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UN Peacekeeping as a Pillar of Nepal's Soft Power

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Abstract

Being small doesn't limited Nepal's efficiency to participate and become a number 1 contributor to the UN Peacekeeping. Nepal has limited hard power, but still peacekeeping helped Nepal to be visible in international forums. Remittance and economic support from peacekeeping directly support for the family and gradually contribute to the national economy and other development. Nepal's military service abroad has long history (e.g, Gorkha regiment, British Army) and that has evolved as a modern form of Soft Power through UN Peacekeeping. Nepal also became an inclusive and progressive nation by gradually increasing participation of women peacekeepers. Due to political complexity and resource limitations peacekeepers faces dangerous environment but still Nepali peacekeepers shine as brave security forces. Peacekeeping transforms military capability into international trust, moral authority, and diplomatic credibility rather than coercive influence. This study uses qualitative research methods. The study makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The major finds are, UN peacekeeping remains the most visible and influential among Nepal's various forms of soft power. It reflects both professionalism and bravery of the Nepali Army. Limited research has been conducted before, that focuses specifically on its socio-economic impact on Nepal. This study tried to fill that gap by identifying Nepal's principal sources of soft power grounded in Joseph Nye's theoretical framework and analyze how peacekeeping participation enhances Nepal's soft power projection and explore the socio-economic effects of mission-related remittances, particularly at the household level.

Keywords

Nepal, Peacekeeping, Engagement, Diplomacy, Bravery

Introduction

Soft power according to Joseph Nye is the ability of a country to influence others through attraction and persuasion (Baruah, 2024). Even before Joseph Nye formally defined the concept of soft power, countries had already been using it as an important tool in international relations.

In the contemporary world, the trend of soft power plays extremely important role and this trend is not only emerging but has risen its importance in softer world where hard power is less effective. When the relation among states as only a balance of power, traditional approach to hard power based on military power alone is not sufficient. Changing global politics with new global players and actors emerging in international arena with growing complexity of interaction with power being dispersed among nations creating unipolar world to multipolar world (Joseph S. Nye, 2004) The emergence of soft power has not only given hope but also provided a new horizon where power is broadly distributed.

Currently, Nepal maintains diplomatic ties with 171 countries, and the use of soft power in its foreign policy and international relations has played an important role in fostering engagement and cooperation. Despite ranking 101st in the 2025 Global Soft Power Index, Nepal retains considerable untapped potential (Jagodzinski, 2025).

Peacekeeping is one of the most significant and enduring elements of Soft Power. Since 1958, Nepal has been mobilizing its army as a soft power instrument in the global stage. In 1974, with the deployment of its first peacekeeping contingent, Nepal's involvement in peacekeeping mission significantly expanded. Nepal's sustained and growing role as a contributor of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions is a major form of positive international reputation and soft power: Nepali personnel serve abroad in dozens of missions and that contribution enhances Nepal's global standing, goodwill and diplomatic capital (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Review of Literature

Nepal's Soft Power

The term 'Soft Power' came into practice only after the American Political Scientist Joseph Nye introduced it, if we relate the concept explained by Joseph Nye to soft power, it shows the primitive stage of society had also practiced it for building society back then. Power sometimes demonstrates itself as Cultural influence, language, tourism, education, policies, media etc. The question of how you utilize your resources to attract and influence others is the subject of how strongly you use your resources of soft power (Baniya, 2021).

Very recently, Joseph Nye has developed his concept of soft power in multiple phases, and it is being used in many academic and non-academic publications. Nye's efforts were a great success, as soft power became a widely known concept in International Relations and elsewhere (Parmar, 2010).

The strength of Nepal's soft power comes from natural beauty, cultural heritage, adventure tourism, Aayurveda hospitality, religious significance, spiritual significance, Gorkha regiment and UN peacekeeping participation. Nepal can elevate its soft power through cultural traditions such as 'Kukur Tihar', the festival that honors dog. As the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, Nepal holds a great spiritual significance which could serve as a powerful source of soft power. Sagarmatha and other beauty of mountain could also be its soft power for targeted tourist. Nepal should utilize these qualities to further strengthen its motive to identify and pursue soft power (Karki, 2023).

Nepal's assignments in UN peacekeeping missions reinforce its international standing, nurture friendliness and boost its soft power. It gives Nepal a global recognition by promoting peace, steadiness, and humanitarian values.

As Joseph Nye mentioned, the three major components of soft power are Culture, political values and foreign policy, and Nepal's soft power reflects all these elements. Nepal's cultural heritage and diversity, along with its pilgrimage sites are quite famous around the world. The local governments of Nepal are using sister-city diplomacy as a soft power instrument. Nepal has established sister-city relations with several countries including its neighbors China and India.

UN Peacekeeping as Nepal's soft power

United Nations peacekeeping operations are a unique instrument for advancing international peace and security. As a troop-contributing country, Nepal's peacekeeping troops have been meeting the expectations of those whose lives are ravaged by armed conflict and helping the UN Organization fulfill the purposes of the United Nations Charter with irreproachable integrity and professionalism.

According to the United Nations, UN Peace keeping is intended to steer the difficult path from conflict to peace. It has unique strengths including legitimacy, burden sharing and an ability to deploy troops and police from around the world. The major role of the UN is to integrate civilian peacekeepers with peacekeeping troops to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council and General Assembly (United Nations Peacekeeping n.d).

The UN diplomatic process can be characterized in a variety of ways. It has also historically been known as conference diplomacy, public diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, or parliamentary diplomacy. On occasion, it has also been referred to as bloc diplomacy, group diplomacy, and majority diplomacy (Adhikari, 2024). The core concept of Nepal's Foreign Policy is UN Peacekeeping. Nepal Army has gain constructive status around the world as a skilled security institution.

Through the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, the Nepalese Army commanders play an invaluable role in the promotion of foreign policy via diplomacy. Different UN peacekeeping mission units carry out day-to-day activities of military diplomacy within the United Nations structures. The military service components representing the Nepal Army through different Infantry Battalions, Engineering Companies, and Special Forces companies provide the manpower, resources, and expertise required to perform Peacekeeping operations mandated by the United Nations. They also perform military-to-military cooperation, conferences, exercises, and exchanges. Besides that, they also carry out humanitarian operations, human rights missions, and other civil-military affairs, which help and fulfill the UN mandate and charter as well (Kafle 2022).

In 1958 Nepal deployed first batch of United Nations peacekeeping troops in Lebanon, since then Nepal has emerged as top troop contributor country to UN peace operations. Nepal's engagement in United Nations peacekeeping operations has become a noteworthy element of its international identity, foreign policy and security strategy with over 135000 personnel having served in various missions (Troop and Police Contributors, n.d.). Nepal has currently deployed more than 6000 troops in 11 different missions. This role has been increasingly demonstrating Nepal's ability to influence others through attraction rather coercion, a term coined by Joseph Nye.

UN peacekeeping is extensively argued as one of Nepal's robust sources of soft power because it adapts military professionalism into international trust, goodwill, and diplomatic influence without coercion. Nepali Army's unswerving contribution and reliability, normative configuration with UN values, people-to-people diplomacy on the ground, symbolic identity and national branding are some of symbolic coherence that strengthens Nepal's soft power by making its international behavior consistent, credible, and easily recognizable.

Socio-Economic Impact on Nepal due to UN Peacekeeping

Nepal participates in training programs of the UN and receives financial and logistical assistance through UN peacekeeping, which indirectly benefits the country. Nepal leverages soft power through her foreign policy to maintain her independence, focusing on cooperation rather than confrontation. The remittances earned from UN peacekeeping missions provide significant socio-economic benefits to Nepal. These funds not only support individual families but also contribute to the national economy, development, and stability.

Since Nepal first participated in the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) in 1958 with the deployment of five Military Observers and later sent a battalion of troops (Shree Purano Gorakh Battalion) to the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in Egypt in 1974, peacekeeping missions have become an important source of financial inflows for the country. In 2019, the basic allowance of Nepal Army's soldier serving in mission increases by US \$ 85 per month to US\$ 1029 (Onlilekhabar, 2019). Nepal, consistently ranking among the top contributors to UN peacekeeping missions with over 5,000 personnel deployed, generates substantial revenue that significantly supports its Army Welfare Fund (Regmi 2025), which had a capital of NPR 77.61 billion (approx. USD 580+ million). Peacekeepers receive a monthly allowance of over USD 1,000 (around \$1,029–\$1,114), contributing to both individual welfare and the national economy in a form of foreign remittances.

These funds, sent through formal channels as portions of salaries, allowances, or savings, provide direct income support that helps reduce poverty and smooth household consumption, particularly during shocks such as illness, crop failure, or unemployment. They enable families to increase spending on essentials like food, housing, education, and healthcare, thereby improving living standards. In education, remittances cover school fees, uniforms, and materials, allowing more children, especially from poorer households, to remain enrolled (Byanjankar & Sakha, 2021), with long-term benefits for human capital and community productivity (Lamsal, 2024).

Discussion

Nepal's key sources of soft power

Nepal's key sources of soft power include its cultural richness, spiritual heritage, environmental uniqueness, diplomatic neutrality and peacekeeping contribution. Nepal's diverse cultural assortment containing traditions, festivals, art, music, architecture, and multi-ethnic society serves as a compelling source of attraction (Limbu, 2011). Iconic

World Heritage Sites like Kathmandu Durbar Square, Bhaktapur, and Patan, as well as Newar art and architecture, showcase Nepal's ancient civilization (Upreti, 2017).

Birthplace of Buddha

Nepal, the birthplace of Buddha, is renowned as peace loving country. Spiritual places like Lumbini play a crucial role in the dissemination of Buddhist philosophy. It is a significant spiritual and religious soft power across Buddhist world, especially in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan and Korea. Its Hindu-Buddhist syncretism and sacred landscapes attract both pilgrims and spiritual tourists (Dixit, 2021). UN Secretary-General praised Nepal, during his visit in 2023 as 'a promoter of peace, champion of multilateralism, staunch supporter of sustainable development' highlighting its diplomatic soft power (United Nations, 2023).

Mount Everest

Nepal can also foster climate change advocacy from the Himalayan perspective. Mount Everest is a key component of Nepal's soft power strategy. It could be a focal point for diplomacy particularly around climate change.

Education and Cultural diplomacy

The educational and cultural exchange specially in India and China, is also a forum of soft power of Nepal (Saxena, 2024). Nepal is a popular destination for Bangladesh, Tibetan and Indian students. Recently Nepal and China have increasingly organized such events and established sister city relation with several district of Nepal. Chinese students are also interested in learning Nepali language, resulting in an increasing number of students pursuing Nepali studies.

Nepali Diaspora

The Nepali diaspora living around the world can be also the key form of Nepal's soft power. In fact, Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNA) can boost the small and cottage industries abroad. The NRNA was involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of the earthquake in 2015 and extended humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic (The Rising Nepal 2022). "Article 8.15 of the Foreign Policy, 2077 presents a strategy to mobilize the knowledge, skills, capital, technology and network of Nepali immigrants in economic development. These include plans to connect experts through 'Braingain Centre', cultural promotion, mobilization of diaspora in economic diplomacy and establishment of Nepali language training center" (Saud, 2025).

Those highlighted features as Key soft power of Nepal prove the stance by Joseph Nye, in his definition of soft power. Nepal can utilize above mentioned points to promote itself around the world.

UN Peacekeeping as Nepal's Soft Power

American author cum blogger Faith Hunter beautifully put it, “You don’t have to shout from the mountaintops. Sometimes power comes in a soft, calm, compassionate way, like a quiet warrior.” Nepal’s participation in UN peacekeeping started in 1958 in the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL), Lebanon, with 5 Military Observers deployment. After that, one Battalion (Shree Purano Gorakh Battalion) of troops contingent was deployed in “United Nations Emergency Force”, UNEF, Egypt in 1974 (Kalyankari Darpan, 2021).

“The UN peacekeeping mission is a powerful platform for creating and maintaining soft power for Nepal. However, while soft power may seem less risky than economic and military power, it is difficult to use and easily lost without preservation. It requires time and effort to restore after being lost” (Rawol, 2025).

Nepali UN Peacekeepers have represented Nepal as the peace ambassadors in the multilateral and multinational environment. They have strongly demonstrated Nepal’s commitments towards international peace and security. The UN Peacekeeping contribution has enhanced our international visibility and image, ultimately the soft power which is beyond our geographical size and hard power. Civil-military cooperation, military diplomacy, humanitarian rescue, and reliefs are the military sources of soft power.

Nepali troops are widely respected for the discipline, dedication, and effectiveness. Their professionalism has helped shape a positive global image of this has earned Nepal trust and admiration from both developed and developing countries alike.

The ability of Nepali personnel to handle complex missions in volatile environments such as in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Lebanon has demonstrated their professionalism and maturity with dedication, devotion and discipline. This has not only increased Nepal’s diplomatic influence but also its soft power appeal, positioning it as a nation that supports global stability and cooperation.

“Nepal earned respect by deploying a robust peacekeeper in UNPKO. Nepal must continue participating in the future to contribute to world peace in line to her foreign policy objectives. Such participation will uplift national pride, credibility and international respect”. (R. Chhetri, personal communication, August 18, 2025).

“Moreover, female troops from Nepal have played a vital role in UN peacekeeping missions, demonstrating professionalism, resilience, and a strong commitment to promoting peace along with protecting the vulnerable communities around the world” (M. B. Malla, personal communication, August 9, 2025).

The Nepali Army is becoming an attractive employer in Nepal because of its contribution in UN peacekeeping. The longstanding contribution of peacekeepers has helped preserve and enhance Nepali soldiers’ operational and organizational skills, expertise, and the confidence required of professional servicemen. Regular participation in peacekeeping operations has also increased the peacekeepers’ understanding of universal human rights values, the importance of the rule of law, and the significance of professionalism (N. B. Chand, personal communication, August 8, 2025).

So far, Nepal has residential embassies in only 29 countries. However, we lack embassies in deployed peacekeeping missions such as UNIFIL (Lebanon), MONUSCO (DR Congo), and UNMIS (Sudan). In the absence of embassies, it will be extremely difficult to achieve wholehearted host nation support to carry out mandate implementation and force protection effectively in the mission area (P. Silwal, personal communication, August 7, 2025).

Though Nepal fully supports the gender equality and women empowerment, women serving in the uniform continue to encounter numerous disproportions to male counterparts. Recruiting and retaining more women in peacekeeping missions from Nepal may take longer time to meet the UN standard (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023).

Socio-Economic Impact

UN allowances and remittances have become important sources for the security forces “welfare fund” (N. B. Chand, personal communication, August 8, 2025). Unlike tourism, exports, or Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which often have broader sectoral and regional spillovers, peacekeeping remittances are concentrated among the families of deployed personnel. Their usage patterns are focused more on household needs rather than capital-intensive investments, though they do show general remittance trends in supporting education, housing, and health. Policy considerations should therefore account for the resilience of peacekeeping inflows when assessing external vulnerability, ensure mechanisms to channel such funds toward long-term development, and maintain a clear breakdown between private remittances and soldiers’ remittances for macroeconomic and social impact analysis (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2023).

Nepal's soldiers are more dedicated and motivated thanks to the financial assistance they receive from peacekeeping. The security forces welfare fund, which provides various welfare programs, medical facilities, educational opportunities, and humanitarian assistance to active military personnel, veterans, and their families, is largely funded by UN allowances and remittances. In our situation, the UN's financial assistance to the peacekeepers is more alluring than that of other outside sources.

Peacekeepers' remittances are also used to build or upgrade durable housing, purchase appliances, acquire land or livestock, and start small businesses, fostering local economic activity (Byanjankar & Sakha, 2021). By encouraging the use of formal banking services, these inflows enhance financial inclusion, improve savings and creditworthiness, and strengthen financial planning (World Bank, 2023). At the macroeconomic level, they contribute to stability by supporting aggregate demand, cushioning against domestic shocks, and helping maintain foreign exchange reserves, with potential to finance infrastructure, education, and health investments (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Socially, such remittances can empower women by increasing their role in household financial decisions and enabling them to pursue entrepreneurial activities. They also reduce vulnerability for households headed by single or elderly members.

Since many peacekeepers come from rural areas, their earnings help bridge rural-urban divides by funding housing, education, and enterprise development in less-developed regions. Some recipients invest in micro and small businesses, creating employment and enhancing productivity, while returning peacekeepers bring home skills and knowledge that benefit local communities. Importantly, remittances also serve as informal social insurance during crises such as natural disasters, pandemics, or job losses (Lamsal, 2024).

Compared to other foreign income sources, peacekeeping remittances are a smaller but notable part of Nepal's overall remittance receipts and GDP contribution (Sakya and Gonpu, 2021). While they are generally more stable than tourism receipts or merchandise exports due to predictable UN salary structures, they remain susceptible to policy changes, exchange rate fluctuations, and deployment cycles.

Conclusion

Nepal's diverse cultural assortment containing traditions, festivals, art, music, architecture, and multi-ethnic society serves as a compelling source of attraction. The country is friends of all the countries; it has maintained good relations with almost all the

countries around the world. After the 6-decade engagement, Nepali peacekeepers are representing Nepal in the international environment in a most professional manner.

UN Peacekeeping is seen as another synonyms of Nepal's identity. Peacekeeping not only gives recognition but is also very helpful to demonstrate Nepal's significant contribution to foreign policy objectives. Nepali Peacekeepers has maintained an active role, gaining international recognition for Nepal from the very beginning of the UN's establishment. Nepal's contribution to world peace has not only elevated its image but also helped achieve the broader goals of its foreign policy.

Nepal's foreign policy principles of non-alignment, peaceful coexistence, and respect for sovereignty, strengthening coherence between values and action affiliates closely with the Peacekeeping. Nepali personnel under the UN flag enhances national branding, elevates international respect, and contributes to people-to-people diplomacy across conflict zones.

With global recognition, Peacekeeping has also become a major source of revenue. Economic benefit from peacekeeping does not enlarge the life standard of the peacekeepers or their families but is also very helpful for overall economic and other developmental work. UN Peacekeeping is the major form of Nepal's foreign policy as it became the well-known factor to know about Nepal and the bravery of Nepali Army. Though Nepal has several means of soft power UN Peacekeeping can be used as the strongest instrument of Nepal's soft power.

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