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## **Examining the Role and Perception of Nepali Peacekeepers in Nepal's Foreign Policy Narratives**

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### **Abstract**

In the mid of July, a few Members of the Parliament proposed the idea of downsizing the Nepali Army as one of the measures to decrease public spending. But this is not the first time that such debate has stirred in the Nepalese political stratum. The topic of downsizing the Nepalese Army has been reiterated from time to time in the higher echelons of the Nepali government, most notably following the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA). At the national level, The Nepal Army as an institution has been deployed since centuries for to accomplish a wide array of functions. On the international front, the Nepbat has been deployed in UN Peacekeeping missions since 1958 in war-prone regions and is largely regarded as a highly competent battalion of proven caliber. Nepal Army's global exposure and experience as such have also refined the institution's conflict resolution and crisis management skills. But despite such positive global acknowledgment and the rich experience that the Nepal Army has garnered, the deliberations regarding the utilization of their insights and experiences in Nepal's foreign policy discourse seem to have been kept at an arm's length. To identify the role of the Nepali Army in promoting the value of world peace as enshrined in the Nepalese Constitution, this article has intended to investigate the level of recognition and influence of their insights in Nepal's foreign policy discourse. This qualitative study based on both primary and secondary data and process tracing and interview methods, identified that the imbalances in the state's priorities have led to the skills of Nepali peacekeepers from their global exposure being kept under the radar. The study has then suggested some of the possibilities for incorporating military expertise into Nepal's foreign policy discourse.

**Keywords:** Nepali Army, peacekeeping, Nepbat, foreign policy, downsizing, diplomacy

### **Introduction**

In the mid of July, a few Members of the Parliament proposed the idea of downsizing the Nepalese Army as one of the measures to decrease the national public spending. Such statements from the lawmakers were not taken pleasantly by various sects of the national security apparatus and

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by the public at large. According to one upper house member, “It is not a rational decision for Nepal to maintain an Army of a large size as it doesn't have any possibilities of war. And even if a warlike situation were to arise, Nepal can't fight a war with big countries like China and India.” The aspect of the rationality of such an expression is another question, but if we look at the matter itself, we must know that this is not the first time that the debate of downsizing the Nepalese Army has been raised in the Nepalese political stratum, especially following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Nepal Army, the biggest flagship of Nepal, has been deployed for peacekeeping operations worldwide since 1958. Its global presence, particularly in war-prone regions with objectives to ensure peace and order has resulted in its proven caliber while also garnering global acclaim. While presenting the Nepal Army's reputation in a positive light among its global partners, the UN peacekeeping mission has also grown to be a crucial component of Nepal's foreign policy and in advancing the national objectives. (Singh, 2023).

As Nepal is situated between two geographically large and potentially hostile neighbours, this form of the geopolitical vulnerability requires an ample amount of strategic preparedness for Nepal. We have witnessed several instances of Nepal's internal political weaknesses in the past, and this fact has challenged the state apparatus from time to time. Therefore, vigilant domestic and external strategies can not only keep a check on possible threats to the national interests but also aid the country's efforts to maneuver diplomatic skills abroad.

It is noteworthy that the Nepal Army has earned a positive reputation across the globe as a security institution based on its skills and contribution to world peace. The recent remarks of lawmakers as discussed above however not only undermine the credibility of the security establishment but reflect a lack of constructive outlook on the part of policymakers regarding the Nepal Army and its potential.

With this context, the researchers will use primary and secondary data to identify the role of the Nepali Army in promoting the value of world peace enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal, while investigating the recognition and influence of their insights in Nepal's foreign policy discourse. The qualitative study design is a mix of exploratory and descriptive research methodology that relies on process tracing and further incorporates the interview method to identify how the imbalances in the priorities of the state have made the role of Nepalese peacekeepers in promoting Nepal's global image out of the radar and find out possibilities for incorporating military expertise into Nepal's foreign policy discourse.

## **Review of Literature**

For the proposed research, researchers have thematically assessed some of the available literature in the field of peacekeeping and foreign policy making.

A state's adopted political and security strategies with the primary goal of advancing its interests and goals are known as its foreign policies. The strategies and objectives that must be adhered to are crucial for achieving foreign policy goals. Thus, the general purpose of foreign policy is to safeguard a nation's economic prosperity, national security, ideological objectives, and interests. This can be achieved through a variety of channels, such as diplomatic, economic, military, social, and cultural ones (Alden & Aran, 2017). According to Breuning (2007), ‘Foreign policy decisions are the complexity of various elements as there is a number of actors and institutions involved in it for coming into a specific foreign policy conclusion.’ Rourke (2008) believes that states have been able to become more powerful than other because

of their coherent and resilient foreign policymaking. He further states that the determinant of foreign policy includes various states and non-state actors that have a role in foreign policy decisions, and they can be understood through levels of analysis including individual, state, and system-level analyses.

Bhattarai (2020) believes that, despite being small, Nepal has been able to skillfully handle her diplomatic engagements through military channels in a way that would be impossible for any country like Nepal to do. According to him, the Nepal Army has two types of engagements, first with the immediate neighbor and second, beyond the neighborhood. For the Nepal Army, the peacekeeping missions have served as a powerful tool to prove its caliber beyond the neighborhood.

According to Maharjan (2022), the Nepal Army as a flagship organization has been able to gain a reputation across the globe through its skillful diplomatic practices. However, there is a gap regarding the use of military diplomacy at the foreign policy level. While many states use the military as a vital tool for foreign policy, Maharjan argues that the Nepal Army can play a significant role in helping Nepal achieve the same goal.

The military's involvement in managing public diplomacy has not received as much attention from international relations scholars as that from the various state and non-state actors. The ability of the Nepal Army to use public diplomacy as a tool to improve the country's reputation overseas is demonstrated by its people-centric initiatives on a global scale. (Singh, 2022).

Basnet (2020) gives the Nepal Army credit for expertly executing the tasks assigned by the Nepali government through diplomatic channels overseas. Through United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, the Nepal Army has been instrumental in improving the country's reputation overseas.

Bhattarai & Nepali (2021) have argued that the role of the Nepal Army should be seen from a broad spectrum as this institution has applied the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' at a practical level through its peacekeeping missions abroad. Therefore, confining peacekeeper's role to bravery and earning undermines their contributions to promoting Nepal's image abroad.

Most of the available literature has touched upon the role played by the Nepali Army in promoting the nation's image abroad and called for the need to utilize the Army's diplomacy through its institutional channel. However, they have failed to assess how a wide range of expertise of the army personnel having worked abroad has gone unnoticed and sidelined in Nepal's foreign policy discourse, and how their experience and expertise would have been very instrumental in shaping an effective foreign policy for Nepal. Identifying the same gap in the available literature, the researchers have intended to outline the possibilities for incorporating military expertise into Nepal's foreign policy discourse.

## **Operational Definitions**

### ***Foreign Policy Decision Making***

A foreign policy is a plan of action that is intended to advance the nation's interests in its interactions with other countries. It can be formalized or grounded on normative principles. The decisions made by individuals, governments, or other state stakeholders regarding foreign policy are referred to as foreign policy decisions, but they are primarily determined by state policies (Mintz & Jr., 2010).

### ***National Security:***

For Capie & Evans (2002) national interest is primarily concerned with territorial dimensions while for Buzan (1998), national security is a blend of holistic security from a nation's perspectives including economic, social, and political security. Thus, national security involves not only the psychological fixation on traditional security elements but also the integration of sound internal dynamics, which are further reinforced by strong institutions to enable the maneuvering of abilities that are beneficial to the country's interests.

### ***Foreign Policy Strategy***

Unlike foreign policy, which is a more static concept, a foreign policy strategy is more dynamic and based on necessities. In a foreign policy strategy, choices are made within the context of the international system for which system structure and the structural position of a state within the international system are taken into consideration.

### ***Determinants of Foreign Policy***

The actors and institutions, either domestic or external which influence the foreign policy decisions are considered as determinants of foreign policy.

### ***Diplomacy:***

Diplomacy is primarily a political activity that involves the art and practice of conducting negotiations and relationships between nations. Its primary goal is to enable states to secure the goals of their foreign policies. It accomplishes this primarily through professional diplomatic agents and other officials.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

Objectively the mix of exploratory and descriptive research design is based on qualitative methods. The events and correlational explanations are based on process tracing methods supplemented by content analysis.

### ***Data Collection, Analysis, and Ethical Considerations***

The secondary data used in this study are primarily from public domain sources like libraries and e-libraries. Journals, government papers, think tank publications and books will be investigated to suit the research theme and objectives. In order to facilitate process tracing and enhance comprehension of thought loops, media sources are referred to when appropriate. The recommendations and analysis are grounded in content analysis, wherein the existing literature is evaluated on a topic basis to facilitate the proposed study's analysis. To protect the subject's confidentiality, the interview sources are coded. To further recognize the researcher's efforts, the original sources are appropriately acknowledged. The interviewee has been coded to maintain the confidentiality of the subject. Retired officers are named (RAO) and currently serving officers are named (AO).

The limitation of this study is that the researchers have confined their study to Nepali Army however there are also the police forces deployed for peacekeeping missions.

### ***Discussion and Analysis***

A foreign policy is a course of action designed to further a country's interests when it interacts with other nations. A country establishes strategies, decisions, and actions to manage

its relationships with other countries and protect its interests on a global scale (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

Although foreign policy serves as a guidebook for any country's international interactions, it is the result of a rigorous process that connects various stakeholders and transcends various levels. Thus, foreign policy decision-making refers to the decisions made by individuals, groups, and coalitions that affect a country's actions on the international stage. The foreign policy process is a decision-making process. States take actions that they deem necessary, which are primarily made by individuals and other stakeholders. As such, decision-making is a guiding process in which changes are made in response to feedback from the wider community (Berridge, 2015).

While collective decisions yield better outcomes, the due considerations of stakeholders are an important element of foreign policy decision-making (Rourke, 2008). After all, countries mainly focus on securitization of their foreign policy. This means that security is a key aspect while drafting strategies and policies. For a country like Nepal which is situated in a very sensitive geopolitical location and that experiences geopolitical shocks regularly, the security element cannot be left aside while considering foreign policy decisions. However, the security dynamics have been given due consideration neither in Nepal's foreign policy planning and policy formulations nor in any institutional setups. In this context, this part deals with the current scenario of the Nepal Army in peacekeeping, their assigned roles abroad, and the government's priorities in capitalizing on peacekeepers' expertise beyond the military setup.

### **An Outlook of Nepal Army in Peacekeeping**

Soon after getting membership in the United Nations in 1955, the Nepal Army deployed its first peacekeeping battalion in 1958. This brave and fierce institutional reputation was then recognized by the United Nations, after which it sent an observer group in Lebanon named the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL).

As of now, a total of 44 missions have been deployed across the globe with 1,46,630 Armies serving the duty.

### **Nepali Army in UN Peace Support Operations**

S.No.	Mission	Year
1	UNOGIL, Lebanon (Military Observers)	1958
2	UNIPOM, India/Pakistan (Military Observers)	1966
3	UNEF II Sinai, Middle East (Peacekeeping Troops)	1974
4	UNIFIL, Lebanon (Peacekeeping Troops)	1978
5	UNMOT, Tajikistan	1989
6	UNGOMAP I/II, OSGAP I/II/III (Military Observers)	1989
7	UNIKOM Kuwait/Iraq (Force Commander)	1991
8	UNMIH, Haiti (Peacekeeping Troops)	1991
9	UNTSO, Israel, Middle - East (Staff Officer and Military Observers)	1992
10	UNISOM, Somalia (Peacekeeping Troops)	1993
11	UNPF/UNPROFOR, Former Yugoslavia (Peacekeeping Troops)	1994

12	UNGCI, Iraq (Peacekeeping Troops)	1995
13	UNTAES, Eastern Slovenia (Military Observers)	1996
14	UNPREDEP, Macedonia (Military Observers)	1996
15	UNOMIL, Liberia (Military Observers)	1996
16	UNMOP, Prevalaka (Military Observers)	1998
17	UNMIK, Kosovo (Military Observers)	1999
18	UNOMSIL/UNAMSIL, Sierra Leone (Peacekeeping Troops)	1999
19	MONUC, DR Congo (Peacekeeping Troops)	1999
20	UNAMET/UNTAET/UNMISSET, East Timor (Peacekeeping Troops)	1999
21	UNFICYP, Cyprus (Force Commander)	1999
22	UNMEE, Ethiopia/Eritrea (Military Observers)	2000
23	MINUCI, Ivory Coast (Military Observers)	2003
24	UNOCI, Ivory Coast (Military Observers)	2003
25	UNMIL, Liberia - Provost (Peacekeeping Troops)	2003
26	MONUSCO, DR Congo (Peacekeeping Troops)	2003
27	UNDOF, Israel/Syria (Force Commander & Staff Officers)	2004
28	MINUSTAH, Haiti (Peacekeeping Troops)	2004
29	ONUB, Burundi (Peacekeeping Troops)	2004
30	UNMIS, Sudan (Force Commander and Peacekeeping Troops)	2004
31	UNIFIL, Lebanon (Peacekeeping Troops)	2006
32	UNOMIG, Georgia (Military Observers)	2007
33	MINURCAT, Chad (Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops)	2008
34	UNAMID, Sudan (Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops)	2008
35	UNAMI, Iraq (Staff Officer and Peacekeeping Troops)	2008
36	UNMIT, Timor-Leste (Military Observer)	2008
37	MINURSO, Morocco (Military Observer)	2010
38	UNMISS, South Sudan (Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops)	2011
39	UNSMIS, Syria (Staff Officers)	2012
40	UNISFA, Sudan (Military Observers and Staff Officers)	2012
41	MINUSMA, Mali (Peacekeeping Troops)	2013
42	MINUSCA, Central African Republic (Military Observers and Staff Officers)	2014
43	UNSMIL, Lybia (Peacekeeping Troops)	2016
44	UNMHA, Yemen (Military Observer)	2019

*Table 1: Nepali Army in UN Peace Support Operations*

*Source: [https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na\\_in\\_un](https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na_in_un)*

Capacitated with around 10,000 troops which can be sent for the duties abroad, at present a total of 6062 peacekeepers are serving their duty outside borders in various peacekeeping missions.



Figure 1: Present Participation of Nepali Army in UN Missions

Source: [https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na\\_in\\_un](https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na_in_un)

Roles assigned to the peacekeepers: a general outlook:

There are several deployment processes for peacekeepers which help to better understand their assigned roles abroad.

According to AO, the types of deployments and their roles are:

I. Deployment on an individual basis.

- Head of the Mission/Force Commander/Deputy Force commander (Maj Gen and above)– responsible for the entire mission, directly involved in policy and strategy development, held responsible for maintaining cordial relations with the host nation’s government and other stakeholders, accountable for failure and success of the mission.
- Sector Commander (Most of the UN missions will be sub-divided into various sectors to have better command and control and smooth functioning of the mission) – Responsible for all the military matters and activities within the designated sector, involved in making operational level policy and strategy, liaison and coordination with host government and authorities.

- Staff at various levels (from UN HQ, New York to mission area at the field) - Directly involved in drafting plans, policies, strategies, liaison, and coordination with designated authorities of the host nation's government.

II. Deployment as a unit (Battalion, Company)

- Infantry Unit- maintaining peace and stability, protecting the mandate, and safeguarding civilians.
- Special Force Unit- conducting special missions, protection of VIP/VVIP
- Engineer Unit - Supporting host nations in development by building various facilities and infrastructures like roads, bridges, etc
- Military Policy Unit - ensuring that all the provisions and protocols are being followed by the UN military personnel, Conducting an investigation into uniform personnel in case of disciplinary breaches.
- Jungle Warfare Unit - carrying out jungle operations to subdue armed groups/rebels.
- Mountain Warfare Unit- Deployed at Mt Hermon, to ensure that all belligerent parties adhere to agreement.

**Nepal Army's International Recognition vs National Perception: An Analysis**

The Nepali Army has been involved in UN peacekeeping missions for more than half a century, with nearly 147 thousand professionals assigned for duties abroad. It is a sad reality that there hasn't been a constructive outlook to assess the role of the Nepal Army in foreign policy mechanisms. Nevertheless, it is important to deliberate on how the Nepal Army has in fact played a pivotal role also to complement the institutional lacunas of Nepal as a small state and in escaping the inherent structural scarcity by virtue of Nepal's smallness. It is also important to discuss the role of the Nepal Army in championing military diplomacy.

**On Escaping Structural Scarcity: Complementing Institutional Lacunas**

There are several shortcomings of small states, particularly structural scarcity- which indicates both a lack of and inefficiency in the available institutions. The inability of a country to assert itself internationally is primarily caused by structural scarcity. Structural scarcity breeds distrust in government agencies, and bureaucracy (Bista, 2023). Weak institutions do not create a good impression in an international arena for any country. In particular, weak countries face structural scarcity due to the extractive institutions. While this aspect is a noteworthy concern for a small state like Nepal, the Nepal Army has however been instrumental in creating a felt presence in the international community through peacekeeping operations, thereby garnering a positive image abroad.

Soon after Nepal got the UN membership in 1955 changing its isolationist foreign policy into a non-isolationist one, (Bhattarai, 2021), the Nepal Army became a flagship of the government in extending its foreign policy that values peace and non-intervention beyond borders. Through their actions aligned with such values, Nepali peacekeepers are thus able to champion the foreign policy objective of world peace and the Eastern philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. (Bhattarai, 2021).



Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) have stressed how the institutions of any country play a decisive role in its development. RAO reiterates how the Nepal Army is the only institution that has been constantly contributing at a global level through UNPKO for the creation of Nepal's positive reputation abroad. Quoting the Nepal Army's dedication and professionalism in the performance of the assigned roles and responsibilities in the missions abroad, he also highlighted that the Nepal Army's role as such has helped, to an extent, in bridging the existing institutional lacunas at the national level.

### **On Championing Military Diplomacy**

As a nation-state, Nepal has been a witness to a lot of political and institutional changes. While the country saw a shift from monarchy to republicanism, and from a centralized state structure to a federal one, this undeniably implied that with each wave of such change, the prime actors and stakeholders in the national government would also change. But amidst all these shifts across various timelines, The Nepalese Army is the only institution within the Nepalese government that has stood the test of time. On being able to "wither the challenges ushered by change", the Nepalese Army has been consistent in the discharge of the duties vested upon it regardless of the changing government leaderships and institutions in Nepal. (Adhikari, 2022)

The role of the Nepalese Army has been very prominent for the protection and defense of "the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of the state of Nepal." (Army Act, 2063). A case in point is the role of the Nepalese Army during the 10-year-long Maoist insurgency. The relentless contribution of the Nepalese Army during the insurgency evidenced the noteworthy capability of the Nepalese Army in the conflict settlement process. From safeguarding national borders to their role in disaster management and rescue operations, the caliber of the Nepalese Army has undoubtedly been tested on the national fronts.

Further, the roles and contributions of the Nepalese Army are also prominent in the arena of international cooperation. Whether it be the prevention of likely conflicts, or neutralizing the likelihood of conflict escalation, the Nepalese Army has contributed to a great extent to the diplomatic endeavours of Nepal.

For instance, after the promulgation of the constitution of Nepal in the year 2015, India imposed an unofficial blockade in Nepal. The probable cause for such action was speculated to be the ignorance of the advice imparted by the Indian counterparts regarding the provisions of the Nepalese constitution. In this context, it is believed the visit of Nepal Army Chief Rajendra Chhetri to India was what paved the way for "the top Indian civilian and military brass to resume the dialogues at the government level." (KathmanduPati, 2020) This shows how the strategic engagement initiated by the Nepalese Army helped normalize the probability of further escalation of tensions between the two states.

To help prevent potential conflicts, The Nepalese Army also indulges in the efforts to build cooperative relations with neighbouring states. This form of effort is evident in various activities of military cooperation that the Nepalese Army engages in. For instance, the military exercise named "SURYA KIRAN" takes place each year between Nepal and India. This military exercise is expected to "develop inter-operability between the military of the two states to collectively strive towards Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorist operations as well as for Humanitarian Relief operations." (PIB Delhi, 2022) Some other joint military exercises that Nepal has held are 'The Pacific command training' with the USA, and 'Sagarmatha joint

military training' with China. (Khadka, 2022) Similarly, the efforts of the Nepalese Army in fostering international relations and cooperation are further evidenced by its joint military exercises with other countries like the UK, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Bangladesh with the objectives to “better their strategies on disaster management, search and rescue, anti-terrorism, mountaineering, and fulfilling their responsibilities while serving in the UN peacekeeping forces’, etc.(The Kathmandu Post, 2023).

These forms of military cooperation exercises help to introduce “transparency into defence relations with regard to states' intentions and capabilities”, due to which trust can be built among foreign counterparts to cooperate in overcoming differences amongst them, and to reinforce perceptions of common interests. (Cotter, 2004) Furthermore, due to mutual trust and cooperation reinforced as a result of such exercises, the Nepalese Army has also been getting military assistance from these states.

For instance, the National Armed Police Force Academy of Nepal was built by China and later handed over to the Nepalese government. Other instances of Chinese assistance in financial terms include the provision of a grant of USD 32.3 million to the Nepalese Army during the inception of the first joint military exercise ‘Sagarmatha Friendship’ in 2017; and the signing of an agreement to provide Nepal Army with an assistance of RMB 150 million (Rs. 2.53 billion) for the next five years for humanitarian and disaster relief equipment. The increment in available seats in war colleges and National Defence Courses (NDC) in China for Nepalese Army officers also falls under the Chinese military assistance to Nepal. Similarly, the provision of USD 1 million in assistance for the construction of the Birendra Peace Operation Training Centre of Dhulikhel in 2016, and “explosive ordnance disposal worth USD 82,845” in 2018 are some instances of America’s military assistance to Nepal. Similarly, India has also been providing military assistance to Nepal in the form of loans as well as grants. (Bhattarai, 2022)

This form of military assistance resulting from effective military diplomacy of the Nepalese Army has consequently aided in strengthening the Nepalese Army as an institution and bolstered their preparedness to effectively handle the situations of any likely conflicts in national and international spheres.

Now, diving further deep into the diplomatic efforts of the Nepalese Army, it becomes fundamental that we look into the contribution of the Nepalese Army to international peace and security. As stipulated in the UN Charter, the United Nations aims for the maintenance of international peace and security, and the settlement of international disputes/situations leading to a breach of such intended situation of peace. (UN Charter) Ever since Nepal became a UN member state in 1955, it has actively contributed to upholding the value of world peace as stipulated in the UN Charter. By chiefly contributing military observers and peacekeeping troops in about half a century of peace support operations of the United Nations to date, the Nepalese Army has played an important role in military diplomacy.

During their deployment in conflict-prone countries, their chief responsibilities include paving the way for and coordinating peace agreement efforts between the warring parties, and establishing transitional governments made through democratic consensus. Furthermore, the protection of civilians and the monitoring of disputed territories as required, also fall under the responsibility of the deployed military personnel. Some cases in point are the ongoing United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and The United Nations Organization

Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). With such practical and technical military assistance, the democratic transition in such conflict-ridden countries becomes easier. (Cottey, 2004). Therefore, in the international arena, the Nepal Army has made a noteworthy contribution to support conflict-prone states in securing peace and order.

It is worth mentioning that the overall contributions of the Nepalese Army are viewed in a positive light at the international level. Some instances that show the positive acknowledgement of the Nepalese Army at the international level are: the election of Nepal as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council two times, firstly in 1969-70 and secondly in 1988-89; the act of entrusting the responsibility to Nepal in 1961 by the UN to investigate the death of then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold; and a Nepali peacekeeper accompanying UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on his choosing while receiving the Nobel Peace Prize 2001. (Singh, 2023)

In this manner, the role of the Nepalese Army in the field of military diplomacy can be identified in line with its efforts of strategic engagements and military cooperation with neighbour states, and its role in world peace through the UN peace support operations. Such exposure of the Nepalese Army beyond borders, especially through peacekeeping missions has positively impacted the capability of the Nepalese Army as better negotiators on the world stage.

The above discussions have dealt in length with how the role of the Nepal Army is pivotal in the foreign policy dimension and how for the Nepal Army in that matter, credit is due. Now it becomes fundamental that we simultaneously discuss how such an important role played by the Nepal Army has been a subject of neglect in the national political front.

### **On being the subject of neglect**

While the peacekeeping missions have served as an expansive forum for learning the most advanced diplomatic skills such as pre-negotiations, negotiations, momentum, and follow-up that would not have been possible otherwise, AO believes that the skills gained abroad are not recognized by the state beyond the Nepali Army's institution, and it goes in vain after the retirement of the military officers. Rather, the government apparatus tries to block the learnings and does not provide any opportunity for their expertise to get surfaced while designing the country's security and foreign policy. For example, during the formation of the National Security Council, the government was not willing to provide any rooms for security apparatus. AO also noted how 'the expertise earned abroad immensely helped Nepal during post insurgency peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peace enforcement.'

According to RAO, as of now, NA has been contributing its competencies while the government has not paid much attention to NA's diplomatic capacity buildings. Retired military officers are given various spaces in the developed world to show their skills in policy-making and application,

But in the case of Nepal, even when the retired officers would be willing to make such a contribution if such an opportunity was provided, it is ironic that not even a single diplomatic appointment of the highest levels has been provided in the last thirty years for such a large number of experts. Due to this, the skills and rich experiences earned abroad by the military go unnoticed and are often sidelined. As Nepal lies in a sensitive geopolitical location, this fact

alone warrants the need to conduct massive defense research to complement our foreign affairs strategy. For this, the experiences and the expertise of such retired human resources could be capitalized upon by the state in universities and policy research wings.

### **Conclusion**

The study results based on both primary and secondary data concluded that, with its demonstrated abilities operating alongside the largest multilateral forum under the United Nations, the Nepali Army has garnered a noteworthy reputation overseas. It is among the largest organizations that have given Nepal recognition on a global scale despite the prevalent structural scarcities within the nation. In addition to that, the Nepal Army, through peacekeeping operations, has served as a crucial agent of the country in its efforts to implement foreign policy goals of promoting world peace, as enshrined in the Nepalese constitution.

However, the country has not been able to capitalize on the expertise gained by the Nepal Army. The rhetoric and hyperbole of military diplomacy have always gained popularity in research and publications too. While military diplomacy is equally important, and the Nepal Army has championed in that field, the efforts to soak in such knowledge at the national policy-making level have been very minimal. Because of this, the acquired skills and expertise of peacekeepers have remained within the four walls of Nepal's military institutions. As such, the state has failed to exploit and capitalize on the skills of peacekeepers, which thus go in vain after their retirement. Therefore, Nepal as a state must find ways to incorporate security strategy into the foreign policy apparatus, while providing spaces for security experts in the making and execution of foreign policy.

### **Recommendations**

Whilst security strategy has played a crucial role for countries that have championed its foreign policy formulation and application, it is equally viable for countries like Nepal. The Nepali Army's experience has occasionally been attempted to be used by the government of Nepal, but such efforts seem to be insufficient. So, this calls for the government to devise effective ways and methods to capitalize on the skills and expertise of the Nepalese peacekeepers.

- Internal security dynamics have a direct and imperative impact on a country's foreign policy. Without sound internal security, it is almost impossible to achieve foreign policy objectives. Sustainable peace is a core aspect of peacekeeping operations where tasks assigned to peacekeepers are to reduce violence by empowering national authorities to strengthen security. Peacekeeping engagements provide valuable insights into formulating policies and strategies for stabilization which are useful for government apparatus. Since Nepal as a nation is prone to internal security vulnerabilities, the knowledge acquired from the peacekeeping missions should be made use of for securing internal peace for better foreign policy projection.
- The security component is not given as much priority in some of Nepal's major international agreements. If the security considerations are not taken into account, such finalized agreement might not fully be in alignment with the country's national interest. Therefore, the government apparatus has the leverage to incorporate such proficiency through the Nepali Army.

- The Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs can have a team of individuals that incorporates military expertise to develop strategy and formulate pragmatic foreign policy without living out the security aspect.
- A fully functional National Security Council is necessary for Nepal; the government can take effective measures for providing a space for retired military officials to utilize their expertise in such platforms.
- In the last 20 years, there has been no major diplomatic appointment provided for security personnel. The government should consider prioritizing some of the diplomatic appointments where it could better exploit the expertise.
- Almost none of the academic institutions have been able to capitalize on the expertise of peacekeepers in academia, for example, universities. There is various research yet to be explored in the fields of national security and foreign policy. In this regard, the insights from the military might come handy.
- Some of the international negotiations carried out through military channels have had better outcomes and gained quick responses. For example, the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) after insurgency. So, the government should take such facts into account, and create more spaces for the expertise of the military to be employed in the foreign policy apparatus.

While the steps taken to make use of military proficiency in formulating strategy and implementing foreign policy in Nepal remain inadequate, it is high time that the government considers incorporating military expertise into Nepal's foreign policy discourse.

## **Annex-I**

### **Checklist of an Interview**

- I. What is peacekeeping in simple terms and what is its relevancy for Nepal in international relations?
- II. Can you briefly explain Nepali peacekeeping missions and their assigned roles?
- III. What is the major learning from the peacekeeping missions in the field of international relations and diplomacy?
- IV. What are the general practices done by countries to utilize the peacekeepers' expertise in foreign policy making? How should the Nepali state capitalize on the experiences of peacekeepers in Nepal's foreign policy-making? Can you share your thoughts about how well Nepal has absorbed such experiences till now?
- V. What could be the possible areas and roles in foreign policy making and application that the state might assign to capitalize on the experiences gained from peacekeeping experiences?
- VI. How far the Nepali state has prioritized security policy in foreign policy making?

Current Participation of Nepali Peacekeepers as of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023

S. N.	Mission Name	Country	Contingent Strength	UNMO/SO				Total	UN HQ			Rem.
				HOM/FC	Sector Commander	Staff Officer	Military Observer		Milad	P4	P3	
1	MONUSCO	DR Congo	700					1152				
	MECH. BN											
	QRF Company		248		13	16						
	ENG COY		175									
2	UNMISS	South Sudan	700					1760				
	SIB (BN)			1	45	14						
	FRB (BN)		849									
	HRC (Coy)		150									
3	UNISFA	Abyei Sudan	97			7	2	107				
4	MINURSO	Western Sahara					5	5				
5	UNTSO	Israel					3	3				
6	UNIFIL	Lebanon	849	1		24		874				Non MSA-8
7	MINUSMA	Mali	156		1	13		170	1	5	1	
8	UNDOF	Syria						416				
	FHQ Support		140									
	ENG PL		30	1	15							
	Mech Inf.		188									
	Level- 1 (+) Hospital		33									
	CPU		9									
9	MINUSCA	Central African Republic						1242				
	HRPB (BN)		600	1	17	5						
	LIB (BN)		450									
	MP (Coy)		169									
10	UNAMI	Iraq	88					88				
11	UNSMIL	Libya	234			1		235				
12	UNITAMS	Sudan				0		0				
13	UNMHA	Yemen		1		2		3				
<b>Total</b>			<b>5866</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>6055</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	
Grand Total			6062									

Table 2: Present number of peacekeepers Deployed abroad

Source: [https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na\\_in\\_un](https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na_in_un)

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