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The Significance of Nepal's Geopolitical Location: Reality Check

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Abstract

This research paper investigates Nepal's geostrategic importance by analyzing its role as a significant nexus in South Asia. In ancient times, Nepal occupied a crucial geostrategic position as it served as a pivotal crossroads connecting South Asia, Tibet, and China, facilitating the exchange of commodities, ideas, and culture. The central argument posits that Nepal's geographic location endows it with substantial strategic significance, both politically and economically, enabling it to influence regional dynamics. Employing a mixed methodology, the research delves into various facets of Nepal's geostrategic relevance through historical assessments, geopolitical analyses, and case studies of hydro-politic potentiality. The approach commences by examining Nepal's historical role as a buffer state amid regional powers, leading to a longstanding history of diplomatic struggles to safeguard its sovereignty. Furthermore, the paper explores how Nepal's geographical position shapes its security dynamics, particularly in the context of the escalating China-India rivalry in contemporary times, employing geopolitical frameworks to illuminate this aspect. To shed light on Nepal's involvement in facilitating global trade and connectivity, the methodology also includes case studies of infrastructure initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and regional connectivity projects. In conclusion, the paper asserts that Nepal's geostrategic significance is a product of its historical development and proactive international relations, closely intertwined with its geographic positioning. It underscores Nepal's potential to serve as a conduit for regional cooperation and economic integration while emphasizing the need for astute navigation to preserve its independence in a challenging geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Buffer state, trade-transit routes, hydro-politics, border conflicts, political instability, cross-border initiatives

Introduction

Nepal's strategic location has long been a central element in the dynamics of the region, influencing its political, economic, and cultural exchanges. Nevertheless, despite its historical significance, more research is required to fully understand the opportunities and challenges

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Nepal's geopolitical location present today. The goal of this introduction is to set the stage for an examination of Nepal's historical development, security dynamics, and economic potential by highlighting the complex role that the country plays in South Asia.

The statement of the problem centers on comprehending the complexity of Nepal's geopolitical environment while taking historical factors and current difficulties into account. The purpose of this study is to investigate Nepal's capacity to manage the rivalry between China and India, the ramifications of serving as a buffer state, and the prospects for economic integration in a globalized world. Understanding how Nepal's geostrategic importance can be used for regional cooperation while preserving its independence in the face of a complex geopolitical environment characterized by border conflicts and political instability is the main challenge.

Nepal, often called the "roof of the world," is a country distinguished by its stunning scenery, vibrant culture, and, above all, its strategic location. Nepal's location, surrounded by China and India, the two most populous countries on Earth, makes it a vital actor in both regional and international politics. This article explores Nepal's actual geopolitical circumstances, analyzing their strategic significance and national ramifications.

Kathmandu- "A yam between two stones" is how Nepal's founding monarch, Prithvi Narayan Shah, described the Himalayan kingdom he forged out of dozens of feuding principalities in the 18th century. Even 250 years ago, it was evident to the country's founder that his new nation had to contend with the geopolitical influences of its two powerful neighbors—China to the north and British India to the south. Indeed, the British were immediately wary of the belligerent and expansionist new Himalayan kingdom. They invaded Nepal in 1814, and an ensuing two-year war ended in a stalemate. The 1816 Sugauli Treaty allowed Nepal to retain its independence in return for ceding more than half of its territory to British India. Great Britain then opened a legation in Kathmandu and began recruitment of Gurkha soldiers into its army. The warlike Nepalis also ventured north, crossing the Himalayan Mountains to invade Tibet twice in the 19th century. But what the Nepali generals hadn't bargained for was that the Chinese would come to the aid of the Tibetans. At the end of one campaign, Chinese and Tibetan forces chased fleeing Nepali troops almost back to Kathmandu itself (Dixit, 2014).

Nepal's relations with China are complex in the political, economic, and security domains as China is both its next-door neighbor and a long-standing economic partner. From a geopolitical perspective, China and India have long dominated Nepal's foreign policy. Nonetheless, there could be a three-way push and pull on the Himalayan nation due to the United States' rising interest in the area. Nepal should carefully craft its foreign policy so that its connections with China do not in any way cause it to become embroiled in a great power rivalry, in keeping with its non-alignment values. Instead, Nepal can profit economically from all three of these nations—China, India, and the US—by utilizing its geostrategic location (Thapa, 2023). This underscores the intricate geopolitical dynamics shaping Nepal's foreign policy decisions.

Nepal's connections with its immediate neighbors must be carefully balanced due to geopolitical factors. The historical, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and family links that bind us to India are profound. The two nations' open border policy facilitates the movement of people and goods. Yet there have been ups and downs in Nepali and Indian politics. Despite their shared historical ties, Nepal and China's bilateral relations are less on people-to-people

interactions and more about political and economic matters. Nevertheless, during the last ten years, China's influence in Nepal has grown significantly. These days, one of Nepal's most significant development partners is the United States (Thapa, 2022). "Geography does not argue; it simply is," as the saying goes. Nepal's situation is defined by its location. China opposes a stronger US involvement in Nepal. The United States believes that China is having a negative impact on Nepal's democracy and progress. India does not wish to jeopardize or lessen its own authority over matters pertaining to Nepal.

Literature Review

The literature review delves into existing scholarly works that explore Nepal's geostrategic significance. It includes case studies of surrounding nations, geopolitical analyses, and historical evaluations. Using conversations about buffer states, trade-transit routes, hydro-politics, and cross-border initiatives, the review aims to pinpoint knowledge gaps. A thorough grasp of Nepal's past and present geopolitical context is made possible by the research's foundation, which is provided by the analysis of the body of existing literature.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The research's theoretical framework examines how Nepal's geographic location affects its political and economic relationships by drawing on geopolitical theories. Theories like buffer state theory and regional geopolitics serve as a framework for investigating Nepal's function as a middleman between major powers.

Conceptual Framework

The concepts of hydro-politics, cross-border initiatives, and trade-transit routes are all included in the conceptual framework. This framework offers a structured approach to comprehending Nepal's regional significance and directs the analysis of its diplomatic and economic engagements.

Research Methods

This study uses a mixed methodology that incorporates case studies, geopolitical analyses, and historical evaluations. This methodology enables a thorough analysis of Nepal's geopolitical environment by combining qualitative and quantitative data.

Research Design

A longitudinal study that looks at both historical developments and current trends is used in this research design. Case studies of infrastructure initiatives, like the Belt and Road Initiative, offer a thorough comprehension of Nepal's approaches to economic integration.

Analytical Tools and Material

A range of resources are used in the analysis, such as historical records, case study techniques, and geopolitical frameworks. These resources make it easier to analyze Nepal's geopolitical dynamics in depth.

Interpretative Perspectives and Strategies

The examination of Nepal's diplomatic approaches to handle regional complexities is informed

by interpretative viewpoints. Through the use of interpretive techniques, the study seeks to reveal the complex aspects of Nepal's geopolitical decision-making.

The methodology section essentially presents a thorough method for comprehending Nepal's geostrategic significance, combining various elements to produce a well-rounded analysis.

Historical Context

Nepal is a landlocked country with exceptional geographical prominence in its region, nestled in the heart of South Asia. Its southern landscape extends to the enormous plains of India, while its northern bounds are delineated by the tremendous heights of the Tibetan plateau in China. Due to its unique location, Nepal is positioned as the natural link between two enormously powerful countries that are simultaneously striving to become global superpowers and the most populous countries in the world. There are important ramifications to this strategic placement. For countries such as the United States, this emphasizes Nepal's significance within the complex network of global diplomacy. Understanding the potential influence that this little Himalayan country has because of its closeness to China and India, the United States sees great benefit in fostering a strong relationship with Nepal. These connections are critical to ensuring that the United States maintains a balanced and significant presence in the dynamic political environment of South Asia, in addition to being advantageous for mutual growth and cooperation (Lama, 2023). This emphasizes Nepal's geopolitical importance within the larger framework of international relations.

The main reason why the British and Gorkhali conflicts in the Himalaya escalated was their want to dominate the main trans-Himalayan trade routes that pass through the Kathmandu Valley and eastern Nepal. These routes offered the British access to unexplored markets in Tibet and China for their manufactured goods. Conversely, the Gorkha rulers saw this trade as a means of generating income to support their continued territorial expansion in the Himalayan region. Early in the nineteenth century, British forces were able to curtail the ambitions of the Gorkhalis, but only after granting their broad demands for territorial sovereignty—guarantees that resulted in Nepal's virtual isolation. Tens of thousands of Nepali citizens fled to British India throughout the nineteenth century in spite of their country's rulers' deliberate political isolation. They did so in order to serve as plantation laborers and join the British army's illustrious Gurkha Brigade. As a result, even though Nepal's rulers steadfastly refused to recognize British India, their people formed an army of reserve labor that was vital to the political unification of the Indian subcontinent as well as the growth of the British colonial economy (English, 1985). This accentuates how migration, territorial aspirations, and economic interests have complicatedly interacted to shape the historical dynamics of the area.

Since the beginning of time, India and Nepal have shared civilizational links based on their shared geography, history, geo-culture, and various religions. The 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty established these complex relations. However, despite Nepal playing a significant role in India's neighbourhood policy, these bilateral ties have had many ups and downs over the past few decades. Since the 1950s, Nepal has yearned for democracy and has made some progress toward this objective. It has had seven constitutions so far, the most recent one being adopted on September 24, 2015. The constitution has been duly acknowledged by the comity of nations; nevertheless, India has expressed disapproval by only taking "note" of it,

which has caused significant repercussions in the bilateral ties (Singh, 2016). This focuses on how complicated the political and historical dynamics are between the two countries.

A quick rundown of Nepal's historical background is necessary to comprehend the country's geopolitical significance (Muni, 2017). Nepal has long upheld a policy of neutrality and non-alignment, which has freed it from the shackles of any one alliance and allowed it to interact with a variety of regional and international players. Since the middle of the 20th century, Nepal's foreign policy has been based on this neutrality.

Geopolitical Significance

Buffer State

The stability of the region has been largely attributed to Nepal's historical function as a buffer state separating China and India (Muni, 2017). Although this posture offers some protection, it has also placed Nepal in a precarious situation where it must carefully manage its relations with both of the nearby giants in order to preserve its sovereignty.

Nepal is ideally situated to act as a buffer because it is encircled by two extremely large nations. Tibet (not Nepal) served as a buffer during the British era, when Tibet was independent of China and British power stretched across the Himalayas. However, since China became a more powerful nation and began to occupy Tibet. It stopped performing the function of a buffer. The boundary of China was expanded to include Nepal. The five hundred-mile Nepal-Tibet border, which served as India's primary natural defense line, had now been exposed, making India's interest in Nepal crucial. The fact that the Himalayas to the north of Nepal might be breached in quite a short amount of time made the threat to India's security real. Since Nepal shares an open border with India and the Tibetan border forms the latter's northern border, the entire Indo-Gangetic plain would be severely exposed if China or any other country were to occupy or influence Nepal. Nepal holds a crucial strategic position in India's northern security system because of this. On December 6, 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru made a statement in the parliament that brought attention to the issue (Singh, 2010). Nehru's statement that emphasized the strategic significance of preserving stability in the region and emphasized Nepal's critical role in India's northern security.

The historical, geographic, cultural, and linguistic linkages that exist between these two South Asian countries are reflected in their deep popular and cultural ties. The superpowers have taken notice of Nepal due to its geostrategic location, which includes China and India. Nepal was seen by both British India and independent India as a key buffer protecting India's northern borders and serving as a buffer between the two countries. Since China annexed Tibet in the early 1500s, Nepal's foreign policy has been significantly influenced by India's security concerns. Once more, the Chinese military incursion into India in 1862 has increased the vigilance of our foreign policy advisors to protect this strategically significant Himalayan kingdom from subversion from both the inside and the outside. Therefore, despite the special relationship between these two neighbors that has been molded by both formal and informal causes, India-Nepal relations have faced difficulties over the past 50 years due to disagreements between India's security aspirations and Nepal's need for its own space (Shukla, 2006). Nepal is significant to India because it hugs the southern slopes of the Himalayas and straddles the People's Republic of China for five hundred miles along its northern border.

Nepal has always maintained a strategic position as a buffer state between China and India, which has influenced its careful balancing act. But recent events have caused controversy, especially in Beijing. Any outside attempts to strengthen connections with Nepal are seen by China as a direct threat to its hegemony in the area, which raises concerns about possible changes to the delicate power dynamics. With programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which functions as a substitute for China's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Nepal, the United States, in particular, has offered an alternative vision (Gupta, 2023). This stresses the geopolitical tensions brought about by outside factors and how they affect Nepal's relationships with powerful nations.

Nepal is still unable to fully capitalize on the economic potential due to internal political instability and conflict, despite the fact that dynamic geopolitical and geo-economics efforts are at risk, a topic that the participants seemed to be highly drawn to. Conversely, several participants felt that the rivalry between China and India prevented the country from asserting its position as a land bridge and a connection between these two economies (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022). It focuses on the difficulties the nation has in making the most of its strategic location given the dynamics of regional power.

Trade and Transit Routes

Nepal's trade and transportation routes are greatly impacted by its geopolitical location. Its supply of products and services is largely dependent on those of its neighbors, especially India (Acharya, 2016). Changes in border conflicts and transit arrangements may have a significant effect on Nepal's economy.

Nepal has long served as a transit country connecting China and India. The spread of Buddhism and the travelogues of the ancient Chinese and Tibetan travelers, Fa-Xian and Huan-Xang, attest to the fact that both countries utilized Nepal as a shortcut. The Malla Kings of the Kathmandu Valley had cordial ties with China and India during the Middle Ages. The magnificent monuments of the city were constructed in the 17th and early 18th century with the money earned by trade between China and India. Over the course of a century, the Shah regime's three wars with Tibet progressively strained relations, while India's relationship with Tibet strengthened as a result of its close proximity (Baral, 2022). It draws attention to the strain that the wars of the Shah regime placed on relations, especially with Tibet, and highlights the changing nature of Nepal's historical ties to its neighbors.

Hydro-Politics

Rai (2017) The health and prosperity of a nation are closely related to its natural resources, particularly its rivers, which are abundant freshwater sources. However, these water reserves become a competitive resource when rivers run across political borders (transboundary rivers), which causes political friction between nations.

Projects using hydropower provide several advantages. The most notable of these are that these projects have lower energy production costs than all other major plant types combined with lower operating and maintenance costs; they are also more efficient than all other plant types when using both renewable and non-renewable energy resources; they almost completely do not emit greenhouse gases; they can be used for multipurpose water use and water management, such as irrigation and river flow regulation during flood season and low flow periods; they are not affected by fluctuations in fuel prices or disruptions in supply; they

have efficient output regulation; they can respond quickly to changes in energy demand; they are based on dependable, mature technology with well-documented benefits and drawbacks; and they use renewable energy sources instead of fossil fuels or firewood. As hydropower plants use artificial river falls and hydraulic conveyance circuits that can be integrated into other components for multiple purposes like irrigation, water supply systems, fisheries, water tourism, etc., they constitute traditional energy sources that contribute to greenhouse effects or atmospheric pollution. The main advantage of hydropower plants is that they generate electricity without drawing energy from the environment (Adhikari, 2022). Since they are integrated into different components, they generate electricity without depleting natural resources, making them environmentally friendly.

Because of its enormous freshwater reserves, the Himalayan nation is frequently described to as the "water tower of South Asia". Due to these complicated water-sharing disputes with India, Nepal's geopolitical significance in regional dynamics is further highlighted (Rai, 2019). Nepal's vast river systems and spectacular Himalayan glaciers provide the majority of the country's water resources, which are the foundation of the country's agrarian economy and a major source of electricity (Smith, 2008).

An examination of the historical narratives and agreements that have defined the region's water management is necessary to comprehend Nepal's hydro-politics. Cooperative water use is based on historical accords, such as the 1954 Kosi Agreement with India (John, 1990). Subsequent events, like as the 1996 Mahakali Treaty discussions, highlight the difficulties in striking a balance between national interests and regional cooperation, nevertheless (Singh, 2005).

There are chances for equitable and sustainable water management in Nepal as it negotiates its hydro-political terrain. Addressing the difficulties brought on by the interaction of geopolitics, environment, and domestic governance can be aided by making investments in strong infrastructure, encouraging regional collaboration, and utilizing international partnerships (UNESCO, 2020).

Nepal has internal governance issues that make it difficult to use its water resources efficiently. The country's capacity to maximize water consumption for sustainable development is hampered by inconsistent policies, poor infrastructure, and low institutional capacity (Nepal Water Resource Council, 2019).

Nepal is a small state in the Himalayan area that sits between China and India. With over 6000 streams, rivers, and rivulets, including the four major rivers Koshi, Gandaki, Karnali, and Mahakali that account for about 75% of the Ganges flow, Nepal is regarded as having abundant water resources. Because of this, Nepal's theoretical 83,000 MW of hydropower potential is seen as a game-changer in terms of affordability, providing a significant and convenient supply of "clean" energy to meet the country's growing energy needs as well as those of neighboring India. These needs are met by large-scale hydropower storage projects that augment the low flow during the dry season and regulate the high flow during the monsoon season (Tandan, 2021). In Nepal, hydropower is the main source of electricity. At the moment, hydropower accounts for 96.2% of installed capacity, thermal plants for 3.7%, and solar plants for 0.1%. Of the 8.8 gigawatt hours of power used in Nepal in 2021, only 68% were produced locally; the remaining 32% were imported from India. However, there are a variety of obstacles facing Nepal's hydropower industry, including financial, social, environmental, and technological ones (Basnet, 2022).

Nevertheless, after decades of efforts to deploy hydropower, the nation is still unable to meet its energy needs. The deficiency of financial and human resources is among the causes. High project costs are another, and they are linked to different investment risks that are present in the nation. These risks are partially related to shifting laws and regulations, which give investors unease. They are linked together by issues of social acceptance and a lack of community engagement, which are causing local populations to rebel against the growth of hydropower. Investors shifted their focus from infrastructure projects to trade and social services, where the repayment period for investments is much shorter and uncertainties are less significant, due to the sunk costs of investment and the longer repayment period associated with uncertainty over medium- to long-term investment (Singh, 2020). This emphasizes how intricately social, political, and economic elements interact to shape the growth of hydropower initiatives across the nation.

Geopolitical Challenges

Border Conflicts

It is essential to study the historical treaties and agreements that outlined Nepal's borders in order to understand the country's border conflicts. Nepal's territorial boundaries have been significantly shaped by the Sugauli Treaty of 1815 and subsequent border delineations, which have also shed light on the underlying causes of current conflicts (Sharma, 2008).

(Acharya, 2016) Nepal has had border disputes with China and India in the past. There is a chance that these disagreements will increase hostilities and affect Nepal's sovereignty. Nepal is heavily involved in both geopolitics and geostrategic matters. It already forms a part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy-related MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) Compact, which is supported by the US. India and China are engaged in a protracted border conflict. India has encroached upon Nepal's sovereign territory at Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Susta. China has encroached upon the Humla neighborhood. Though slowly, the Free Tibet campaign is gaining traction. The geopolitical and geostrategic rivalry between China and the US, as well as between India and China, have trapped Nepal (Dixit, 2023).

With disagreements arising along its borders with China and India, Nepal's border conflicts have drawn attention from throughout the region. The Lipulekh and Kalapani dispute with India, among other recent events, emphasize the necessity of a thorough analysis of the historical background and current geopolitical factors influencing Nepal's territorial integrity (Pandey, 2021).

Completing border conflict resolution requires complex diplomatic negotiations. In order to find peaceful solutions, Nepal must actively participate in international forums, bilateral discussions, and third-party mediation (Aryal, 2021). An analysis of these diplomatic endeavors sheds light on how Nepal's foreign policy has changed over time.

Over 1,700 kilometers long and with a convoluted history spanning several centuries separates Nepal and India. The Sugauli Treaty, which put an end to the Anglo-Nepal War in 1816 and was signed by the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Nepal, serves as the main foundation for the border. The border between the two nations was established by the treaty, and it was further defined by subsequent treaties and agreements. In the Mahakali River, also known as the River Kalee according to the Treaty, is mentioned as the western boundary in Article 5 of the Sugauli Treaty. In the hydrographic study identifies Limpiyadhura as the Mahakali River's origin, establishing it as the trilateral junction between China, Nepal, and

India, despite the Treaty's lack of indication to that effect. This border is still being contested by the two nations (Aryal, 2023).

Among the many escalatory moves since then, Nepal deployed police forces to the region, summoned the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu, and initiated a constitutional amendment to formalize and extend its territorial claims over approximately 400 sq km. India, on the other hand, has conveyed its openness to a dialogue but does not seem to share Nepal's sense of urgency (Xavier, 2020).

Following the wall painting depicting Lumbini and Kapilbastu under India that was displayed in India's new Parliament building, nationalistic waves were generated in Nepal. India responded to Nepal's concern about this issue by stating that this was a cultural map from the era of Emperor Ashoka, when these regions were ruled by the distinguished ruler. This argument does not appear to be supported by the fact that the emperor had to engage in combat with Sthunko, the Kirat King, which created the appearance that the emperor did not have authority over this territory (Pokharel, 2023).

In September, there were reports that China had built nine buildings in Limi of Humla, encroaching on Nepali territory. Protests against China were held in large numbers outside the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nepal, conducted a survey recently, which was cited in media reports. The survey indicated that illegal Chinese encroachments were occurring in bordering districts such as Dolakha, Gorkha, Darchula, Humla, Sindhupalchowk, Sankhuwasabha, and Rasuwa. Examining the historical background and the drafting of the Sino-Nepal border agreement is crucial to comprehending the nature of the current border disputes (Chakraborty, 2020).

Dependence on Neighbors

For practically all imports, including many essential goods, Nepal is economically and strategically dependent on two large neighbors. In certain instances, these neighbors may not only be a threat to the economy but also increase Nepal's reliance on items related to national security. India is the only country in the neighborhood that controls Nepal's supply chain, which is a result of the country's incapacity to produce sensitive materials, petroleum products, medicines, food, and other necessities on its own (Shrestha, 2022). There may occasionally be a perception of diminished autonomy due to Nepal's significant reliance on China and India for economic support, commerce, and transit (Muni, 2017).

Beyond the relationship between Nepal and its near neighbors, Dhaka recently suggested trading power with Kathmandu. On the one side, Bangladesh generates excess energy in the winter months when Nepal experiences a shortage because of the low river levels. However, as Bangladesh's energy consumption rises in the summer and monsoon, Nepal produces excess energy. Bangladesh has therefore been in negotiations with Nepal to purchase electricity from the latter from May to December and export electricity to the former from December to February. Bangladesh has also expressed interest in establishing hydroelectric projects in Nepal. In September of last year, at the secretary-level Joint Steering Committee meeting, Bangladesh and Nepal decided to build a separate transmission line between them by bringing India on board (Shakya, 2022).

China wants to build strong physical ties between the two countries that will last through changes in Kathmandu's government. Both New Delhi and Washington will undoubtedly be

disappointed by the idea of forging new ties with a leader who has denounced the US as a "imperialist power" and India as a "expansionist" entity. The region is significantly affected geopolitically by Nepal's political unrest. Nepal serves as a buffer state between China and India, so any unrest there could have an impact on ties between the two nations. Since the two nations have strong cultural and historical ties, India is Nepal's main trading partner. China, on the other hand, has been investing in infrastructure and pursuing other initiatives to expand its influence in Nepal. Nepal's geopolitical significance stems from its advantageous placement sandwiched between two of the world's most populous countries (Hossain, 2023).

Furthermore, given the intensity of geopolitical endeavors in the area, Nepal has always faced an unfavorable external environment. This forces China and India, Nepal's two powerful neighbors, to think outside the box when it comes to Nepal's political system and relations. Although the western nations did play a significant role in Nepal's democratization and development, they frequently took advantage of this support to further their own geopolitical objectives by using Nepal as a launching pad. These effects are also clearly visible in the country's internal politics. Therefore, political parties' ability to balance domestic politics and international relations, particularly those with China, India, and the West will determine the course of democratic politics and political stability in the future. Although Nepal's proximity to China and India necessitates closer ties and a delicate balance between the two major neighbors, people's livelihoods are gradually moving outside the region as a result of political economy changes. In addition, Nepal needs to keep friendly ties with Western nations, who have long been its development partners. The diaspora of Nepal and the degree of interaction with the West have both grown dramatically in recent years. Furthermore, because of the close cultural and civilizational ties between China and India, Nepal cannot afford to have relations with either on an equal footing (Bhatta, 2022).

In terms of its size, strength, and economic potential, Nepal is considered a smaller power. In the current highly competitive global environment, the country should incorporate strategic hedging as a component of its foreign policy, as it has been unable to influence the international order. Nepal is unable to manage a strict equilibrium with China or India, its immediate neighbors. However, by taking precautions, Nepal will also not be dependent on them. The overarching goal is to more actively diversify significant alliances with other powerful nations (Neupane, 2023).

Political Instability

Following the return of multiparty democracy in the 1990s, the people of Nepal had high expectations for a free and prosperous country. The sentiment was understandable because the system they had in mind would have given everyone an equal chance at prosperity, even those who did not belong to the elite class. Unfortunately, their dreams and aspirations have not yet come to pass after thirty years of democracy. The nation has had 28 different governments in the last 31 years due to petty party politics, which has hindered any meaningful progress toward development (Chaulagain, 2021).

Nepal has adopted, implemented, and altered numerous political systems over the last eight decades. In 1951, Nepalis toppled the Rana oligarchy and, in the early 1960s, for eighteen months, established a multiparty democratic system. Following this, the monarchs experimented for thirty years with the partyless Panchayat, finally reintroducing multiparty

democracy in 1991. Then, in 2006, a monarchy that had existed for more than 240 years was overthrown. The federal democratic republic system in which we currently live is inclusive and participatory. However, one thing persisted throughout it all: erratic governments (The Kathmandu Post, 2023). Nepal's politics are characterized by frequent changes in leadership, frequently brought about by outside forces (Dixit, 2019). Its foreign policy and general stability may be impacted by this volatility.

Many attempts have been made throughout the history of political instability in Nepal to counteract it, but these have mostly failed since they did not address the underlying causes of the problem. The ongoing predicament of instability clouds the future possibilities for Nepal. Dialogue and compromise between political parties could be one way to foster political unity among Nepali political groups (Hossain, 2023).

Precarity has been Nepal's political theme for the past ten years, and this most recent political drama coincides with some concerning patterns. Politicians have played musical chairs with political appointments, and governments hardly ever serve out their entire terms. Meanwhile, the electorates will have been weakened by behind-closed doors power grabs. The initial hope for the success of federalism has largely faded in the seven years since Nepal became a federal state (Healy & Moktan, 2023).

Immediate action is needed to address the disorganized politics. Any coalition between parties with similar ideologies will be more successful. Regular coalition shuffles clearly demonstrate how out of the ordinary such coalition partners are in government. The nation's current mixed election system needs to be changed. Members of parliament should be chosen using either a fully proportional system or a first-past-the-post method, with the caveat that no elected member may serve in a government (Mainali, 2023).

There are two causes for party divisions in Nepal, as journalist Dhruva Hari Adhikari states. Leaders' own self-interest comes first, followed by outside variables. It seems that India is one of the external factors. According to him, the "Indian Embassy calls the leader, provides dinner, and gives the instruction to split the party; there is the hand of India behind almost all parties' splits." The party divisions in Nepal are caused by Indian factors because the leaders only carry out their directives. He continued by saying that because of India and its interests, regional parties in the CA are already dividing. Consequently, there is no ideological basis for party divisions in Nepal (Prasad, 2012).

A deficiency of efficient governance and weak institutions in Nepal is another factor fueling political instability in the nation. In addition to the police and other security forces being accused of abuse and human rights violations, the judiciary is frequently ineffective and corruptible. This has increased political instability and stoked public unrest by fostering a lack of trust in the state and its institutions. For a considerable amount of time, Nepal's political climate has been unstable because of a confluence of historical, social, economic, and geopolitical factors. This instability has been caused by the nation's history of monarchy and feudalism, as well as by its diverse and complex society, economic difficulties, advantageous location in the world, and weak institutional framework. Nepal will need to address these underlying issues and work toward constructing stronger and more functional institutions of governance in order to address these problems and achieve political stability (Neupane, 2023).

In his poem from 1925, TS Eliot forewarned that the world would end "not with a bang but a whimper." This seems to sum up Nepal's struggle to hold onto hope in the face of

despair and disillusionment almost a century later. Nepal ended a ten-year civil war, abolished the monarchy, and signed a historic peace agreement that allowed the Maoist guerrillas to participate in the peaceful electoral process in the first ten years of the twenty-first century. There was a lot of public enthusiasm for democracy (Gyawali, 2023).

Nepal reneged on these enormous victories in the following ten years. Acrimonious political and ethnic disputes simmered during the Constitution's drafting. It took eight years for its adoption to finally pick up speed, along with a significant earthquake and a subsequent humanitarian crisis. It is even harder to respond to the legitimacy question when foreign actors are your neighbors. The location raises questions of economic, political, and social strategy. The outcome of a conflict can have a direct impact on the national interests of the intervener. The neighbor's involvement thus has the effect of "making settlements more difficult to reach". According to Brown (1996), the areas' powers may start to worry about their interests and attempt to reshape the conflict. Foreign actors are denied a legitimate place in the host state when interests take precedence (Thapa, 2023).

Geopolitical Opportunities

Diversification of Ties

Nepal can lessen its reliance on China and India by broadening its worldwide network of contacts. Political and economic options can be obtained by engagement with nations such as the US, the EU, and Japan (Muni, 2017).

America already has Nepal on its military, strategic, and tactical radar. The frequent military drills between the USA and Nepal under the pretext of training are concerning. An estimated 5,000 American soldiers are currently present in Nepal under covert circumstances (Dixit, 2023).

The growing partnership between the US and India poses a serious threat to China's aspirations for territorial expansion in Nepal. Nepal is at the center of these changes, which highlight a dramatic shift in the dynamics of Himalayan diplomacy between China's domestically driven, debt-ridden strategy and the democratic, collaborative, growth-oriented approach espoused by the United States and India. The choices Nepal makes will become pillars that mold its future and influence the shifting power relations in the area. Nepal has made a several diplomatic attempts through trade, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic channels, but it hasn't yet completely utilized its advantageous Himalayan location (Gupta, 2023).

Given that it can result in advantages and opportunities for aid, trade, and investment, Nepal may not be adversely affected by the triangular geopolitical competition between India, China, and the US in Nepal. Building relationships with all nations should be our priority, and we shouldn't side with any of them in their geopolitical struggles. We were able to keep the best of relations with the two superpowers—the US and the USSR—during the Cold War era and receive assistance and support from both. There is no reason why we can't continue to have the best possible relationships with China, India, and the US. Safeguarding Nepal's national interests while also benefiting from their collaboration and support. We are not forced to pick between a neighbor or another major power. Finding a way to outcompete them in their market while dealing with them in accordance with our national interests will allow us to gain from them (Acharya, 2023).

Harnessing Hydropower

Nepal can improve its economic standing in the area by utilizing its hydroelectric potential. Establishing infrastructure for the production and export of electricity has the potential to revolutionize the country (Rai, 2019).

Nepal wants to take advantage of the enormous advantages that come with quickly realizing its enormous potential for producing electricity domestically. This can include everything from electric cooking to electric mobility, as well as electrifying all energy-related needs for agriculture and powering all industrial heating, cooling, and motive power systems. In order to generate foreign exchange and offer environmental services to other South Asian nations, Nepal also wishes to export its excess electricity. Nepal's GDP could rise by 87% above the base case if it were to utilize even 20% of its roughly 40,000 megawatts of economically viable potential, according to a study. Additionally, electricity exports to India could prevent the emission of roughly 224,000 tons of carbon dioxide every day (Basnet, 2022).

Harnessing untapped hydropower resources could be one of the key solutions for meeting energy demands, while also helping to address climate change. Hydropower is generally viewed as a sustainable, clean, low-carbon source of energy. However, concerns have been raised about the emissions from rotting impacts of carbon emissions associated with the actual construction of large dams and methane emissions from rotting vegetation in the reservoirs behind newly constructed dams under certain conditions. Nevertheless, hydropower is still generally viewed as contributing positively to low-carbon energy futures. Not only that, but the technology can aid the integration of wind and solar resources into electricity grids. High rates of variable, weather-dependent, renewable generation places additional demands on grids in terms of delivering constant, reliable electricity supplies- but hydropower's flexibility and reliability (it provides an almost instantly available source of power), coupled with its storage capabilities, can help to balance out intermittency issues (Palladian Publications, 2021).

Hurford et al. (2014) One of the main issues facing Nepal is figuring out how to use its massive 42,000 MW of economically viable hydropower resources to promote inclusive and broad development while stabilizing and increasing power availability. Just 1.5% of the viable total, or 660MW, are currently installed; 28% come from small and 72% from medium-sized plants; 28% are owned privately, and 97% are connected to the grid. While there are inefficiencies in the overall system outputs during the wet season, they fall well short (up to 18 hours of outages) during the dry season. All but one of Nepal's hydropower projects are "run of river" schemes. In order to meet domestic demand during its dry season, Nepal will have to import an increasing amount of electricity if its hydropower sector isn't altered to include more storage projects. The range of advantages could be expanded by developing storage hydropower, including better irrigation and greater use of the nation's water resources, which are currently only 8% utilized.

Nepal has been in talks with a number of nations, led by China and India, about potential investments in massive hydropower projects. Power, particularly green power, is necessary for the region's economic development, which includes northern India, Bangladesh, and central and southern China. Nepal's hydropower is ideal for their requirements. Given the significant financial outlay needed for hydropower projects, Nepal ought to look into joint venture hydro projects with Bangladesh and India. This will enable Nepal's hydropower to be developed peacefully and secure power purchase agreements with Bangladesh and India for ongoing power trade (Alama, 2017).

Cross-Border Initiatives

Ancient civilizations have their seat in China, India, and Nepal. They have enormous potential and plenty of room for productive collaboration. To link cultural locations that emphasize Buddhism, a cultural corridor can be established. One geographical water tower that supplies water to rivers and other waterways is one of its many shared characteristics. Historically, Nepal has served as a hub and transit for trade with Tibet and India, but its infrastructure is severely lacking. As connectivity among China, Nepal and India mainly depends on roads, aviation, and shipping, China has proposed to build a "China -Nepal-India Economic Corridor," under the BRI. Indian experts read Beijing's overtures to include India in the China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor as nothing more than an attempt "to allay suspicions from New Delhi." An Indian government spokesperson has made it clear that while India shares the "international community's desire for enhancing physical connectivity," it wants connectivity projects to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity as "no country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Bhattarai, 2020). Nepal can leverage its advantageous geopolitical situation by collaborating with its neighbors. Initiatives such as the China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor (C-N-I) have the potential to improve Nepal's connectivity and economy (Guo, 2021).

India and Nepali people have historically been much closer than those from Nepal and China. Cross-border marriages between Indian and Nepali citizens are common, despite a decline in their numbers, particularly among those who reside near the borders. Citizens of Nepal and India are free to travel to each other's countries. Approximately 3.9 million citizens of Nepal lived in India and 4 million Indians lived in Nepal, according to the 2011 census. A significant center of education for a large number of Nepali students is now New Delhi. Every year, the Indian government offers about 3,000 seats and scholarships to citizens of Nepal so that they can pursue a variety of courses in both India and Nepal (Ranjan & Gurung, 2021).

Nepal will need to walk carefully and pragmatically in order to take into account Chinese and Indian security concerns in the area. At the moment, Nepal is still enamored with the idea of riding for free on the "vibrant economic drive" provided by its two magnificent neighbors. Nepal wants to fulfill its domestic promises of economic development and prosperity by attracting significant investment from China and India. When choosing to engage with China and India, Nepal must only consider the financial benefits. Nepal must take up projects that are technically, financially, and practically feasible. Beijing's present pledges of assistance to Nepal will undoubtedly come at a heavy cost, lest massive infrastructure projects undermine the legitimacy of Nepal's investment. If there is any economic or strategic strangulation that could result in a debt trap and political leverage for Beijing or India, Kathmandu needs to be vigilant. The experiences of Sri Lanka and Myanmar have made Bangladesh, Nepal, and other South Asian countries fearful of Chinese investment. Nepal has received warnings from the US and India about China's opaque financing terms and loans (Imran, 2021).

Nepali strategic experts may also want to think about the implications of a Sino-centric regional order in a more comprehensive regional context. China primarily has strategic goals in Nepal about its foreign policy. Nepal might incur severe consequences if the country's political elite keeps exploiting the rivalry between China and India. Adding fuel to India's fears could have unintended consequences. Nepal might turn into a proxy war, a bystander caught in the crosshairs of rising regional ambitions, if New Delhi refuses to allow China passage to India

or if China believes that India poses a threat to its security interests. According to a well-known academic from Nepal, India's concerns about the evolving relationship between China and Nepal and China and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agenda need to be properly balanced. If Nepal wants to become the link between them, it might be more prudent to adopt a credible strategy characterized by openness, geopolitical objectivity, and mutual understanding of each other's sensitivities (Gorkhale, 2021).

Conclusion

The wisest course of action for Nepal would be to focus on its internal affairs once again and develop foreign policies that are based on maintaining a non-aligned regional posture while utilizing its soft power and wide range of alliances. One important element that can contribute to stability is the constitution's full implementation, which has taken time and is still up for debate. Nepal to actively and significantly contribute to promoting regional cooperation in all areas, from economic connection to climate change cooperation. In this way, Nepal make use of its strategic location within Asia to transform from a landlocked nation into a major land bridge and land-linked nation (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022).

Nepal needs to advance its domestic aims and aspirations while pragmatically striking a balance between the competing interests of China, India, and the US. Sustaining peace and security in the Himalayas will depend critically on Kathmandu's impartial stance toward China. Nepal is in a position to use the Millennium Challenge Corporation to its economic advantage and send a message of openness to China, especially with regard to the BRI, by using policy instruments wisely (Gupta, 2023).

Indeed, Nepal's geopolitical location has advantages and disadvantages. It offers the country a lot of chances to develop and prosper, but it also makes preserving its stability and sovereignty extremely difficult. Nepal must continue to tread cautiously across the increasingly complicated geopolitical terrain as it advances, using its position to its advantage and defending its fundamental interests.

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