



## **Nepal-USA Diplomatic Relations (April 25, 1947): A Historical Overview**

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Received: January 11, 2026,

Revised & Accepted: April 30, 2026

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Most Rana Prime Ministers restricted Nepal's foreign policy to relations with Britain alone. However, Prime Minister Padma Shumsher Rana, initiated a policy shift toward expanding diplomatic ties with other nations.

**Objective:** This article examines the circumstances leading to the establishment of Nepal-US diplomatic relations on April 25, 1947 the mutual interest of both countries and the provisions of the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship.

**Methods:** The research employs qualitative historical methodology using descriptive and Analytical approaches drawing from primary and secondary sources including government documents, Academic books, articles and contemporary newspaper (Gorkhapatra). Gregorian (A.D.) and Bikram Sambat (B.S.) date systems are used in the main text of the books, journals, news papers etc. However, A.D. has not mentioned in English dates and B.S. has been referred in Nepali dates.

**Key Findings:** The Treaty of Commerce and Friendship (12 articles) established diplomatic relations based on equality. Key events included the presentation of the US 'Legion of Merit' to Prime Minister Padma Shamsher (November 1946) and Joseph C. Satterthwaite's arrival as President Truman's special representative (April 1947). Nepal sought to preserve Rana Rule amid anticipated British withdrawal from India, while the US aimed to prevent communist expansion in South Asia.

**Conclusion:** While the Rana rulers political objectives remained unfulfilled (the US did not support them during the 1951 Anti-Rana revolution), The US successfully achieved its goal of containing communist influence. the Treaty remains active with no termination notice to date.



**Keywords:** Treaty of Commerce and friendship (1947), Padma Shamsher, Legend of merit, Nepal-US relations, Cold war diplomacy, Rana regime

## **Introduction**

### **Prime Minister Jung Bahadur and Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher to U.S. Ambassadors**

During his visit to Britain in 1850, Prime Minister Jung Bahadur met and exchanged introductions with the American ambassador to Britain, Lawrence, in London (JBR, 2059 BS; Rana, 1980). In 1866, he also expressed a desire to send Nepali troops to assist during the American Civil War to President Abraham Lincoln (Manandhar, 2004). It is possible that Jung Bahadur was inspired by the introduction exchange with the American ambassador in Britain to express a desire for military cooperation during the American Civil War to strengthen relations with the U.S. In 1908, Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher also exchanged introductions with the then American ambassador during his visit to Britain (Shiwakoti & Dahal, 2060 BS). However, these interactions alone were not sufficient to bring Nepal and the U.S. closer together.

### **American Perspective on Accepting Nepali Goods with Minimal Customs Duties**

In 1910, William H. Michael, the American Consul General in Calcutta, mentioned that goods imported from Nepal could be accepted with minimal duties according to the then American customs regulations (US Informations Service, n.d.). This implies that at that time, the American government was willing to establish trade relations with Nepal and was ready to impose only minimal customs duties on Nepali goods. However, detailed information on this matter is not available.

### **Visit of Nepali Minister General Krishna Shamsher Rana to the United States**

In 1939, Nepali Minister General Krishna Shamsher Rana visited the United States. This visit is considered the first official visit to the U.S. on behalf of Nepal (Khanal, 2004). The specific purpose of his visit across the Indian Ocean to the United States remains unclear.

### **Nepal's invitation to the American technical experts**

The first official contact between the two nations occurred in 1945 during a formal meeting in New Delhi between Nepali officials and technical experts from the U.S. Foreign Economic Administration (Swatantra Bishow, 1987). On this occasion, the Nepalese government invited American technical experts to come to Kathmandu for discussions on Nepal's economic development with the aim of expanding relations with the United States (Dharamdashani, 1984). But, it remains unclear whether those American technical experts were aware of their visit to Nepal at that time. Nevertheless, these events helped create an environment that brought Nepal and the United States closer together.



### **Clear stance of Nepal to expand diplomatic relations with USA**

Most Rana Prime Ministers adopted a policy of limiting Nepal's diplomatic relations to the British in India, which prevented the expansion of Nepal's diplomatic relations throughout the Rana era. However, the last Rana Prime Minister, Padma Shamsher, abandoned this policy and pursued a strategy to expand Nepal's diplomatic relations with other nations. Government representatives also clarified Nepal's foreign policy accordingly at various international conferences. In March 1946, General Vijaya Shamsher Rana expressed at the 'Afro-Asian Relations Conference' in Delhi, attended by political leaders and social figures from 28 countries (Gorkhapatra, 2005 BS) that Nepal wishes to strengthen its relations with its old friends while extending a hand of friendship to other nations of the world (Muni, 1973). This statement allowed the international community to understand that Nepal wanted to abandon its old foreign policy and expand diplomatic relations with other nations.

### **U.S. Military's highest honor, the 'Legion of Merit' to the Prime Minister Padma Shamsher**

The Second World War played a significant role in bringing Nepal and the United States closer together and establishing diplomatic relations. Nepal's participation on the side of the Allies during the Second World War allowed Nepali and American military forces to interact for the first time. The bravery displayed by Nepali soldiers during the war greatly impressed the American government, military, and public. After the Allies' victory in the war, Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher sent a congratulatory and best wishes message to U.S. President Harry S. Truman (Ghimire, 2063 BS). At the same time, the Nepali Minister in London, General Singh Shamsher Rana, also visited the United States on behalf of the Nepalese government towards the end of 1945. During this visit, he met with President Harry S. Truman and other high-ranking officials (Swatantra Bishow, 1987). In this context, in July 1946, a Nepali delegation also visited the United States as guests of the U.S. State Department and the War Department (Swatantra Bishow, 1987). This goodwill delegation was led by the then Eastern Commanding General Babar Shamsher Rana. The delegation, which spent ten days in the U.S., was warmly welcomed by the American government as official guests, with tours of places like Washington and New York, as well as demonstrations of military training. During the meetings, U.S. President Harry S. Truman expressed that the American government would also send a delegation to visit Nepal, extending a hand of friendship in recognition of the military assistance, Nepal provided to the Allies during the war. At that time, President Truman also sent a photograph of himself as a token to Prime Minister Padma Shamsher (Gorkhapatra, 2003 BS), while the Nepali delegation presented the 'Om Ram Patta' decoration to President Truman on behalf of King Tribhuvan (Shah, 1996).

In accordance with the wishes expressed by U.S. President Truman to the Nepali goodwill delegation to advance friendship with Nepal, he considered sending a delegation to Nepal and awarding the U.S. military's highest honor, the 'Legion of Merit,' to Prime Minister Padma Shamsher in recognition of the bravery and assistance provided by the Nepali army during the Second World War. For this purpose, President Truman sent a delegation led by American



acting ambassador to India, George R. Merrell to Kathmandu. Accordingly, in November 1946, Merrell arrived in Kathmandu and presented the 'Legion of Merit' to Prime Minister Padma Shamsher on behalf of the U.S. government (Swatantra Bishow, 1987).

On this occasion, U.S. Minister Louis W. Henderson, who accompanied George R. Merrell to Nepal, stated that 'this honor is the highest honor given by the United States to any foreign nation's prominent figures, praising the bravery shown by the Nepali army in collaboration with the Allies during the First and Second World Wars' (Gorkhapatra, 2005 BS). Thus, the fact that the United States, as one of the world's most powerful countries after the Second World War, recognized and honored the bravery of the Nepali army by awarding its highest military medal to Nepal clearly indicates that the U.S. viewed Nepal from an important perspective.

The function presenting the 'Legion of Merit' played an important role in establishing diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States. During the function of presenting the 'Legion of Merit', U.S. acting ambassador George R. Merrell made significant statements. The main part of his speech was as follows;

The United Nations (United States of America?). However, Nepal had also returned home from the battlefields of Europe. Nevertheless, my country has decided that as long as the fascist oppressors are not removed, the peace-loving nations of the world will not be free from fear. Therefore, Nepal has sent its sons to fight willingly. I firmly believe that the close relationship between America and Nepal will continue to grow stronger in the coming era of peace. America has moved forward towards Nepal for friendship and good wishes (Gorkhapatra, 2003, p. 1-4).

According to the statements given by George R. Merrell made clear that the United States wants to establish permanent diplomatic relations with Nepal. In response to the statements of George R. Merrell, Prime Minister Padma Shamsher expressed his opinion as follows;

We all are pleased that you have graciously shared welcoming remarks with us. From a new world, your first visit to Nepal, the oldest Hindu state, from America, is a historic event. We salute your great nation. With gratitude, we wholeheartedly welcome your wishes and friendship that you have extended to us. We hope that the close and joyful relationship during times of conflict will become even closer in times of peace (Gorkhapatra, 2003, p. 1-4).

This statement by Prime Minister Padma Shamsher clearly indicated that Nepal also wishes to establish diplomatic relations with the United States. At the conclusion of the medal presenting ceremony, Prime Minister Padma Shamsher expressed his commitment to make every effort to strengthen the friendly relations between Nepal and the United States (Gorkhapatra, 2005 BS). On that occasion, Prime Minister Padma Shamsher also formally invited the U.S. government to send a special delegation to Nepal to establish diplomatic relations and to sign a Commerce and Friendship Treaty. George R. Merrell stayed in Kathmandu from November 16 to 22, returned to the U.S. with the invitation from the Nepalese government.



### **Establishment of Diplomatic Relations**

According to the expressions made by representatives of both countries for joining diplomatic relations between the two countries in the occasion of presenting 'Legion of merit', U.S. President Harry S. Truman appointed Joseph C. Satterthwaite as his special representative to conclude a 'Commerce and Friendship Treaty' with Nepal, sending him to Nepal in April 1947. Accordingly, Satterthwaite arrived in Nepal on April 13, 1947, and on April 21, he presented President Truman's letter to King Tribhuvan (US Informations Service, n.d.). Four days later, at 2:31 PM on April 25, the 'Commerce and Friendship Treaty' was signed and established diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States in a meeting at the Singha Durbar Gallery Baithak. The treaty, made on the basis of equality and parity (Thapa, 2069 BS), was signed by Prime Minister Padma Shamsher on behalf of Nepal and by Satterthwaite on behalf of the United States. Although, the President Truman was not present on that occasion, but honoring him, a 21-gun salute was given to him while a 31-gun salute was fired in honor of King Tribhuvan, along with a salute band for both (Gorkhapatra, 2004 BS). The treaty was signed on a Friday, deemed auspicious by Nepali astrologers (Swatantra Bishow, 1987). After the signing of the agreement, Nepali military generals requested assistance to American officials for Nepal's economic survey, feasibility studies for hydropower production, and the establishment of industries in the Terai region. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, embassies were not immediately opened in both countries. It was decided that the American ambassador to India would also serve as the ambassador to Nepal, and the Nepali ambassador to London would serve as the ambassador to the United States. Later, in 1959, embassies were established in both countries.

In the treaty, U.S. President Truman addressed Nepal as a sovereign nation. After World War II, the emerging superpower of the world, United States recognized Nepal as a sovereign state for the first time in written form, allowing this agreement to present Nepal to the international community as an independent and sovereign country. This treaty can be considered a significant historical event as it showcased Nepal's own independent status in the international arena. This constituted Nepal's second formal diplomatic relationship, following that with Britain. Therefore, in an interview, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, Leon J. Wile had said that '...we are the second country of the world that recognized Nepal as sovereign country...' (Swatantra Bishow, 1988, 12). What he meant was that the United States was the nation that recognized Nepal as an independent and sovereign country after Britain. Indeed, by signing this agreement, the United States recognized Nepal's independence and sovereignty. When Nepal established this diplomatic relationship with the United States, there was British rule in India. Britain did not oppose this treaty, because there were good relations between Britain and the United States. Similarly, the neighboring country China and later becoming independence of India, there is no record of any reaction from the signatories of this treaty. Perhaps they did not oppose it because this treaty was related only to friendship and commerce, not to security and military matters. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, a 'General Agreement for Technical Cooperation' was signed in 1951. According to that agreement, 'USOM', later 'USAID', began to provide economic and technical assistance for the



development of various sectors in Nepal. This was significant for Nepal's development. In 1955, the United States helped Nepal to get membership of the United Nations Organization (Thapa, 2069 BS). This was also a result of the establishment of diplomatic relations with United States.

### **The interests of Nepal and the United States in establishing diplomatic relations**

At that time, Nepal and the United States had mutual interests in establishing diplomatic relations. The main objective of the Rana rulers in establishing diplomatic relations with the United States was to bolster their own power. There would be chance for Rana rulers to lose their great supporter, if British would be lose their rule in India. Therefore, seeing the end of British rule in India, the Rana rulers adopted a policy of connecting relations with another powerful nation to preserve their rule. For this, the neighboring country of China could have been suitable. However, as the influence of communists was increasing in China, they saw no possibility of receiving support from China and instead looked to Western nations as potential allies. The Americans had a good relationship with the British, and diplomatic relations with British India were also established. Even after the British were expelled from India, American presence remained. Thus, the Rana rulers aimed to maintain their rule by obtaining support and assistance from the Americans, just as they did from the British. Therefore, they established diplomatic relations with the United States. It is also said that the Rana rulers wanted to gain international recognition that Nepal, governed by them, is an independent and sovereign nation. For this, they adopted a policy of establishing relations with other nations and moved forward to build friendships with powerful countries like Britain (Sharma, 2006). It is also said that Prime Minister Padma Shamsher's objective in establishing diplomatic relations with the United States was to bring in economic assistance from America (Amatya, 2004). Their attention was directed towards the United States, and in this context, Nepal established diplomatic relations with America. However, contrary to their hopes and objectives, during the Anti-Rana revolution in 1951, the United States did not provide any kind of support to the Rana rulers. Instead, the U.S. accepted the political changes of 1951. Therefore, the political interests that the Rana rulers had in establishing friendly relations with the United States were completely unsuccessful.

Establishment of diplomatic relations with Nepal by America was not a ruler's interest as Nepal. They had nation's interest to join diplomatic relations with Nepal. Initially, the main objective of the United States in seeking relations with Nepal was to end British influence in Nepal (Bhandari, 1980). However, as time passed, the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Nepal to expand its influence in South Asian nations and to prevent the entry of communist influence in Nepal. The increasing power of communists in China and the potential exodus of the British from India indicated a possibility of growing communist influence in the region. The U.S. wanted to prevent the spread of communist influence in this area. The conclusion of the U.S. was that only if it could fill the power vacuum created by the British exodus from India could it stop the communist influence. Therefore, by establishing a friendly treaty with Nepal, the U.S. aimed to prevent the spread of communist influence in this region. Similarly,



at that time, the Soviet Union was also increasing its communist influence in Asian nations. For this, the Soviet Union could have made a weak nation like Nepal a focal point. Therefore, the U.S. did not want to allow the influence of Soviet and Chinese communist regimes to spread in Asian nations. Thus, the U.S. adopted a policy of establishing diplomatic relations with Nepal to assert its presence before such a situation arose. With this objective, the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Nepal.

It is also said that due to the Cold War with the then Soviet Union, the U.S. wanted to establish friendships with countries in every corner of the world to bring them to its side. Therefore, the desire shown by the Rana rulers of Nepal to maintain friendship with the United States was easily accepted by the United States (Karki, 2039 BS). The statement issued by the U.S. State Department shortly after the treaty also confirms this. According to the statement, the U.S. sought to maintain the power of a non-communist country like Nepal, increase the inclination of western democratic countries against the Soviet Union and its allied nations, engage Nepal in the global arena, and promote Nepal's development, economic advancement, and the development of political organizations in a democratic manner. The statement was as follows;

Our fundamental objectives with respect to Nepal are the maintenance in power of non-communist government, the continued orientation of such government toward the western democracies as opposed to Soviet Russia and its satellites and the increasing participating of Nepal in world affairs. We desire the development of Nepal's economy and political institutions along democratic lines (Jain, 1983, 181).

After this friendship treaty, the United States was also successful in preventing the influence of communism in Nepal. Therefore, the objectives with which the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Nepal were indeed successful.

### **Evaluation of the Agreement**

The Friendship and Commerce Treaty between Nepal and the United States was signed on April 25, 1947, and it established diplomatic relations between both countries. In some treaties between nations, a specific time period is set. However, this treaty does not specify any time period. Therefore, according to this treaty, diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States have continued to progress to this day. This treaty is based on equality. All the provisions mentioned in this treaty are agreed upon to be equally adhered to by both countries. Therefore, the duties and obligations that Nepal and the United States must fulfill according to the treaty, as well as the rights obtained by both countries, are of the same nature, with no differences.

The Friendship and Commerce Treaty between Nepal and the United States contains a total of 12 articles. As mentioned in the first article, both countries have become agreed that diplomatic and political relations will be established between the two countries from the day of ratification (Bebhans, 1972). The second article states that diplomatic representatives sent by one country to the other will enjoy all rights, privileges, freedoms, and exemptions according to international rules, laws, and norms in the territories of the other country. Similarly, the third article states that the rights and freedoms granted to diplomatic representatives of third countries in their respective countries will also be granted to the diplomatic representatives of



the other country, and there will be no reduction in those rights (Bebhans, 1972). According to the third article, both countries agree that no customs duties or taxes will be levied on the furniture, clothing, utensils, etc., necessary for the diplomatic representatives and offices sent by one country. The fourth article states that diplomatic officials, consular officers, and other workers from one country will be provided the facility to take necessary items to the other country without any customs duties, taxes, or levies. However, it is restricted that the workers should not be citizens of the respective country and should not be engaged in personal employment in the other country. Similarly, it can be seen that both countries have agreed that no customs duties, taxes, or levies will be imposed on the items sent by the respective country for diplomatic officials, consular officers, and other workers later on. However, the fifth article imposes some restrictions on the facilities mentioned in the fourth article. According to this, diplomatic officials must inform the relevant country's authorities in advance to obtain such facilities, and the relevant country may request information about such items, and if such items are found to be against the rules in the relevant country, there is a prohibition on sending or bringing back such items. This provision ensures that no party can bring items that violate the laws and interests of the relevant country, thus eliminating the fear of illegal items entering the relevant country.

According to the sixth article, both countries agree to provide facilities and protection to the citizens of each other's countries according to universally accepted international laws, ensuring the protection of their lives, property, and rights by the authorities and laws of the relevant country, and that the treatment of these citizens will not be less favorable than that of citizens of third countries residing in the relevant country. According to the agreement made in this article, when Nepali citizens go to America for various purposes, they will receive protection for their lives, property, and other rights, and they will be able to enjoy the same facilities and rights as citizens of other countries, which has become a positive aspect for Nepalese.

As mentioned in the seventh point, if the United States or Nepal has agreed on matters such as trade and maritime transportation facilities, privileges, customs exemptions, or the application of customs with any third country, both Nepal and the United States have agreed to grant and receive the same rights and facilities from each other accordingly.

However, if either country has accepted membership in the customs union, and if it has made an agreement with neighboring countries for the convenience of transit in the marginal areas (demarcated countries), and if it has established relations with countries that are parties to various economic agreements that are generally applicable in significant trade areas with the aim of promoting international economic relations or international trade recognized by the United Nations, then the provisions regarding special facilities provided or to be provided according to point seven shall not apply, as mentioned in point eight.

In point nine, rules regarding the import and export of luxury goods and military weapons are also made. This point mainly addresses the export and import of goods made of gold and silver, and military weapons, during times of national crisis, when it is necessary to fulfill the duty of maintaining international peace and security, and when rules need to be established for those coming from abroad to reside in the country. It is mentioned that both countries have the right



to create and enforce any kind of law or regulation that suits their interests. This means that if any rules need to be established regarding the matters mentioned above, such agreements will not cause any difficulties.

In the moral or humanitarian field, regarding humans, animals, plants, or health issues, or in the enforcement of rules related to customs and police, this agreement will not impose any restrictions, as clarified in point ten. As mentioned in point eleven, all the rules mentioned in this agreement will apply to all areas within the sovereignty and rights of both countries, but will not apply in the Panama Canal area. The provisions that some matters mentioned in the agreement between the two countries will not apply to the Panama Canal seem to take into account the interests of the United States.

It is mentioned in point twelve that this agreement will remain in effect continuously until another detailed trade agreement is made. Similarly, either Nepal or the United States has the right to terminate this agreement if they do not wish to continue it. However, for this, any country must provide a written notice of 30 days. Likewise, if points seven and eight need to be revoked, this can also be done, but a written notice of 30 days is required. However, until now, neither Nepal nor the United States has attempted to revoke the entire agreement or any matters in points seven and eight. This indicates that both countries are fully satisfied with this agreement. This agreement has been the driving force behind the Nepal-U.S. relationship so far.

### **The importance and characteristics of the agreement**

This agreement between Nepal and the United States has various characteristics and significance. This treaty was Nepal's second diplomatic treaty after the one with Britain. Until then, Nepal had not established diplomatic relations with any other countries besides these two. There is no time limit set in this treaty, which means that it is not specified that this treaty will be renewed after a certain number of years. Therefore, according to this treaty, diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States have been continuously advancing. This is not a treaty of win or loss; it is an agreement made between a large and powerful country and a small and weaker country based on equality and parity. This treaty does not include provisions where one country gives up or provides something while the other country only receives. This treaty is not related to military and security matters but is purely political and diplomatic, as well as related to trade and commerce. After this treaty was signed, Nepal established friendship with the United States, which emerged as one of the world's powerful nations after World War II. At that time, the Cold War was intensifying between the United States and the Soviet Union. This treaty could raise suspicions that Nepal might be part of the American bloc. Therefore, Nepal established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union on July 20, 1956 to show that the Soviet Union is also a friend of Nepal. This also played an important role behind establishing diplomatic relations with Russia.



## **Conclusion**

After the Rana rulers saw the end of British rule in India, they wanted to establish friendship with a powerful country like Britain to maintain their rule and felt it necessary to ensure their presence in the region to prevent the spread of communism from China and the then Soviet Union in Southeast Asia, leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States. It appears that the diplomatic relations between the two countries were established due to their respective interests. Initially, while establishing diplomatic relations with the United States, the interests of the ruling class played a role more than national interests, but over time, it seems to have fulfilled national sovereignty. This is because, after the establishment of diplomatic relations, the United States has provided significant assistance for the development of Nepal's infrastructure, the advancement of democracy, and the protection of human rights. This has strengthened the relationship between the two countries.

**Transparency Statement:** The author confirms that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

**Funding:** The study received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** The researcher would like to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their comments, which have greatly improved the paper.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.



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