjudication was one of the self-help efforts that cloaked the interactions among the Nepali public intellectuals after India published its new map (Malla, 2020). For the settlement of disputes in the international courts, the availability of valid boundary treaties,

along with authentic historical documents, is a must. Notably, such treaties already exist and are accepted by both India and Nepal. According to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, Nepal's territory lies up to Limpiyadhura, the source of the Kali River. More precisely, Article 5 of the Sugauli Treaty says "The Rajah of Nipaul renounces for himself, his heirs and successors all claims to or connections with the countries lying to the west of the river Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries of the inhabitants thereof". Article 2 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1923, after 108 years of the Sugauli treaty, has also validated the provisions in the Sugauli treaty. Drafted on 2 December 1815, the Sugauli treaty made Nepal lose to the British the whole plain land from the Koshi River to the Kali River. But, from 8 to 11 December of 1816, with the letters of exchange between Nepal and the British East Indian Company, the British regime returned the eastern Tarai plains to Nepal from the Koshi River to the Rapti River. Similarly, on 1 November 1860, Nepal and British India signed an agreement in Kathmandu, whereby the British returned the territory of the plain areas from the Kali River to the Rapti River after Nepal helped the East India Company to curb Sepoy mutiny in India under Jung Bahadur Rana, the prime minister of Nepal from 1846-1877. But, none of the aforementioned treaties, letters of exchanges and agreements indicate Nepal's northwestern border – the Kali River – being modified. They rather delimit Nepal's borders up to Limpiyadhura, which is also a tri-junction between Nepal, India and China today.

Actually, until 1963, Limpiyadhura wasn't a disputed territory as people from Byas Garkha—lying on the west of the river Kali – had voted to elect the member of the parliament in the first general elections of 1959 (Dhungel, et al. 2020). They had even voted in the 1963 Village Panchayat elections. In 1954 and 1961, the Nepal government had conducted a census in the villages including Gunji, Nabi, Kutu, Tinker and Charung without any disputes (Risal, 2020). But, in 2019, India included these areas in its new map. In Nepal, not only the record about the elections and census is safe and available, but also the people involved in collecting data in the 50s and 60s, are alive and are valid evidence (Risal, 2020). Also, Nepal has secured evidence of residents from these villages paying land revenue to Nepal (Shara, 2020). Records mentioning the residents of the Byas area paying revenue to the Baitadi office after the Sugauli Treaty are also available. At the time when the Sugauli treaty was signed, Nepal had no official map of its own. But all the maps published by the British East Indian Company from 1816 to 1856 have identified the river Kali originating from Limpiyadhura as the boundary river (Bhusal, 2020). British geographer and cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith's 'Improved Map of India' published on 2 January of 1816 also mentions the river originating from Limpiyadhura as 'river Kali or western branch of Gogra or Sarju'. The map created by Captain W. J. Webb. "Sketch of Kumaon" (Survey of India) identifies the river originating from Limpiyadhura as the river Kali. Equally, the map "Gurhwal and Kumaon" prepared in 1827 by James Horsburgh, Hydrographer to East India as per the Act of Parliament, has introduced the river originating from Limpiyadhura as river Kali.

But, over time, realizing the strategic importance of the tri-junction, the source of the Kali river was falsified as Lipu Khola, a small stream flowing from the Lipu range. The "District Almora" published with the help of surveys conducted from 1865-69 and 1871-77 by the Survey of India, for the first time named the Kali river originating from Limpiyadhura as 'Kutu Yangti'. Maps published until 1850 used the details included in the Sugauli treaty. The Atlas of

India-1846 has mentioned that Nepal's western border with India is the river Kali that originates from Limpiyadhura. Besides the treaty and maps, the letter written to British Resident Edward Gardner in Kathmandu by Acting Chief Secretary of the Government of British India, J Adams, on February 4, 1817, stated that the territories east of the river Kali belong to Nepal and also expressed the Secretary's readiness to instruct the Kumaon Commissioner to return the territories to Nepal. On March 22, 1817, Kumaon Commissioner, GW Trail's letter clearly stated that Nepal has the right to all the territories situated eastwards of the Kali. Nepal claims that all of these historical maps and documents are enough to falsify any kind of cartographic manipulation over the areas to the east of river Kali. Even though the Boundary Working Group, the joint agency constituted by both the governments in 2014 to conduct activities in the fields of construction, repair and restoration of boundary pillars, is not mandated to look into Susta and Kalapani, Nepal proposed the meeting in the last week of August 2020. But, only a foreign ministry level mechanism is tasked with resolving the disputes concerning Susta and Kalapani (Giri, 2020a). But, even during Nepal's foreign minister Pradip Gyanwali's visit to Delhi in January 2021, boundary issues weren't discussed in the joint commission meeting chaired by Nepali and Indian foreign ministers (The Wire, 2021). Even in such unfavourable circumstances, taking refuge in international law may not be an easy task, as bilateral relations with a powerful country often overpower the provision of international law. Not being in a position to resort to force, even adjudication is costlier for them due to the limited financial and human resources available to the small states (Bashyal & Bhattarai, 2020). Thus, the only self-help available to Nepal is the diplomatic negotiations with India. But, India has not been paying attention to Nepal's concerns. Firstly, India published the new map unilaterally incorporating Nepali territory. Secondly, India gave no response to Nepal's diplomatic note over the same. Thirdly, instead of responding to Nepal's diplomatic note, India constructed and inaugurated a road through Nepali territory. Fourth, the Indian army chief gave agitated remarks over Nepal's protest. Fifth, repeated calls from Nepal were unheeded. Consequently, the Nepal government not only issued a full-fledged map incorporating its territory up to Limpiyadhura but also got it approved by the parliament. Since then, Nepal had to wait until August 15, 2020, India's 74th Independence Day, to hold a conversation with India. Although Prime Minister Oli's telephonic conversation with Modi was not related to the resolution of border disputes, but to express Nepal's greetings on the occasion of Independence Day (Indianexpress, 2020), Kathmandu-based foreign policy experts believed that Nepal could materialize the conversation to start holding talks with India (Simkhada, 2020). But, Delhi-based Nepal experts believed that border problems couldn't be resolved with a telephonic conversation. For that, the two countries need to sit for talks and let the historical facts and maps speak (Muni, 2020).

Nepali border experts have underlined the importance of diplomatic negotiations on resolving Nepal-India border issues. Former Director General at the Survey Department of the Government of Nepal, Toya Nath Baral, in his article "Border Disputes and Its Impact on Bilateral Relation: A Case of Nepal India International Border Management," has analysed the impacts of border disputes on the bilateral relations between Nepal and India, and demands the willingness and dedication from both the sides to resolve the dispute through diplomatic efforts and negotiations (Baral, 2018). In the same way, Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, in his article, "Diplomacy in the Perspective of Boundaries" has emphasized border demarcation diplomacy to resolve the border dispute between Nepal and India. While suggesting ways for border

management diplomacy, he recommends meticulous negotiations and identifies possible strategies for border management through diplomatic efforts (Shrestha, 2021). But, Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving border issues haven't been taken seriously by India as New Delhi expressed its reluctance for a long time citing the unprecedented crisis brought by COVID-19. But, deeming diplomatic negotiation as the only self-help available, Kathmandu has been digging archives, consulting senior geographers, hydrologists, foreign policy experts, so that Nepal could come up with appropriate knowledge on the nature of border problems with India, its causes and consequences, and the established procedures for international border management. But, will that make any sense unless India shows any sign of holding talks with Nepal? To get a clear glimpse of why India has been procrastinating talks with Nepal, it is important to understand India's response to Nepal's objection to New Delhi's construction of the new route, and over Kathmandu's new map. Although the Chinese response to India's opening of the new route to Mansarovar doesn't justify New Delhi's China connection in Nepal's new map, it has procrastinated the probability of bilateral talks between the two countries, permeating a geopolitical challenge.

1.4 Foreign Policy Analysis of India's Response:

The primary level of analysis in FPA is influenced by cognitive processes, small-group decision making, organizational process and bureaucratic politics, domestic political contestation, societal milieu and psychological attributes (Kaarbo, 2015). Apprehending the same, New Delhi's response to Nepal's protest against India's Mansarovar route is variously influenced. Under the cognitive processes, Indian media were swayed away by the heuristic fallacies and emotion, following the publication of a new map by Nepal. Groupthink like EPG appeared helpless in front of the bureaucratic politics, which was further complicated by evoking Himalayan geopolitics. The domestic political contestation was not much visible as New Delhi's policy towards the small countries in the vicinity doesn't change with a change of guard, because India bureaucracy is perceived as a permanent government and plays a predominant role in foreign policymaking. The societal milieu in India's response was invoked with the help of cross-border ties, or in the words of Prime Minister Modi, 'roti-beti' relations existing among the inhabitants of Nepal-India borderlands. Although India tried its best to present the Mansarovar road as a pilgrimage route expecting to attract Hindus from Nepal, the inauguration done by the Indian defence minister contradicted the manifested religious goal with a latent strategic objective. While the FPA also provides insights in understanding the mind of the foreign policy decision-maker because under some circumstances it is unavoidable to comprehend individual psychological attributes in understanding how decisions are made (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), India's defence minister inaugurating the Mansarovar route indicates at India's policy towards the securitization of the Himalayan region, which is largely influenced by the frontier theory that perceives China as a perpetual threat. The same perception is circulated to the groupthink, organizational process, and social milieu. On May 8, 2020, when India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated a road linking Dharchula in Uttarakhand of India to Lipulekh of Nepal via a video conference (Per, 2020), the 80 km road originating from Ghatiabagarh and ending at Lipulekh Pass (Subramanina, 2020), created an uproar in Nepal as the road passes through Nepali territory, and Kathmandu wasn't consulted by New Delhi while inaugurating the road (Panda, 2020). Although the new route is anticipated to reduce the travel time to Kailash-Mansarovar – a pilgrimage sacred to religious groups such

as the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains – to a week, down from the two to three weeks if they travelled through Sikkim or Nepal (Press Information Bureau, 2020), the inauguration during a global pandemic is perceived by Nepali folks as of strategic value over the manifested religious interest.

Nepal asked India to refrain from carrying out any activity, including the road construction “through Nepali territory” (MoFA, 2020a), New Delhi rejected Nepal's protest with the following response:

India and Nepal have established mechanisms to deal with all boundary matters. The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing. India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal. Both sides are also in the process of scheduling Foreign Secretary-level talks which will be held once the dates are finalised between the two sides after the two societies and governments have successfully dealt with the challenge of COVID-19 emergency (MEA, 2020).

Objecting to India's move of opening the new route, Nepal also handed over a diplomatic note to Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra, and Nepal's foreign minister Pradeep Gyanwali even made it clear that Nepal cannot wait for the Covid-19 crisis to be over to hold talks with India (The Kathmandu Post, 2020c). Gyanwali had handed over the diplomatic note to the Indian Ambassador Kwatra. Since November, when India included Nepali territory in its new political map, Nepal had already sought dates with India for talks to resolve the boundary issues, twice, but to no avail. Rather Delhi said that the road section to Lipulekh lies within the Indian territory. Responding to Nepal's press release of May 9, 2020, protesting India's move, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated that the construction “follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra” to make the same route “pliable for the ease and convenience of pilgrims, locals and traders” (MEA, 2020).

Nepal's protest against India's construction of the road coincided with the cross-border clash during a face-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers at a remote crossing point near Tibet. It made Nepali folks further wonder about Sino-Indian relations, which have the elements of conflict, cooperation and competition. Despite their burgeoning economic cooperation, India and China have been competing for global governance and regional supremacy, while their conflict is more geopolitical. Nepal, which has the strategic advantage of being located between India and China, is being impacted by the same geopolitical rivalry. As India believes in sustaining its sphere of influence in Nepal, China too struggles to engage more in Nepal. Using a similar geopolitical lens in interpreting the proximity between China and India, Chief of Indian Army Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane remarked that Nepal's objection to India's opening of road link via Lipulekh is “at the behest of someone else” (The Kathmandu Post, 2020d). Without naming any country, Naravane stated during an interaction in Delhi that the Nepali people's agitation against the road construction was “at the behest of someone else” and the area east of the Kali river, where the road was being built, belonged to India (Singh, 2020).

While the private Indian media cynically portrayed Nepal-China relations echoing Naravane's concerns, and as India paid no heed to Nepal's repeated calls to sit for talks in resolving border disputes, in Nepal, the public pressure on the Oli administration mounted to issue a new map.

The Nepali cabinet expressed serious reservations over General Naravane's statement (Pradhan & Giri, 2020) and endorsed the updated map of Nepal proposed by the Ministry of Land Management. Six months after India unveiled its new political map, Nepal also unveiled its new map showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh as Nepali territories (The Kathmandu Post, 2020e). India, however, expressed its displeasure over the new map of Nepal. Reacting to the release of the new map by Nepal, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated:

This unilateral act is not based on historical facts and evidence. It is contrary to the bilateral understanding to resolve the outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue. Such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India. Nepal is well aware of India's consistent position on this matter and we urge the Government of Nepal to refrain from such unjustified cartographic assertion and respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity (MEA, 2020).

After the map dispute has surfaced, Nepal is making all the endeavours possible to hold talks with India. But, New Delhi hasn't been responding. Few attempts have been made by the Nepali diaspora to internationalize the issue (The Himalayan Times, 2020a), but to no avail. Senior lawyers were even heard of taking the issue to the international court for adjudication (Sangroula, 2020). India's Nepal experts, however, call for a cautious approach in not letting mix Nepal-India intimate relations into a geopolitical trap. While responding to Karan Thapar's interview questions, seasoned Nepal expert Shivshankar Menon, who was also a National Security Advisor to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated, "Nepal and India share friendly relations and intimate ties in different spheres (Menon, 2020). Owing to the same, India needs to deal with the border problems with Nepal accordingly without complicating it by infusing a geopolitical twist into it (Thapar, 2020). Similarly, Anand Swaroop Verma, Nepal expert and Indian Marxist intellectual even went on clarifying that Lipulekh and Kalapani belong to Nepal, which New Delhi had borrowed from Nepal to establish an army camp during the 1962 border war between Nepal and India (Indo-Nepal News 2020). Verma's statement not only provides evidence to India's policy of securitization of the Himalayan region but also offers Nepali diplomats an opportunity to strengthen their claims and evidence while resolving the border problems through dialogue and negotiations.

1.5 Foreign Policy Analysis of China's Response:

Current FPA scholarship calls for a social-psychological analysis of world politics that employs a general system theory 'to unify the understanding of actors, actions and relations that constitute foreign policy and international relations'. Thus, China's response to India-Nepal border relations needs to be understood by taking into consideration how China's perception was constructed within a socio-political context of India's blockade on Nepal, which necessitated Kathmandu to look beyond the Indo-centric viewpoint and diversify its trade and transit relations via China.

Most importantly, Beijing is aware of the fact that China's public image in Nepal has been always positive and favourable. Upon the same realization, China responded to India's Mansarovar route by stating that New Delhi should refrain from taking any unilateral action that may complicate the situation in the disputed territory. But, New Delhi perceived it differently and tried to explore China connection in Nepal's new map. Interestingly, Nepal's border problems with India coincided with a tweet by the official Chinese news site CGTN

stating Mt Everest or Qomolangma located in China's TAR, which created an uproar among the Nepali public. Apprehending the same, in a Brookings webinar of July 29, 2020, Lisa Curtis, senior director for South Central Asia, US National Security Council stated that "Chinese state-run media claimed that Mt. Everest, which is a symbol of Nepali sovereignty, actually belongs to China " (Curtis, 2020). Curtis's remarks came at a time when the relations between China and the U.S. had reached a low point. But, the incident that Curtis referred to, was of early May, when Nepal was already bearing the brunt of Delhi's new road to Lipulekh. On the same day, when the Indian defence minister inaugurated it, a week-old tweet by CGTN claiming Mt Everest or Chomolungma located in China's Tibetan Autonomous Region, created a state of commotion in Nepal. Anxious of losing its favourable image in Nepal, CGTN quickly revised the tweet (Mulmi, 2020). It was not the first time that the official Chinese claim on the peak had surfaced. During the border discussion with Nepal in the 1960s, Chairman Mao had told former Nepali Prime Minister B.P Koirala that Nepal doesn't even have a vernacular name for it as Mount Everest is a colonial name given by George Everest who was a British surveyor-general in India from 1830-1843. As Koirala mentions in his autobiography when he told Mao that Nepali call it Sagarmatha and China doesn't have a name for it as Chomolungma is a Tibetan name, the communist leader replied, 'Tibet is in China'. The border between Nepal and China was resolved politically, unlike the watershed principles. For a long time, Nepal's Department of Survey had its own measurement of the peak, while China had its own measurement having installed a 5G station at the base camp, the height of the peak also differed. Nepal claimed 8848 meters as the precise height, while the Chinese survey claimed 8844.43m as the exact height until December 8, 2020, when the Survey Department of Nepal and Chinese authorities jointly announced that the new height of Mt Everest is 8,848.86 metres (Wilkinson, 2021).

While India's unilateral action to open link road to Lipulekh had already created a furore among Nepali folks, Chinese media's report on Mt Everest location, created further confusion (The Himalayan Times, 2020b). Finally, almost after two weeks, Beijing's response over India's opening of a road came. It mentioned that the issue is between Nepal and India. Beijing's response came as a sigh of relief for Kathmandu as the Nepali folks were assuming that India's opening of the new route to Mansarovar was the upshot of the 2015 joint communique between India and China, to use the Lipulekh corridor in boosting up the bilateral trade between India and China. With Beijing's response, Nepal's preliminary speculation over China's intent diluted. Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that the issue of Kalapani was between Nepal and India, and hoped the two countries would be able to resolve the differences through friendly consultations and without resorting to any further unilateral action (The Kathmandu Post, 2020f). Although there was no palpable connection for India-China border disputes being coincided with the inauguration of the Mansarovar route, Delhi-based Nepal experts pointed to Chinese interest in Nepal-India border problems (Nayak, 2020). To them, Nepal could have issued the new map in November of 2019 itself to counter India's new map, instead of unveiling it while India-China border tension emerged (Nayak, 2020). They believe that China's interest in India-China border problems surfaced for the first time in 2008, when Bamdev Gautam, the then home minister of Nepal made a statement that the Kalapani border dispute between India and Nepal could be resolved through trilateral understanding between China, Nepal and India. Interestingly, Gautam remarked after meeting with a Chinese military delegation led by General Ei Hujeng (Nayak, 2020). But, Nepalis reiterate that China has no

hand in India-Nepal border problems, and it will be wrong to assume that Nepal is acting on the behest of China (The Times of India, 2020). Responding to General MM Naravane's remarks that Nepal might have raised the border problem "at the behest of someone else", an indirect reference to China, Chinese scholars too didn't see China's hand (Ethiranjan, 2020).

Because of the geographical proximity, and economic relations they have, the relationship between India and China is often labelled as one of the most 'electrifying' of this century. Their interactions are not only expected to determine the future of reciprocity, interdependence and globalization itself but are also anticipated to shape the hopes and prospects of international institutions (Bhattarai, 2017). Their interactions are also estimated to determine the U.S. power globally and in the Asian region. Most importantly, their ability to cooperate is projected as crucial on the core issues, ranging from climate change to multilateral trade negotiations (Martin, 2016). But, there are certain similarities and unusual differences in the foreign policy behaviours of India and China, particularly in dealing with the small states in the South Asian region (Bhattarai, 2017). India's Mansarovar route through Nepal and China's response over the same provides an apt example. Such similarities and differences are often deemed as the outcomes of the geopolitical vulnerabilities that have gripped the region, amidst the rise of China and India. Such similarities and differences can be better understood with the help of the CFP which builds a multilevel and cross-national theory of foreign policy, and subjects such a theory to rigorous empirical testing. The CFP inherits scientism and behaviourism in the genealogy of the FPA. With the help of the CFP, events can be compared to understand whether the particular foreign policy has positive or negative impacts, and also to evaluate the instruments of statecraft including diplomacy, military, economics, etc. In comparison to Groupthink, Organizational and Bureaucratic Politics models, the CFP approach underlines integrated multilevel explanations. Hence, the CFP helps us to understand 'who does what to whom, how' in international affairs. For instance, while comparing the foreign policies of India and China towards Nepal's new map, not only unusual differences at the strategic front may be discovered, but also the implications of such differences are felt. The recurrent instances of standoffs, brawls, and skirmishes in the Himalayan borders between India and China have already burgeoned security threats for Nepal. Following the death of 20 Indian soldiers in the recent skirmish with China in the Galwan valley, Nepal's security threat has multiplied, which was visible in the press statement issued by Nepal on 20th June 2020, mentioning that the two neighbouring countries need to resolve their dispute in Galwan valley area through "peaceful means in favour of bilateral, regional and world peace and stability". Most importantly, the geographical location of any state shapes the outlook of a state's leaders, and, thus, influences their decision-making process over the foreign policy affairs" (Sempa, 2002, p. 5). Today, India seemingly executes foreign policy towards its neighbouring states by assessing the influence of China on the small states of South Asia. For India, which is strategically alarmed, South Asia is the sphere of influence. While for China, which seems economically concerned, South Asia is a big market (Bhattarai, 2017). As a result, the geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas has further aggravated the challenges in resolving the border problems between India and Nepal.

1.6 Challenges in Resolving Nepal-India Border Problems

Foreign policy analysts have emphasized that Nepal and India need to find a lasting and permanent solution to the border disputes that have riveted their bilateral relations. But, it's

not an easy task (Giri, 2020b), as foreign policy decision making is variously influenced at different levels, as represented in Table 1 below. Assessing the status of the EPG report, Groupthink hints at India’s reluctance in resolving border problems with Nepal. In the same way, Bureaucratic Politics indicate India’s interest in continuing Himalayan frontier theory and securitize the Himalayan region instead of resolving border problems. The CFP gives a clear understanding of how Himalayan geopolitics and power contestation in the Himalayan region has made India disinterested to resolve the border disputes with Nepal. Social-Psychological Milieu, however, demonstrates China’s increasing presence in Nepali politics and society following India’s 2015 blockade peeving New Delhi to explore China connection in Nepal’s new map.

Table 1 Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) of Challenges to Nepal’s Diplomatic Efforts in Resolving Border Problems with India

Groupthink	Bureaucratic Politics	Comparative Foreign Policy	Social- Psychological Milieu
Lack of interest in Indian leadership to receive EPG report	Continuity of Himalayan frontier theory in India’s foreign policy	Himalayan geopolitics	2015 unofficial blockade on Nepal
Group consensus in EPG helpless in front of Bureaucratic Politics	India’s policy of the securitization of the Himalayan region	Sino-Indian border standoffs, skirmishes, border clashes	Public pressure on Nepali leadership to issue a new map
EPG limited to recommendations	Indian bureaucracy as Permanent Government	Indian exploring China connection in Nepal’s map	Role of Indian media
EPG Report not made public	Standard Operating Procedures offering little flexibility and creativity	China calling for no unilateral action in the disputed territory	Mind of the foreign policy decision-maker

Although Nepal was aware of the fact that India had been constructing a road via Lipulekh pass for the past 12 years (Gyanwali, 2020), the successive governments didn’t take up the matter seriously. Although the incumbent Nepali government pledged to resolve the border disputes with the help of diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, because of the rift inside the ruling communist party, the government focus shifted towards resolving the internal conflicts (Mehta, 2020), which waned the Nepal government’s will power while New Delhi had already indicated in holding talks only after the end of the pandemic. As a result, Nepal’s border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved. In the same way, group consensus in EPG appears helpless in front of Bureaucratic Politics, as Indian Prime Minister Modi hasn't received the EPG report. This has raised doubts over India’s commitment to implementing recommendations forwarded by the EPG and leaving the fate of Nepal-India borderlands in limbo.

While the report will be made public only after the prime ministers of both countries receive it, it becomes clear how groupthink falls victim to bureaucratic politics, which offers little flexibility and creativity in resolving the border problems. India's policy of securitization towards the Himalayan region through continuity of its frontier theory has pervaded the Indian bureaucracy, a major actor in Indian foreign policy formulation and implementation, yielding a continuous reluctance to resolve the Himalayan border problems with Nepal. The CFP analysis helps us understand how the resurgence of Himalayan geopolitics and power contestation in the Himalayan region has obliged India to take refuge in the Himalayan frontier theory, while China aims to transform the Himalayas with the infrastructure and connectivity projects under its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) project. Although Beijing demanded no unilateral action in the disputed territory, the way Sino-Indian border clash in Galwan coincided with Nepal-India border problems over Lipulekh, New Delhi started to explore China connection in Nepal's new map that further lessened the chance of reaching a diplomatic resolution of border problems.

The cognitive process of the foreign policy decision-maker is variously influenced. For instance, the unveiling of the new map was the upshot of the intense public pressure on the Oli administration. But, it should be also understood in the socio-political context of the 2015 unofficial Indian blockade on the landlocked country. The way China was hauled by Indian media in Nepal-India border problems should be also understood in the socio-political context of how Indian media has been traditionally hostile to China by exploiting paranoia and sensationalism (Lahiri, 2017). India wanted to convey to the world that the Himalayas are under constant threat from China, and synchronously New Delhi attempts to position itself as the guardian of the Himalayan region. But, as India aims to draw legitimacy to its Himalayan frontier theory, Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving border problems has to suffer. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the Kathmandu-based analysts floated three ways to deal with India over the border problems, which were: deploying the military to secure Nepali land, pursuing a diplomatic approach, and if such an approach failed to yield results, then to seek international arbitration (Giri, 2020b). But, such approaches may further worsen bilateral relations with India. Because, India is already not in a position to realize that China has nothing to do with Nepal's position on Lipulekh (Baral, 2020). Thus, Nepal-India border problems in Lipulekh have permeated a geopolitical challenge.

Further, the challenge lies on Nepal's part not to exploit any geopolitical benefits out of the intermittent presence of rivalries in Sino-Indian relations. Because Nepal cannot afford to get wedged in the middle of another geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas. Deploying the military to secure Nepali land hasn't yielded any result so far. On May 13, 2020, the Nepal government sent an Armed Police Force to Gaga in Chharung, near Kalapani. But, after two days, on May 15, hinting at China, Indian army chief Naravane made his reactive remark that Nepal is acting at the behest of someone else (Basnet, 2020). Kathmandu-based Security experts were also heard saying that mere 25 APF troops won't be of much help. The post was established to get rid of disparagement from locals criticizing the government's ineptitude in protecting the country's border (Thapa, 2020). Also, the post not being established at the strategically significant place, and less number of security personnel makes it meaningless (Thapa, 2020). As the disputed territory of Kalapani is about 20km uphill from the place where APF is positioned, Indian activity cannot be monitored (Basnet, 2020).

Nepal's diplomatic dealings with India is also not free from mounting challenges. Although Nepal was asking India repeatedly to sit for talks since November 2019, New Delhi expressed its willingness to sit for talks only after the Covid-19 pandemic is over (The Kathmandu Post, 2020g). But, when India held talks with China to resolve the month-long border standoffs and skirmishes (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h), it made Nepali policymakers raise their eyebrows. China was the priority for India, owing to the gravity of the dispute. But, the resolution of the India-China boundary dispute could also accelerate Nepal's chances for talks, as the dispute between Nepal and India also includes China in some capacity (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h). Although it was reported earlier that Prime Minister Oli is engaged in backchannel communications with New Delhi to start the foreign secretary-level talks, it hasn't gained any momentum. Also, in 2017, during the Doklam standoff between India and China, Kathmandu-based analysts had said that Nepal should raise its boundary issues with India, including the row over Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura, so that Nepal doesn't have to face the fate of Bhutan, during Doklam crisis. Also, in 2015, Kathmandu dispatched diplomatic notes to both Beijing and New Delhi after they agreed to open a trade route via Nepal's Lipulekh without informing Nepal. But, the issue wasn't given any attention until India issued its new political map including Nepali territories inside India in November 2019. Since then, Nepal sought two dates for talks at the foreign secretary-level and sent four diplomatic notes, but India has never responded to any of these notes (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h). The three notes were sent at the end of 2019, one on November 20, another on November 22 and one more on December 30. The fourth one was dispatched on May 11, 2020, after the opening up of the new road in Lipulekh by India. But, India wasn't responding to Nepal's concerns, leaving room for the ruling communist party in Nepal to reap geopolitical benefits out of the Sino-Indian dispute (Giri, 2020c).

Indian media went on cynical, portraying Nepal's relations with China as anti-Indian, when, on June 19, 2020, the School Department of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) organised a virtual meeting of the communist parties of Nepal and China (Bhattarai, 2020b). The meeting was held at the time when India and China were not in good relations because of border skirmishes and clashes along the disputed border in Ladakh. Nepal and India also had border disputes at the time of the meeting of the two communist parties. Not only did the meeting make India cast doubt over Nepal's neutrality, it also gave Indian media an opportunity to endorse the Indian army chief's remarks: "Nepal is acting on the behest of someone else" (The Wire, 2020). Although the meeting was scheduled long before the clash between Indian and Chinese troops on June 15, 2020, the timing was not appropriate and would draw widespread criticism for its preventable geopolitical ambitions (Bhattarai, 2020b). The Sino-Indian rivalry includes the features of conflict, cooperation and competition, and exploiting Machiavellian benefits out of the rivalry might not be in favour of Nepal's equidistant foreign policy (Bhattarai, 2020b). Aware of this, Nepal has proposed trilateral partnership (Giri, 2016), and expects New Delhi and Beijing to renegotiate their perceptions about each other accordingly. The Xi-Modi meeting in Wuhan in 2018 aimed to stabilize relations between India and China. Yet, the relations continue to be stirred by border problems and competition for regional supremacy and global influence (Bhattarai, 2020b). Nepal views Sino-Indian ties in three different ways: as geopolitical rivals; as economic giants; and, as two distinct civilizational entities. The India-China dispute for Nepal shouldn't be seen as an opportunity to boost its geopolitical ambitions. Given Nepal's geostrategic location, cultivating relations with one country at the expense of the other may be counterproductive.

2. Conclusion

By using a qualitative method, the article has made the FPA of the row over Nepal's new map against India's Mansarovar Route, with an attempt to illustrate the challenges that Nepal faces while trying to initiate a dialogue with India over the border problems between the two countries in the Himalayan region. The Foreign Policy-2020 has not only directed Nepal to resolve its border disputes with the help of effective diplomacy that relies on historical agreements, treaties, facts and evidence, but has also diplomatically addressed the Indian psyche on such issues. Although such policy directives are profoundly indispensable for the desired result, to deal with Nepal's ongoing border issues with India and the likely ramifications in the near future, Nepal could implement these policies only after India shows its interest in resolving the problem. And to reignite India's interest, friendliness and neighbourliness in Nepal's diplomatic efforts is a key.

This study has further discovered that geopolitical contestation over the Himalayas may not only aggravate the existing border problems between the countries but also tarnished the image of the contesting powers. In June 2017, when Chinese troops had reached the Doklam area, the disputed territory between China and India's strategic ally Bhutan, with bulldozers for constructing a road, New Delhi had objected to the road-building as a violation of its sovereignty over the disputed territory. But, the world's largest democracy itself announced the opening of a road linking Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh with Kailash Mansarovar via the Lipulekh pass, during the time of the pandemic, without Nepal's consent. Alerted by the preventable consequences of such acts, Nepal invited India for talks. But India hasn't paid any heed to Nepal's concerns, which however provided geopolitical opportunities for the ruling party in Nepal to inch further closer to China.

Further, having made the FPA of the row over Nepal's new map against India's Mansarovar route, it has been identified that geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas has been the persistent challenge in resolving border problems, as both the Asian giants—India and China—value the Himalayan region as strategically important for their national security. This raises a question: does India's rise comes with a responsibility towards its small neighbourhood, whenever New Delhi prioritises its security concerns?

Thus, before it's too late, India needs to fast track its diplomatic efforts in resolving border disputes with Nepal. For that, firstly, India needs to display flexibility in understanding and accepting Nepal-China relations, so that China won't be unnecessarily hauled in Nepal-India border problems. Secondly, India needs to tap this opportunity to send a clear message to the world that India's rise is a rise with responsibility towards its neighbours, and it is important to take small countries like Nepal into confidence by eliminating all kinds of mistrust, misinformation, and misperception in healthy bilateral relations.

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