



# Mapping Nepal's Foreign Policy Behaviour towards Great Power Politics: A Study of Nepal's Foreign Policy Response to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis

Gaurav Bhattarai<sup>a\*</sup>, Manish Jung Pulami<sup>b</sup>

a. Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD), Tribhuvan University, University Campus, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal

b. Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi, India

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## Abstract

A country's foreign policy is characterised by continuity and change. A stark divergence, however, between stated foreign policy objectives and practically implemented foreign policy behaviours cannot be convincingly vindicated as a routine transformation. Nepal's foreign policy objectives and principles are laid down in the Constitution and various foreign policy documents, particularly in the integrated foreign policy of 2020. A series of perceptible deviations from those guiding principles, without any justifiable reason, may label Nepal's foreign policy behaviour as an adventurist project. Today, while the residue of Cold War politics has enveloped the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Nepal has divulged traceable foreign policy responses over the same. Taking the case study of Nepal's foreign policy responses to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the study aims to map Nepal's foreign policy behaviour toward great power politics. Surveying Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards the United Nations and the great powers, particularly the United States and Russia, this study, firstly, identifies the sources of key changes and detectible transformations in Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. Secondly, drawing a critical analysis of Nepal's responses to the great power politics to understand the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal that has been ambiguous, ambivalent, and uncertain. Methodologically, this qualitative study has employed the framework of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) along with inductive as well as deductive methods of reasoning per the nature of non-numerical data.

**Keywords:** Nepal, foreign policy behaviour, Russia-Ukraine Crisis, the USA, MCC

\* Corresponding author; G. Bhattarai ([gauravpraysforall@gmail.com](mailto:gauravpraysforall@gmail.com));  
M. J. Pulalmi ([pulalmanishjung@gmail.com](mailto:pulalmanishjung@gmail.com))

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## 1. Introduction

“The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must,” stated Greek Historian Thucydides (c.455-c.400) in *History of the Peloponnesian War*. But experimenting with numerous ways to foil the “might is right” approach toward international politics, the principle of sovereign equality has found its place in normative international relations stipulating a rule-based international order instead of power-driven international politics. Still, it’s up to a country’s foreign policy skills and instruments to materialise benefits from the Kantian principle of sovereign equality in today’s Hobbesian international system, characterised by great power competitions and conflicts. A study of a strategically-placed county’s foreign policy behaviour towards great power politics suggests a lot about its foreign policy objectives, agendas, priorities and institutions because the blatant divergence of foreign policy behaviour from the clearly stated foreign policy goals may thwart a State’s interest in drawing benefits from the principle of sovereign equality and instead foster distrust in the bilateral and multilateral engagements, eventually sully its international image.

The evolution and expression of Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour on bilateral, regional, and multilateral fronts may be variously understood and interpreted. Numerous perspectives from International Relations Theories (IRT), Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and Critical Geopolitics (CG) offer abundant approaches to examining Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour. When investigating Nepal’s interactions and engagements with powerful countries, Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour has been shrewdly ambiguous and ambivalent (Bhattarai, 2022). While a State’s foreign policy behaviour is fundamentally driven by a certain degree of transformation at the domestic and global milieus (East, 1973), changes in Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour are primarily attributed to political changes, which are further compounded by the vicissitudes taken place in the neighbourhood and beyond. While foreign policy experts have concentrated on the inertia and static nature of foreign policy behaviour, its transitional or divergent factors are widely left out (Gutavsson, 1999). The lack of such studies not only designates the state of helplessness of a country’s foreign policy institutions but also results in a divergence between its constitutional foreign policy objectives and perceptively manifested foreign policy behaviours. The crescendos against the backdrop of the Cold War have multiplied with the Russia-Ukraine crisis fluctuating the relations between the countries; the theatrical dimension of the Cold War international relations, where many countries purportedly pursued ambiguous foreign policy behaviours, has been resurrected again in an understandable manner. (Chotiner, 2022). This study highlights Nepal’s case by situating its foreign policy responses to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. When Russia invaded Ukraine on February

24 2022, the initial support offered by the Western countries was minimal compared to the pledges and promises made by the Americans and Europeans. The foreign policy responses of many developing countries and regional powers are still inconsistent and unpredictable concerning the Russia-Ukraine crisis (Hagman, 2022). Dilemmatic decision-making not only drove the foreign policy behaviour of the major powers in the West but Western European countries too revealed the presence of uncertainties and confusion in their foreign policy behaviour. It was the result of the perceived threat and fear from the revisionist power, along with the inescapable predicament stemming from the probability of NATO expansion. While China doesn't want to see Russia's defeat and condemns Western sanctions, the middle powers, including India, Brazil, and South Africa, have also preferred not to align with the US. Thus, America may win the war in the West, whereas Russia is already winning the war in the East and Global South (*The New York Times*, 2022, p. 2).

To the strategically-placed small countries, the Russia-Ukraine crisis has appeared as a geopolitical trial, aggravating the component of the small state syndrome in their foreign policy behaviour. It is triggered mainly by the blatant divergence between the stated foreign policy objectives and manifested foreign policy behaviour. Today, while the Western world perceives the purchase of Russian crude oil by Nepal's two neighbours - India and China - as financing Russia's war, it has weakened American and European attempts to isolate Kremlin. Even though China has escaped from supporting Russia's war, India has depicted its posture as neutral in the geopolitical standoff between Russia and the West. In response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Nepal has demonstrated a clear divergence in its foreign policy behaviour compared to its objectives. In the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 27 2021, Nepal's Foreign Minister, Dr Narayan Khadka, stated that Nepal's worldview is shaped by its adherence to the principle of "amity with all and enmity with none" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). But, after six months, in March 2022, Nepal became one of the few Asian countries to deplore the Russian invasion of Ukraine (while Nepal's South Asian neighbours, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, abstained from the UNGA voting process) and backed the resolution demanding Moscow to pull its troops from Ukraine (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). The Kathmandu-based foreign policy experts were instantly heard stating that if Nepal condemns the Russian invasion officially, NATO's expansionism should also be critiqued, at least to effectively implement its non-aligned foreign policy (Shrestha, 2022).

Nevertheless, many argued that the bilateral foreign policy obligation towards the US-sponsored Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) barred Nepal from doing so

(Welle, 2022). MCC is a USD 500 million grant by the United States, which the House of Representatives ratified on February 27 2022 (Pradhan, 2022). Against the same backdrop, Nepal's initial responses were interpreted and understood as the Lilliputians' Dilemma (Keohane, 1969) or, in simpler words, small state syndrome triggered by the increasing psychological threats emanating from the influence of big neighbours. While non-alignment has always been at the heart of Nepal's foreign policy objectives, Nepal's foreign policy response to the Russian-Ukraine crisis made Kathmandu's posture appear ambiguous, ambivalent, and uncertain (Bhattarai, 2022a), particularly after the country's age-old policy of non-alignment is being reconnoitred discernibly dividing Nepali foreign policy analysts on Nepal's stance on Ukraine.

Since a country's foreign policy is characterised by a certain degree of continuity and some changes, some components of foreign policy continue for decades while others transform. For instance, the role of geography in Nepal's foreign policy has undeniably continued for centuries (Kissinger, 2014), while the methods of strategising the same geography have varied (Bhattarai, 2022). Still, those changes shouldn't be mistaken for the inconsistencies and divergences spotted in a country's foreign policy behaviours against its constitutional objectives. In Nepal's case, foreign policy objectives are laid down in its Constitution. But, assessing Nepal's foreign policy behaviours, manifested by its foreign policy responses over different issues of global importance, a divergence from its foreign policy objectives is noticed. But what causes the divergence between policies and practices? What are its implications for Nepal's image abroad? Does such divergence aggravate a sense of distrust in the relations between countries? This study aims to discover answers to these questions situating Nepal's foreign policy response to Russian-Ukraine Crisis.

## **2. Methods**

By divulging Nepal's foreign policy response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the study's key objective is to map Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards great powers. Thus, this qualitative study has employed data interpretation and review methods. Mostly, the nature of the data is non-numerical, while a simple numeric representation of the analysis of the voting behaviour of Nepal in UNGA is conducted. The data used in the study is collected through the review of available literature: related speeches, texts, reports, books, journal articles, newspapers, and online materials. The process-tracing method has been used to investigate the cause of Nepal's changes in foreign policy behaviour, identifying the potential causes. Different variables have been considered to examine the process of change and continuity in the foreign policy behaviour of the states. Nepal's foreign policy behaviours and objectives are surveyed to trace the divergence between the same in different episodes of history.

Moreover, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is used as a theoretical framework to analyse the actor's decision-making patterns in Nepal. The study by Harold and Sprout was referred to analyse foreign policy behaviour regarding the social, political, and situational contexts in the decision-making process (Sprout & Sprout, 1956). This study has used the inductive method of reasoning as a specific case study of the Russia-Ukraine crisis has been considered in mapping the characteristics of the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal toward great power politics. The study has also employed deductive reasoning techniques while surveying the foreign policy objectives of Nepal and analysing Nepal's behaviour in the United Nations. Also, Nepal's foreign policy behaviours are analysed at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels to understand the sway of adventurism and recklessness in Nepal foreign policy approaches. Nepal's foreign policy objectives, agendas, responses, priorities, and institutions have been systematically tabulated in charting and analysing Nepal's behaviour towards the Great Power politics.

### **3. Results**

Defining foreign policy and objectives is indispensable to understanding the nature and extent of a country's foreign policy behaviours and responses. Foreign policy is understood as 'state activity, 'strategy', 'behaviour', 'set of principles', 'discrete purposeful action', 'political level decision', 'product of the decision', and many more (Bojang, 2018; Chakraborty, 2018; Kassimeris, 2009). George Modelski defined foreign policy as the system of activities evolved by communities to change other states' behaviour and adjust their activities to the international environment (Modelski, 1964). As such, foreign policy attempts to influence or refashion the behaviour of other states (Gutavsson, 1999, p. 75). Thus, foreign policy is an observable artefact of a political-level decision. It is not the decision but a product of the decision (Kassimeris, 2009, p. 84). Scrutinising the foreign policy objectives shall further succour in understanding the foreign policy in question (Gutavsson, 1999). A country's foreign policy objectives may not be restricted to the promotion of national interest. It may also extend to international responsibilities and obligations (Stanzel, 2019). Still, each state's stated foreign policy objectives may differ due to the various determinants and relative capacities (Stanzel, 2019). Some countries may be more concerned about survival in the anarchic international system (Mearsheimer, 2003), while others may concentrate on consolidating power in the international community (Stanzel, 2019). Hence, foreign policy objectives are shaped and influenced by multiple actors and contexts.

For Nepal, foreign policy is a set of principles outlined to conduct its foreign relations, enhance its national interest, and promote the country's status in the international

community. The Constitution of Nepal outlines those principles, including the policy of non-alignment, *Panchasheel*, international law, non-aggression, peaceful settlement of disputes, and world peace based on the Charter of the United Nations. Nepal's stated and prescribed foreign policy objectives are to secure its independence, safeguard sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the Nepali people's rights, promote the country's dignity, and ensure economic well-being and prosperity. The foreign policy objective of Nepal is also concerned with reviewing concluded treaties and entering into new treaties based on equality and mutual interest (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The foreign policy objective of Nepal intends to fulfil its international obligations toward contributing to and maintaining global harmony, peace and security. Although Nepal has outlined comprehensive foreign policy objectives characterised by idealistic fervour, studies on country's foreign policy behaviour and responses are largely confined to papers, few seminars and workshops. Hitherto, no attempts have been made to distinguish Nepal's foreign policy behaviour against her foreign policy objectives. Therefore, to compensate for those gaps in the field, the following sections have been developed to offer a succinct analysis of Nepal's foreign policy behaviour and responses to key events of international and regional importance. Before moving into the sections, it's best to distinguish a few terms which have been mistakenly understood as identical in the Nepali context. After all, the meanings conveyed by 'foreign policy objectives,' 'foreign policy behaviour,' 'foreign policy responses,' 'foreign policy agendas,' 'foreign policy priorities,' and 'foreign policy institutions' aren't the same. Foreign policy objectives are state policies on a country's international relations officially stated. Foreign policy behaviour suggests the traits of the state's external relations, which may be idealistic, pragmatic, adventurist, submissive, and harmonious, among others. Foreign policy responses are understood as a country's response to specific events of international and regional significance. While the foreign policy agenda signifies the list of matters to be taken up in a country's foreign affairs, the foreign policy priorities categorise those agendas one after another as per the urgency and primacy and implement them accordingly. Foreign policy institutions are founded for examining and researching the issue of foreign affairs, national security, national interest, and international relations. The rationale for distinguishing these concepts lies in understanding their role and significance in Nepal's posture in the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

### 3.1 Evolution of Nepal's Foreign Policy Objectives, Agendas and Priorities

Following the unification campaign of Nepal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, Nepal steered its foreign policy objectives by keeping geography at its heart (Bhattarai, 2022). Defensive postures and territorial expansion remained the primary objective of Nepal's foreign policy (Stiller, 1999). The economic

objective of the foreign policy was barely targeted in achieving infrastructural and socio-economic development but was sought through the promotion of security and military substructure (Stiller, 1999). The territorial ambitions of Nepal and the growth of mighty empires and colonial forces in its neighbourhood were equally alarming. The country's foreign policy was profoundly influenced by its geostrategic position. With King Prithvi Narayan Shah explaining the geostrategic location of Nepal through the 'yam' metaphor (comparing Nepal as yam and its gigantic neighbours as two boulders metaphorically), Nepal's foreign policy agendas and priorities had revolved around the same component in the past. Until 1815, Nepal fought two major wars with Tibet and one with the British East India Company. The war with Tibet was driven by the issue of authority and command, while the desire for territorial expansion instigated the war with the British. Nepal's defeat in the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816) halted the foreign policy objective of territorial expansion. After the end of war, Nepal's foreign policy objectives were readjusted to the quest for survival faced by the East India Company in the South and the increasing influence of the Qing Empire in Tibet (Stiller, 1976).

When Jung Bahadur Rana came into power in 1846, Nepal's foreign policy objective of survival as a nation-state became more pronounced. Nepal's tilt toward the British was discernible to fulfil the same objective. In the international system dominated by only a few sovereign states, Nepal's international engagement was limited to the strategic and political interactions with British India and sporadic communication with its northern neighbour, mostly through quinquennial missions and over the issues of Tibet (Manandhar, 2001).

Although the scope of Nepal's foreign policy objective widened with Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana's visit to Britain and France in 1850-1851 (Whelpton, 2016), concentration was laid on appeasing the British. As such, Nepal's foreign policy priority was also directed toward militarily supporting the imperial ambitions of Britain (Whelpton, 2016). Similarly, Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher and Juddha Shumsher played an important role in setting the foreign policy agendas in the changed geopolitical arrangements (Rose, 1971). They introduced '*shikar diplomacy*' (the hunts organised in Nepal), which lured British and non-British royalties to the exotic jungles of Nepal (Liechty, 2017). With such foreign policy priorities, Nepal persuaded the British to ink the Treaty of Friendship with Nepal in 1923, reiterating Nepal's sovereignty while the entire subcontinent was under colonial rule. After British rule began to collapse in the Indian sub-continent, theatrical transformations in the sub-continent led to changes in Nepal's foreign policy objectives, agendas and priorities. However, revolutionary changes in mainland China in the early 1900s

hadn't brought any considerable changes in the foreign policy objectives of Nepal (Rose, 1962).

When India achieved its independence in 1947, Nepali Rana rulers diverted the foreign policy priorities toward the security regime (Whelpton, 2016). At the same time, mounting democratic movements in Nepal made them concerned about mobilising all the foreign policy instruments for a safe exit from the country (Whelpton, 2016; Rose, 1971). From 1947 to 1950, Nepal signed diplomatic relations with the US, India, and France. With the introduction of democracy in 1950, Nepal's foreign policy objective concentrated on joining international and regional organisations and enhancing the country's international image. Although initiations were made towards diversifying foreign relations, geography continued to determine the foreign policy objectives for Nepal (Muni, 2016). There were significant changes in the neighbourhood with the independence of India (1947) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949). Considering the accession of Jammu and Kashmir (1947) to India, the annexation of Hyderabad into the Indian Union (1948), and the control of Tibet by the PRC (1950-51), the foreign policy objective of democratic Nepal was refocused on its survival (Rose, 1971; Bhattarai, 2022a). In this context, Nepal signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India, which evolved a so-called 'special relationship' with India (Whelpton, 2016).

When King Mahendra came into power in 1955 and initiated a party-less Panchayat system in 1960, the foreign policy objectives of Nepal saw a profound transformation. Despite the suspension of democracy, the foreign policy objectives were still directed toward enhancing the image and dignity of the country through foreign policy diversification. Nepal became an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), officially divulging its precise posture during the Cold War (Muni, 2016). The country employed the NAM platform to vocalise discrepancies in global political and economic affairs. Nepal also played an active role in the United Nations. An equidistance foreign policy was adopted towards the neighbours to balance the relationship between China and India. During this period, Nepal's foreign policy objectives were influenced by the principles of neutrality and non-alignment, which were heavily critiqued during the Sino-Indian war in 1962 (Whelpton, 2016). To portray the country's image as a peace-loving, neutral, and non-aligned country, the foreign policy objectives were designed to establish Nepal as a 'Zone of Peace' by King Birendra in 1975 (Muni, 2016).

After the reinstatement of democracy in 1990, Nepal's foreign policy principles (except the Zone of Peace) remained the same, while the variation in the practice can be seen. The foreign policy objectives were directed toward safeguarding democratic

institutions and promoting democratic norms and values (Dahal, 2018). These objectives lured major powers – with multiple interests – to the Himalayan country. India and the USA’s strategic interests increased with China’s growing footprints in Nepal (Muni, 2016). Nepal adhered to the foreign policy objective of maintaining balanced relations with its neighbours (Bhattarai, 2018). Due to political instability in the country, while political leaders were concerned with regime security and channelised foreign policy accordingly, it offered strategic space for major powers to influence Nepal (Whelpton, 2016; Hamal, 2002). As such, intricacies produced by the internal turbulences in the context of Maoist insurgency were compounded by difficulties in managing the interest of major powers against the backdrop of Global War on Terror Campaign. Consequently, it heightened inconsistencies in Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour.

While China stood with Nepal’s Monarchy, fighting against Maoist guerrillas until the fall of the Monarchy in 2008, India and the US supported the street demonstrations of major political parties in ousting the Monarchy and inviting Maoists into mainstream politics. As the decade-long Maoist insurgency, which started in 1996, made Nepal more vulnerable to the influence of external powers, its foreign policy was redirected toward gathering international support and cooperation in minimising the implication of the crisis (Whelpton, 2016). Nepal became part of the Geneva Conventions that governed conflict laws and many other international forums during this period. The foreign policy objectives emphasised fulfilling international obligations toward maintaining human rights and adhering to humanitarian law. In 2006, a 12-point understanding was made between the then Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M), which had launched an armed insurgency against the monarchical form of governance (Jha, 2014). The understanding between SPA and CPN-M triggered a nationwide movement that ended the King’s direct rule and paved the way for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) (Jha, 2014). The political change mandated the Constituent Assembly to promulgate a new constitution in the line of restructuring the Nepali state through federalism, inclusion and representation (Jha, 2014). Throughout the constitution-making process, Nepal witnessed several episodes of political instabilities and unsettled transitional justice. The foreign policy agendas were focused on gathering international support for the transitional processes. Concurrently, the leaders of the post-conflict state were also concerned by the unavoidable need for regime security by accommodating the interests of the major powers.

Since the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015, the foreign policy objectives have been directed to accomplish the agendas of economic prosperity and infrastructural development through foreign aid and assistance and inviting more

foreign direct investments. But, Nepal hasn't been able to remain free from geopolitical challenges. The formation of strategic alliances, including the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD), Build Back Better World (B3W), and the strategic trilateral partnership among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) to contain the rise of China has invited challenges to Nepal's non-alignment and neutrality policy. Although Nepal's foreign policy is focused on buttressing bilateral, regional, and multilateral support for its development, the antagonistic relationship between China and India has invited further challenges to Nepal's balancing acts. Thus, since the days of P.N. Shah, geography has remained a constant factor shaping Nepal's foreign policy objectives, priorities and agendas. Having surveyed the elements of change and continuity in the foreign policy objectives of Nepal, it has been discovered that the continuity component was driven by the protection of Nepal's primary national interest and the core objective of survival. Devising foreign policy priorities for regime security also remains constant. Still, the adjustment of foreign policy agendas to cope with the new transformation in global, regional and domestic structures cannot be denied. As foreign policy goals and agendas have changed with rearrangement in the hopes and ambitions of the country, the foreign policy responses and behaviours of Nepal remain important variables to be analysed in gauging the divergence between the country's foreign policy behaviours and the objectives. To fulfil the objective, it's best to examine Nepal's foreign policy behaviours in multilateral organisations to reveal how the great power countries shape Nepal's foreign policy behaviours in international organisations.

### **3.2 Nepal's Foreign Policy Behaviour in the United Nations**

Small state theories prioritize multilateralism as advantageous and productive for small countries (East, 1973). The same spirit drives Nepal's sojourn to international and regional organisations. Nepal became a member of the United Nations on December 14 1955 (United Nations, 2021). Nepal has been supporting the voices of the weak, vulnerable and marginalised countries in the United Nations (Bhattarai, 2018). Nepal was elected as a temporary member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) two times (1969-1970 and 1988-1989) and has been a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) since 2018 (United Nations, 2021). Nepal has been sending its troops to different parts of the world for peacekeeping and is the second-largest state contributing as peacekeepers (Nepal Army, 2022). From the beginning of the engagement with the world body, the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal can be examined from the perspective of continuity and change (Bhattarai, 2018). Because in some cases, Nepal's behaviour has been issue-specific, while in others, Nepal's foreign policy responses have been in line with the interest of

major powers. In the issues of decolonisation, human rights situation, refugees, international trade, apartheid, self-determination of people, disarmament, terrorism, sustainable development, nuclear non-proliferation, racial discrimination, narcotic drugs, the law of the sea, religious intolerance, disaster prevention, and other similar categories, Nepal's foreign policy behaviour has been consistent towards maintaining world peace, harmony, stability and international security. In such cases, Nepal has adhered to the Charter of the United Nations, demonstrating strong commitments to its core foreign policy principles.

However, a clear divergence from Nepal's foreign policy objective can be noticed in some specific situations. A perceptible shift from its fundamentals also manifests a small state syndrome. Nepal's voting pattern in the United Nations General Assembly displays the same. In the issue of critical importance, including the Palestine questions, the situation in Middle East non-self-governing territories, territories occupied by Israel, Namibia questions, Cuba-United States relations, the Afghan crisis, the Russia-Ukraine Crisis, the Syrian crisis, the Kampuchea situation, the Bosnia and Herzegovina situation, the Iraq-Israel situation and in other similar situations, the voting pattern of Nepal has been consistent with the interest of major powers in the world, instead of adhering to its foreign policy fundamentals. It illustrates the small state syndrome triggered by Nepal's coping strategy.

For instance, in the eight General Assembly Resolutions regarding the Afghanistan situation, Nepal's voting pattern was entirely consistent with the United States but inconsistent with Russia (UN Digital Library, 2022). Although India decided to abstain from five resolutions, Nepal voted in favour of all eight resolutions regarding the Afghanistan situation (UN Digital Library, 2022). Similarly, among the 29 General Assembly Resolutions regarding the Cuba-USA situation, the voting pattern of Nepal has been inconsistent with the United States. In contrast, the pattern has been highly consistent with USSR/Russia (approx. 80%) more than China and India (UN Digital Library, 2022). In this voting process, Nepal has also abstained from some of the resolutions (UN Digital Library, 2022). During the General Assembly resolutions in 1956 regarding the situation in Hungary (anti-communist Hungarian revolution), Nepal's voting pattern was inconsistent with that of the USSR (UN Digital Library, 2022).

All these details show how Nepal's foreign policy behaviour was driven by certain complex situations. At times Nepal was seen coping with the great power politics; other times band wagoning and, during other occasions, hedging. Regarding Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards Russia, the context of 1956 differed significantly from today's Russia-Ukraine crisis.

Firstly, Nepal's non-alignment was evolving in the global context of the beginning of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and the regional context of Sino-Indian rivalry. Secondly, Nepal had just received UN membership in 1955 and wanted to display its deep faith in international law, world peace, and sovereign equality. Thirdly, Nepal's concern for Hungary was the upshot of a "small country's concern about its freedom" (Shrestha, 1977). When the matter was brought before the emergency session of the General Assembly in 1956, representatives from Nepal described Hungary as a symbol of the struggle of a small country against a big and powerful country (GAOR, 1956). Nepal's stance was different from the posture adopted by other non-aligned countries. Nepal not only condemned Soviet action in Hungary strongly but also voted in favour of two resolutions condemning Soviet occupation in Hungary and called for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungarian territory (OAOR, 1956). Still, we need to remember that Nepal abstained from most of the resolutions sponsored by the Western powers. Along with 14 other non-aligned countries, Nepal had abstained from voting on the first major US resolution.

### **3.3 Nepal's Foreign Policy Behaviour towards Great Powers**

The concept of great power has been central to international politics. The strength, power, capabilities and influence (in terms of military, politics, economy and others) are the criteria to determine whether a country is a great power. Kenneth Waltz (1979) defines great power as a country with a large population and area, abundant natural resources, economic capabilities, military might, political stability and competence. Heywood (2015) identifies a great power as a state with immense international influence because of military prowess and economic clout. The concept of 'small' is significant in great power politics, notably the strategically placed small countries (Carafano, 2018). As such, the foreign policy behaviours of small states and the syndromes they display have been under scrutiny for years.

Annette Baker Fox defines small states as those that are not great powers (Fox, 1959). Robert L. Rothstein makes a case for this definition by claiming that small states are those that, in the opinion of their leaders, cannot secure their safety on their own (Rothstein, 1968). In the same manner, Keohane defines small states as incapable of influencing the international system and whose leaders are aware of such constraints (Keohane, 1969). Starting from the days of P.N. Shah, Nepali leaders have always been aware of such constraints that start in the Gulliverian neighbourhood. The interaction of Nepal's two neighbours with Russia on the economic and strategic fronts is broader than that of Nepal. But, when it comes to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Nepal's foreign policy response was more autonomous, which is interpreted by

Kathmandu-based foreign policy experts as an act of adventurism (Shrestha, 2022). But it should also be understood as the upshot of Nepal's persistent desire to reduce Kathmandu's dependence on its two giant neighbours with the help of Washington's assistance. While examining the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal toward great powers, many may debate the great power status of Russia. However, its military might and economic capabilities (the sources of its ability to influence the international system) qualify it as a great power.

Similarly, Nepal's location between the two big countries makes it a small state. But, any assessment from the perspective of size and population doesn't make it a small state. While small states' foreign policy behaviours are driven not only by hopes and aspirations but also by the sense of threat/fear (Sasley, 2011), great powers are acquainted with the methods and instruments of manipulating them. For instance, while the concerns of the US in Nepal are shaped by its strategic interests in Tibet and renewed angsts about China's increasing influence in Nepal and South Asia (Smith & Khanal, 2019), the US aims to fulfil its geopolitical ambition by exploiting the hopes and aspirations of Nepal for economic prosperity and infrastructural development through foreign aids and assistances. Besides, Nepal-US relation is also influenced by the values and norms of democracy and democratic institutions (Department of States, 1973). It remoulds Nepal's foreign policy priorities, agendas and behaviours. Although small countries like Nepal look for ways to minimise the strategic risks while accepting economic support from great powers like the US, it becomes a daunting task, usually resulting in ambiguity in foreign policy behaviours. The ratification of the US-sponsored Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was an apt example. Nepal's interest in MCC commenced in 2011 when the country was selected to develop a threshold program (MCC, 2021). In 2012, the Government of Nepal requested the MCC for the opportunity to collaborate to design a plan for the country's economic growth (MCC, 2021).

In 2013-2014, Nepal and MCC jointly conducted a diagnostic study and identified energy and transportation as the primary challenge to the country's growth (MCC, 2021). After the required level of negotiations, the agreement was signed on September 14 2017, by Finance Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki and acting CEO Jonathan Nash (MCC, 2021). But, with the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) launch, controversies enveloped MCC as a component of IPS. Although the MCC clarified Nepal's questions, stating no justifiable linkage of MCC with the Indo-Pacific Strategy, there was a greater degree of scepticism over certain provisions of the Nepal Compact. Following a huge political tantrum, the MCC was ratified by the parliament with a simple majority on February 27 2022, with a 12-point interpretive declaration (Pandey, 2022).

**Table 1: Timeline showing Nepal’s entry into MCC**

2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board of Directors of the MCC selected Nepal to develop a threshold program.</li> </ul>
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Nepal requested the opportunity to collaborate with the MCC for the country’s economic growth.</li> </ul>
2013-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nepal and the MCC jointly identified energy and transport as a challenge to the country’s development.</li> </ul>
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MCC opened its office in Nepal.</li> </ul>
2016-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MCC conducted feasibility to identify the projects in Nepal.</li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On September 14, the MCC entered into a Millennium Challenge Compact with the Government of Nepal.</li> </ul>
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On December 28, the Ministry of Finance requested the Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs on the Compact.</li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On January 10, a secretary-level decision was made to ratify the Compact with a simple majority of the parliament.</li> <li>• On February 8, The Council of Ministers decided to present the agreement in the parliament.</li> <li>• On July 15, the Ministry of Finance registered the agreement in the Parliamentary Bill Section of the Federal Parliament.</li> </ul>
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On February 2, A Task Force was formed under the leadership of Jhalanath Khanal by the Nepal Communist Party.</li> <li>• On February 21, a report was presented by the Task Force for ratifying the Compact only after a few amendments.</li> <li>• On June 29, the Ministry of Finance notified MCC about the delay in the ratification process due to COVID-19.</li> </ul>
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On June 26, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken telephoned PM Sher Bahadur Deuba.</li> <li>• On September 3, the Ministry of Finance requested the MCC secretariat to provide clarification to 11 questions.</li> <li>• From 9-12 September, MCC Vice President Fatimah Sumar visited Nepal and met senior leaders of Nepalese political parties.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On September 29, PM Deuba and NCP Maoist (Centre) Chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal pledged to ratify the agreement within five months.</li> <li>• On October 29, MCC Secretariat dispatched a notice regarding Nepal.</li> <li>• On November 3, PM Deuba and Deputy CEO Alexia Latortue met in Glasgow.</li> <li>• From 17-20 November, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu discussed Nepal and MCC.</li> <li>• On December 19, a Four-Party Parliamentary Task Force was formed led by Jhalanath Khanal was formed to study the agreement (but the Task Force could not function)</li> </ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On February 3, MCC Secretariat replied to the letter sent by PM Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal on September 29 2021.</li> <li>• On February 10, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu had separate telephone calls with PM Deuba, Chairperson of NCP-Maoist (Centre) Dahal, and Chairperson of CPN-UML K.P. Sharma Oli.</li> <li>• On February 20, the agreement was tabled in the Federal Parliament.</li> <li>• On February 27, the MCC Nepal Compact was ratified.</li> </ul>

While the US interests in Nepal have allegedly been said to increase with the ratification of MCC, a Congressional delegation visit from the US for three days in April 2022 (The Kathmandu Post, 2022a) further made it clear. It was a high-level delegation visit after Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India (The Kathmandu Post, 2022b) and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi came to Nepal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). US strategic interests were expressed when US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya arrived in Kathmandu in May 2022 after she visited India. In India, she met with Dalai Lama and appreciated the activities of the spiritual leader. In Kathmandu, the US Under Secretary Zeya paid a visit to Tibetan refugee leaders and Tibetan camps. However, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson reported, the Ministry was uninformed of such meetings with the Tibetan refugee leaders (The Kathmandu Post, 2022c). While these high-level visits from the USA (also from China and India) portray Nepal's strategic importance to great powers, the unawareness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the activities of the US Special Coordinator on Tibet Issues shows the immaturity of the concerned

foreign policy authority as well as the reckless behaviour of great powers towards Nepal. With the visit of the US Army's Pacific Commanding General Charles A. Flynn in June 2022, Nepal's increasing geostrategic importance to the US was also evident. Flynn's visit happened when Nepal's Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff were scheduled to visit the United States (Pradhan, 2022). General Flynn advised Nepal during the visit to join the State Partnership Program (SSP) (Giri, 2022). However, the Deuba government decided not to join SPP amidst the increasing public pressure. Although Nepal Army has denied its involvement in the SPP (Nepal Army, 2022), the US Embassy in Nepal has divulged the evidence in public, revealing how Nepal was the one who requested it.

The Embassy has also clarified that it is a military-to-military exchange focused on humanitarian and disaster response (Giri, 2022). While divergences and discrepancies in the key foreign policy actors and institutions over the issue of national security and national interest unveil the lack of comprehensive foreign policy response and the presence of ambiguity and inconsistencies characterises Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. Mostly, it is instigated by the unusual shifts in the foreign policy agendas with the change in the guard. A Series of divergences from the foreign policy objectives have raised questions over the interests of the actors involved in foreign policy decision-making as well as over the conflicting interests of the key institutions involved in foreign policymaking and implementation. The series of events depicted in Table (1) tell a lot about the small state syndrome characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty in the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal. Key events from 2011 to 2022 expose a lack of stability in Nepal's foreign policy while dealing with a great power like the United States. While the rise of China and BRI projects also have been a nuisance to balancing its relations with the United States, Nepal failed to display a unanimous and consensual foreign policy behaviour over the issue of national interest and national security.

While Nepal's foreign policy toward Russia remains limited compared to the United States (Neupane, 2020), today's Russia is less concerned about the geostrategic position of Nepal, located between China and India, with whom Russia has developed a good relationship. Five months into the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Nepal's neighbours have emerged as major financiers of Russia's war by buying large amounts of Russian crude oil. It has provided both economic and political advantages to Beijing and New Delhi. While India has portrayed its position as neutral and China has avoided publicly supporting Russia's war, Nepal's posture has been more autonomous by siding with the West. While other South Asian countries, including Bangladesh and Pakistan, also abstained from the UN vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine,

Nepal surprisingly backed the resolution, revealing a shift in its foreign policy. Soon after endorsing the UN resolution, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken appreciated and thanked Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for his government's decision to back the UN resolutions. Kathmandu-based foreign policy analysts are divided over Nepal's foreign policy response (Giri, 2022). Some deem it an act of compromising Nepal's non-alignment, while others consider Nepal's adherence to the values of world peace and UN charters. But it may be surprising to know that in 2014 Nepal didn't criticise Russia's annexation of Crimea and managed to abstain from voting in the UN condemning the occupation. Thus, Nepal's foreign policy response is not consistent. Instead, it is in line with the interests of the great powers. In several junctures, Nepal has missed the opportunities to yield a convergence between foreign policy objectives and foreign policy behaviours in its dealings with great powers. Various sources of divergence in the foreign policy behaviours of Nepal have been identified and examined in the following section.

### **3.4 Sources of Changes in Foreign Policy Behaviour of Nepal**

In their critical reflections on the vicissitudes and variations spotted in a country's foreign policy behaviour, foreign policy analysts have identified several determinants. While the small countries are subjected to structural constraints, impelling them to bandwagon or choose a certain balancing strategy (East, 1973), a sense of insecurity synchronously drives their foreign policy behaviour to undertake unpredictable choices and display inconsistent conduct amidst the new changes at the external front (Browning, 2006). Referring to the widely cited supposition that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, domestic factors determine the foreign policy behaviour of the state (Haass, 2014) in such a manner that the changes in the government, government institutions, and non-governmental actors are among the factors that induce the state to change its course of behaviour in the international system (Gutavsson, 1999). As fostering consistency, dependability and reliability in foreign policy behaviour (Gutavsson, 1999) belittles the possibility of conflicts by gradually abandoning the hypocritical variants in the foreign policy, the initiations could be made by discovering the sources of changes in foreign policy behaviour.

Geography has been a defining factor in the foreign policy behaviour of the country. The geostrategic location between the two Asian giants with relatively high military and economic strength has influenced the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal. Its location has impacted Nepal's growth, stability, security, and sovereignty. While the military power of the neighbouring countries has generated a sense of fear and threat, their economic power capabilities have allured Nepal's hopes and aspirations for economic growth and infrastructure development. Nepal's foreign policy choices

bear the brunt of keeping the balance between sovereignty and security on the one hand and connectivity-driven development on the other. While Nepal desires to get benefitted from the rise of India and China, Nepal hasn't been able to devise effective foreign policy mechanisms in dealing with newer geopolitical challenges in the region. While the rise of China has brought more economic opportunities to the small countries in South Asia, China's increasing presence in the region has also invited security challenges in the context of the Sino-US rivalry globally and Sino-Indian contestation regionally (Ranjan, 2021). Thus, both—economic aspirations and security challenges—happen to influence Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. The deepening relationship between India and the US to counter China's rise and unprecedented influence in the region complements the sources of change, which the political uncertainty in Nepal has further aggravated.

Sources of changes in Nepal's foreign policy behaviour vary at the bilateral, regional and international levels. On the bilateral front, the changes can be largely traced to Nepal's engagements with its two immediate neighbours and great power countries. Regarding Nepal's interactions and engagements with its two neighbours, the changes in Nepal's foreign policy are historically prompted by the strategy of regime security. A change in the government often depicts a policy shift. Two patterns can be generally observed: allying with India to seek legitimacy of the regime and moving closer to China to reduce Indian influence. Recently, the changes in Nepal's foreign policy behaviour toward China have roots in Nepal's hopes and aspirations of economic prosperity, connectivity, infrastructural development and participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The changes are more palpable in the popularly disseminated discourses like 'Nepal as a bridge between China and India' and 'transforming Nepal from a landlocked to a land-linked country. Beyond the neighbourhood, however, changes in the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal toward great power like the United States can be understood from Nepal's coping strategy in the context of the rise of China. Nepal's acceptance of the US-sponsored MCC but rejection of the State Partnership Program indicates the same. Issues of Tibet, terrorism and human rights have always lured the US into the region, which has multiplied the sources of changes in Nepal's foreign policy. Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards the US has been divergent in different cases. Nepal was against the USA's sanctions against Cuba and its handling of the Palestine-Israel situations, but it voted in line with the US over the Afghan and Russia-Ukraine crises.

Nepal's regional engagement is limited. Regionally, Nepal is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO), Bangladesh Bhutan Indian Nepal (BBIN). Although Nepal emphasises regional cooperation, it has not yet been able to materialise the opportunities through the process. Nepal's interaction with the member states of SCO and BIMSTEC is scarce and infrequent. While Nepal hasn't been able to hand over the chairmanship of SAARC to Pakistan owing to the Indo-Pak dispute, BBIN has also not made satisfactory progress. Against this backdrop, Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards regionalism evokes enthusiasm in the response but is largely limited as a platform for participation. For instance, Nepal is a dialogue partner of SCO but was not invited to the 18<sup>th</sup> Summit in Qingdao, China. Even after this event, Nepal has shown an interest in being a full member of the SCO. It suggests that Nepal's foreign policy towards the regional process is more like a platform of participation and representation instead of reaping larger benefits with its pragmatic diplomacy.

In major international organisations, Nepal has also displayed similar traits. Despite being elected two times as a temporary member of the United Nations Security Council, and serving as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council since 2018 (United Nations, 2021), Nepal's participation is motivated by moral and normative components in its foreign policy. Nepal has contributed to world peace through the United Nations Peacekeeping missions. Currently, Nepal is the second-largest troop contributor to peacekeeping missions (Nepal Army, 2022). Nepal has shown adherence to international law as it has been part of many international conventions regarding human rights, humanitarian law, and political, civil, economic, and cultural rights. Nepal has been a strong advocate of the problems faced by the least developed and landlocked countries. Still, institutional deficiencies and a dearth of robust diplomatic engagement have limited Nepal's participation in acts of representation and articulation alone.

Thus, the sources of changes observed in the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal at the bilateral and multilateral fronts are assorted and diverse, because of which a certain level of divergence from stipulated foreign policy objectives is obvious. Such divergences have made Nepal's foreign policy appear adventurist and pragmatic at other times. Upon the same realisation, the upcoming section aims to analyse the Russia-Ukraine crisis to determine the nature or pattern of the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal toward great power politics.

### **3.5 Mapping Foreign Policy Behaviour of Nepal in the Russia-Ukraine Crisis**

Despite the minimal study and research on both, Nepal takes pride in mentioning non-alignment and neutrality as its foreign policy directives. For Nepal, non-alignment

foreign policy refers to not being aligned with any security bloc and treading a middle path (Bhattarai & Pulami, 2022). Nepal's claim to non-alignment has been critiqued by its southern neighbours for different periods. Despite its non-neutral history (Bhattarai, 2022), Nepal's attempt at neutrality is more rhetorical (Adhikari, 2012). As such, Nepal hasn't been able to adhere to the established foreign policy principles successfully. Instead, it has been divergent. A study of Nepal's foreign policy response to the recent Russia-Ukraine crisis may explain such divergence more clearly.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis depicts the effects of the residue of Cold War politics on international geopolitics today (Chotiner, 2022). The conventional clash between NATO and Russia has languished in Eastern Europe since the Cold War. Eastern Europe countries are the most volatile states today after the disintegration of the USSR in the 1990s (Mankoff, 2022). Ukraine is one of the largest territories that separated from the USSR in 1991, and the country has shown interest in being part of NATO, which, in several instances, displayed a positive response towards incorporating Ukraine into the alliance (Mankoff, 2022). However, internal political thrifts, Russian influence, and the reluctance of some of the NATO members to grant membership to Ukraine delayed the process (Metre, Gienger, & Kuehnast, 2022). In 2020, NATO included Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner for deeper cooperation in NATO-led missions and exercises (Richter, 2022). In response, Russia encircled Ukraine from three sides, in April 2021, with 100,000 soldiers, which Russia claimed was a special military exercise (Richter, 2022). The tensions simultaneously increased between Russia, NATO, and Ukraine. Finally, Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 2022 (Mankoff, 2022). Throughout the invasion, there has been a massive loss of property and lives and severe human rights and humanitarian law violations. The refugee crisis has escalated, and the geopolitical scenario has impacted the international world order (Metre, Gienger, & Kuehnast, 2022).

The world became sympathetic towards Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and condemned the Russian invasion. Emotions streamed throughout the globe in support of Ukraine. The Russia-Ukraine crisis has divided the world into different blocs or highlighted the pre-existing global divisions (Chotiner, 2022). The division was also observed in the United Nations General Assembly voting processes. Although most states condemned Russia's actions, some countries abstained or did not vote against Russia. In the resolution- "Aggression against Ukraine" adopted by UNGA, 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution, five countries voted against it (Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, Russia, and Syria), and 35 countries abstained from the process (including Bangladesh, China, India, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and others) (United

Nations General Assembly, 2022). Also, in another resolution (“Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine”) adopted by the General Assembly, 140 countries voted in favour, five voted against it, and 38 countries abstained. This voting process illustrated a clear-cut division between the member of the United Nations (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). Some countries abstained from the process owing to the greater probability of geopolitical repercussions and foreign policy challenges they may confront.

Showing full support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and self-determination, Nepal voted in favour of Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly (Jha, 2022). However, analysts may agree or disagree with the stance taken by Nepal towards this crisis. Those who disagree contend that the foreign policy fundamentals of non-alignment and neutrality should have been adopted by Nepal (Jha, 2022). Those who agree cite Nepal’s foreign policy of world peace and UN charters to justify Nepal’s foreign policy response. But, while presenting ‘for’ and ‘against’ statements on Nepal’s stance, several other factors that shaped Nepal’s foreign policy behaviour towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis should also be considered.

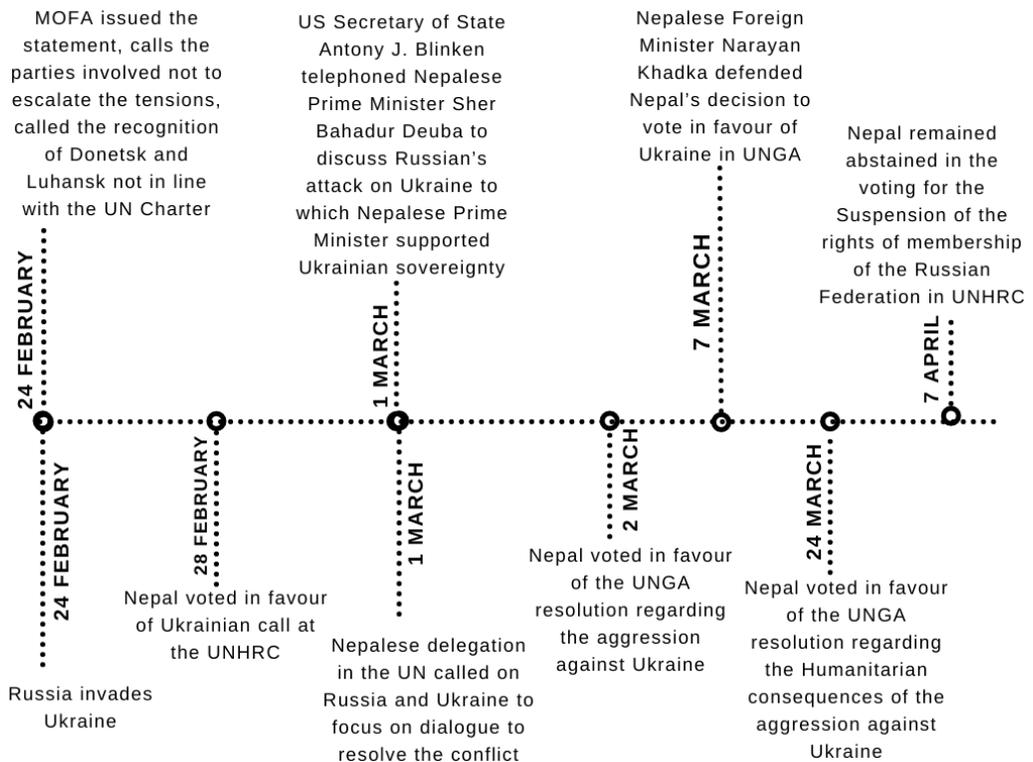


Figure 1: Timeline of Nepal’s Response to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis

The incumbent government justifies Nepal's initial condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in Nepal as the country's long-standing commitment to the peaceful settlement of the dispute, the United Nations Charter, and respect for a country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. The Foreign Minister of Nepal, Dr Narayan Khadka, defended Nepal's decision citing that Nepal hasn't taken a side, instead "we stood for human rights, peaceful co-existence of small countries and the UN charter... respecting the idea of non-alignment policy doesn't mean that we are associated with one particular camp" (Giri, 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement on the day Russia invaded Ukraine was also disseminated as Nepal's unwavering adherence to international law in Russia's recognition of the two republics in Eastern Ukraine. While Nepal's stance is justified similarly, it's also best to look into several other factors that shaped Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. During the early days of Russian military aggression, Nepal's domestic politics faced a debatable and challenging transition to ratify the MCC. For the ratification process, an appreciable amount of influence from the side of the external actors was debated. On February 28 2022, Nepal voted in favour of the Ukrainian call at the UNHRC for an urgent debate on the crisis. On March 1, the US Secretary of States Antony J. Blinken telephoned Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to discuss Russia's attack on Ukraine, to which the Nepali Prime Minister instantly extended his support to the Ukrainian sovereignty (Jha, 2022). Also, on the same day, Nepal's Permanent Representative to the UN called the delegations of Ukraine and Russia and reiterated the significance of dialogue to resolve the conflict (Jha, 2022). On March 2, Nepal voted in favour of the General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/ES-11/1), supporting Ukraine against the aggression by Russia (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). Thus, Nepal's foreign policy response was not only driven by the foreign policy objectives of world peace, international law and UN charters but more by the relation of the Deuba-led government with the United States in the context of MCC ratification.

As such, the pattern of events and the responses of Nepal to the crisis illustrates a clear divergence from the stated foreign policy objectives. Nepal, in this case, seems to be exercising the strategy of coping or bandwagoning, diverting away from the established foreign policy objectives of non-alignment and neutrality. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Nepal's foreign policy behaviour appeared surprisingly different from that of its immediate neighbours (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). Nepal has the sovereign right to differ and pursue an independent foreign policy choice. But, in the name of autonomous foreign policy response, a reckless, irresponsible and adventurist attempt may only jeopardise Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. Although India has close strategic ties with the United States in the Indo-

Pacific region, New Delhi chose to stay neutral, sensing the consequences of actions globally and regionally because of its conventional ties with Russia. But, Nepal's condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in response to perceived NATO expansion was more an adventurist attempt made in the manner to serve the interest of the United States rather than severing the interest of the international law, UN charter and world peace. As such, it was divergent from its established foreign policy principles. Foreign policy experts and security analysts were apprehensive of Nepal's decision to vote in favour. They argued that Nepal could have abstained as her neighbours did instead of displaying adventurism in its foreign policy against receiving US aid under MCC (Jha, 2022). Thus, Nepal's foreign policy response was characterised by discrepancy, inconsistency and unpredictability, leading to the divergence of its foreign policy behaviour from the constitutionally stated foreign policy objectives and principles.

### **3.6 Nepal's Foreign Policy Behaviour: Pragmatic or Adventurist**

The pragmatic approach to foreign policymaking and implementation in international relations is a goal-oriented problem-solving approach. Pragmatism in foreign policy can be what works to achieve the state's desired objectives (Phua, 2021). It offers flexibility in establishing goals for a state to pursue the way that works in a given situation (Phua, 2021). It doesn't demand a single ideology but rather stresses the method that sustains its practical orientation. Similarly, 'risk' has been an unavoidable factor when analysing the foreign policy behaviour of any state (Lamborn, 1985). The 'risk' as a factor is a practical element in analysing the divergence in policy choices (Lamborn, 1985). Small states express this adventurist nature of foreign policy choices because of the structural constraints they confront variously (East, 1973). Such a nature may be markedly unfolded after a complex situation or crisis compels decision-makers to take the risk (Phua, 2021) without making a cost-benefit analysis. Nepal's foreign policy choices have offered numerous such cases designating pragmatism and adventurism in the country's external affairs (Bhattarai, 2022).

The foreign policy of Nepal has been outlined in the Constitution of Nepal. The integrated Foreign Policy document, published in 2020 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, further elaborates on Nepal's foreign policy objectives. Before the integrated foreign policy was introduced, matters related to Nepal's foreign policy were scattered and expressed in national documents, Constitution, security policies, speeches, and annual budgets. The lack of an integrated foreign policy document was fulfilled by its focus on soft power, track II diplomacy, public diplomacy, labour diplomacy, climate change, multidimensional connectivity with the neighbouring countries, and resolving border disputes (Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The primary objective of the foreign policy of Nepal is to enhance the dignity of the nation and safeguard sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and border security, and promote economic well-being and prosperity (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). These objectives are guided by the principles of *Panchasheel*, mutual respect, non-interference, mutual equality, non-aggression, cooperation for mutual benefit, values of world peace and the UN Charter (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The policy of non-alignment has been a core element of Nepal's foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The foreign policy agenda is to have cordial relations with all and enmity with none (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Nonetheless, Nepal's foreign policy priorities have changed with the changing dynamics of global affairs and regional security framework. And it is not uncommon for the foreign policy priorities of any country to change because of several actors and factors shaping Nepal's foreign policy.

The foreign policy priorities of Nepal have changed with the change in the regime or government. Besides the geopolitical variable, Nepal has also flaunted certain hopes and aspirations from the rise of China and economic development in India, which have fashioned Nepal's economic diplomacy. Still, in fulfilling the cause of economic diplomacy and addressing the tensions that have surfaced from the renewed geopolitical vulnerabilities, any divergence from the foreign policy objectives shall result only in inconsistencies in Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. Nepal's foreign policy behaviour discrepancies result from structural constraints and power capabilities. As Maurice East (1973) depicts, structural constraints and power capabilities breed small state syndrome. In an endeavour to showcase its power capabilities through unnecessary geopolitical ambitions, Nepal may pretentiously attempt to escape its small state syndrome. But, in doing so, Nepal's foreign policy behaviour may appear more adventurist. Balancing Indian influence in Nepal by increasing engagements with China in the context of Sino-Indian contestation and balancing Chinese influence in Nepal by increasing engagements with the United States in the context of Sino-US rivalry has revealed the adventurist component of Nepal's foreign policy. Changes in the priorities of Nepal's foreign policy were visible after the new government led by the Nepali Congress was constituted. While the erstwhile government led by the Communists had prioritised engaging with Beijing and the Chinese projects, the new government shifted its priorities to the West, repelling Beijing and luring its rival, the United States. But, while dealing with the great powers, a clear divergence from Nepal's foreign policy objectives was palpable. While the new government prioritised getting the MCC ratified, Beijing lobbied to prevent it and ease the implementation of procrastinated BRI projects. Although there was a visit from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in March 2022, his visit

did not include a comprehensive discussion on BRI and materialising the Trans-Himalayan Connectivity Network. Still, the high-level visits from the United States managed to attract the new government in Nepal towards the interest of Uncle Sam. Controversies that surfaced in Nepal over State Partnership Program (SPP) are an apt example. Nepal's foreign policy priorities towards India have changed with the new government. Issues related to peaceful resolution of border disputes and the EPG report that the Oli government extensively prioritised featured neither in Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to New Delhi nor in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lumbini. Nepal's active condemnation of the acts of Russia on Ukraine, unlike its close neighbours, marks a shift in the foreign policy response to global issues. The call from the US Secretary of State to Nepal's Prime Minister a day before Nepal voted in favour of Ukraine portrays Nepal's behaviour at the multilateral level. However, at the regional level, as an incumbent chair of SAARC, Nepal could not hold the regional organisation responsible for resolving the Afghan crisis.

As Nepal's foreign policy response to major global and regional crises – and great power competition – remains divergent from its stipulated foreign policy objectives, Nepal's foreign policy behaviour becomes ambiguous, ambivalent and uncertain. The series of events and abrupt changes in foreign policy urgencies and priorities, as in the case of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, illustrates the unpredictability of Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. The divergence in foreign policy behaviour risks generating more worries, tensions and geopolitical vulnerabilities for this Himalayan country, which is situated in a geo-strategically sensitive location in the world.

Using the pragmatism and adventurism dichotomy to analyse Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards MCC, SPP, and the Russia-Ukraine case, it is understandable how Nepal demonstrated ambiguity and inconsistency in dealing with MCC and SPP. However, in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Nepal's stance is evident and consistent with Nepal's small state syndrome. Still, it is pertinent to note the level of disagreements among the Nepali public intellectuals and foreign policy experts on Nepal's behaviour towards the Russia-Ukraine crisis, MCC and SPP. The lack of national political consensus on the foreign policy response to the key events and major changes in the world of regional and international importance has also impacted Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. The absence of foreign policy institutions to research the areas of national interest, national security, and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy is evident. The dearth of foreign policy institutions indicates the absence of epistemic communities directing the country's foreign affairs and a deficiency in shaping public discourses regarding foreign policy agendas and priorities.

Table 2: List of Nepal's foreign policy objectives/ agendas/ priorities/ responses

Foreign Policy Objectives	Foreign Policy Agenda	Foreign Policy Priorities	Foreign Policy Responses	Foreign Policy Behaviour	Foreign Policy Institutions
Constitutional Directives; Integrated Foreign Policy 2020; Enhancing the dignity of the country, safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, promoting economic well-being and prosperity, border security, an independent foreign policy based on UN Charter, Non-Alignment, <i>Panchasheel</i> , international law, global peace, international security, neutrality;	“Equity with all, Enmity with None”	Attracting Foreign Investments, Aids, and Grants;  Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC);  Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)	<i>Bilateral:</i> No diplomatic attempts regarding the resolution of the border dispute with India; No substantial progress regarding the materialisation of the BRI projects; Reaffirmation of the One-China Policy;  Ratification of MCC by the parliament but rejection of SPP;  <i>Multilateral:</i> supported the UNGA resolution against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Nepal voted in favour of the Ukrainian call in the UNHRC  <i>Regional:</i> As the incumbent chair of SAARC, Nepal could not react to the Afghan crisis; no response to Sri Lanka's economic crisis	Ambiguous, Ambivalent, and Uncertain	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Nepal Council of World Affairs (NCWA), Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD)

Foreign policy institutions play an important role in shaping and directing foreign policy objectives. They are indispensable in training diplomats and preparing them for convergence in foreign policy objectives, priorities, and behaviour through knowledge production and policy reforms. The key foreign policy institutions in Nepal, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Nepal Council of World Affairs (NCWA), Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Policy Research Institute (PRI) and Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD) in Tribhuvan University (TU) are engaged in producing and reproducing knowledge on Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy. However, the challenges they face are numerous. Although various non-governmental institutes also work in foreign policy and security, they are more donor-driven and operated by interest groups and lobbyists. MoFA has faced huge constraints and limitations regarding resources and budget. While MoFA undergoes various structural constraints (political and economic), its foreign policy responses and behaviours are multifariously impacted.

The IFA, a government think tank, has not been as effective in providing the Government of Nepal with relevant and comprehensive recommendations. The IFA has also not been prompt and decisive in training diplomats. It was earlier focused on conducting seminars and publications, but this also has been halted recently. CNAS and NCWA, which once were unfailing, are also not functioning as policy institutions because of several limitations. The DIRD, too, remains confined to the teaching and learning process. Academic inquiry and theoretical debates at DIRD remain far away from the challenges of the real world. Although some of these institutions organised seminars and discussions on different facets of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and Nepal's foreign policy responses, they have been limited to discourses. They have not received a favourable environment in shaping the foreign policy choices of the country, where bureaucratisation of policy without required political intervention, lack of coordination between line ministries and respective stakeholders and dearth of public opinion on policy formulation have already afflicted the entire process of policymaking.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study discussed Nepal's foreign policy behaviour toward the Great Power politics by highlighting the case of Nepal's foreign policy responses to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. In doing so, it has been realised that a sharp divergence of foreign policy behaviour from the stated objectives may signal Nepal's foreign policy as ambiguous, ambivalent and uncertain. Also, it has been understood that a series of traceable deviations from the constitutional guidelines on Nepal's foreign affairs makes Nepali

international relations more pretentious and adventurist. It's where the hypocritical variant of Nepal's foreign affairs unfolds. While mapping the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal toward great power politics, several episodes of divergences in Nepal's foreign policy are presented. After all, there are several causes of the divergences in the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal. Swift changes in the foreign policy priorities after the regime change or change of government have influenced Nepal's foreign policy behaviour towards great power politics. Interests of great powers have also encouraged Nepal to modify the latter's foreign policy priorities hastily. It is reflected in Nepal's foreign policy response to the issue of conflicting interests between the great powers. Also, the incompetence of the existing foreign policy institutions to advise, execute, train, and produce knowledge has aggravated the policy divergence resulting in an ambivalent foreign policy behaviour. The required amount of trust, confidence, accountability and responsibility in foreign policy interactions may be squeezed. Instead, it shall generate distrust towards Nepal among the great powers, proliferating geopolitical challenges and hindering Nepal's aid-driven development activities.

By critically analysing Nepal's responses to the great power politics, its robbed foreign policy behaviour of the required institutional and policy support is understood. Thus, this study has emphasised the significance of the foreign policy institutions in bolstering the foreign policy behaviour by making the foreign policy responses more practical with the foreign policy agendas exalting Nepal's international image. In doing so, foreign policy priorities should be more consistent, convincing, credible, and, most importantly, in line with the foreign policy objectives.

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## Author's Bio

### Gaurav Bhattarai

Gaurav Bhattarai is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (DIRD), Tribhuvan University. He also teaches Strategic Studies to the officer cadets at Nepali Military Academy. His areas of interest are national security, South Asian Studies, Small States and Nepal-India-China. His articles on the same areas are published in prominent international journals.

### Manish Jung Pulami

Mr. Pulami is PhD Scholar of International Relations at South Asian University.

