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**MILITARY DIPLOMACY AND ITS ROLE IN THE  
FOREIGN POLICY OF NEPAL**

Rawal, Pankaj

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**MILITARY DIPLOMACY AND ITS ROLE IN THE  
FOREIGN POLICY OF NEPAL**

by

Pankaj Rawal

December 2019

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Anshu N. Chatterjee  
Carolyn C. Halladay

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**MILITARY DIPLOMACY AND ITS ROLE IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF  
NEPAL**

Pankaj Rawal  
Lieutenant Colonel, Nepali Army  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

Historically, Nepal's relations with China and India had their share of ups and downs. Nepal, given its imbalance in military strength, has less potential to use its military as a hard power to pursue its national interests. This study explores the dynamics of Nepalese military diplomacy in three separate time periods: from 1857 to 1949, during the Rana regime; from 1950 to 1990, after the fall of the Rana regime, the first democratic period in Nepal until the end of monarchical rule; and from 2008 to 2018. The primary patterns of Nepal's military diplomacy have consisted of appeasing its powerful neighbors, balancing one neighbor against another, practicing nonalignment and internationalism with the United Nations (UN), and maintaining equi-proximity with both neighbors. While some patterns helped Nepal secure its vital interests, others have contradicted its national interests. The study recommends three policy options for effective military diplomacy. Nepal should reassess the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India and negotiate and reject any provisions that prevent Nepal from pursuing independent foreign relations with China or any other state. Nepal should capitalize on peacekeeping as a tool of foreign policy and try to maintain its clout in UN affairs. Finally, Nepal should develop a doctrine for how it will use military diplomacy to support foreign policy.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CA	Constituent Assembly
CPNM	Communist Party of Nepal Maoist
CoAS	Chief of Army Staff
DGMO	Director General of Military Operations
GoN	Government of Nepal
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defense
NA	Nepali Army
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PM	Prime Minister
TTC	Troop Contributing Countries
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Small states positioned in strategic areas amid larger and dominant neighbors are bound to devise effective strategies that lessen their vulnerabilities and extract opportunities to secure their vital interests. Nepal, a landlocked country, is sandwiched between prospering and powerful China and India. Nepal's relation with China and India has "progressed through different periods, stages and events in history."<sup>1</sup> Historically, Nepal's relationship with these two countries has oscillated between cordiality and tensions, even at times, feeling threatened by both the neighbors. During this complicated and longstanding relationship with India and China, the Nepali Army (NA) has usually played a role in diplomacy as a subset of foreign policy. At times, this institutional coordination has paid off and at other times it has not. Against this backdrop, this thesis examines the historical relationship between the NA and Nepal's foreign policy in order to understand the role it has played and can continue to play when engaging with its powerful neighbors.

### A. RESEARCH QUESTION

The thesis asks: how has the Nepalese state used military diplomacy to advance its foreign policy with India and China?

### B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Military forces play several roles in a country besides defending its national boundaries. Their participation in transnational peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts is well known and a growing aspect of their activities. Historically, they also participate with other countries and their forces in a shared defense and a diplomatic context. The militaries of two or more states often come together to conduct bilateral and multilateral exercises and develop means of compatibility and interoperability, thereby leading to better ties not

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<sup>1</sup> Girdhari Dahal, "Foreign Relation of Nepal with China and India." *Journal of Political Science* 18 (February 2018): 46.

only militarily but diplomatically between the states.<sup>2</sup> The case of Nepal presents an important opportunity to study how militaries can participate in the context of diplomacy and aid in balancing relationships between countries. Nepal has a long history of using its military for this purpose and an analysis of this history can add to the theory of military diplomacy as well as civil-military relations because the alliance between the institutions has produced benefits for the country.

This study seeks to contribute to the academic literature on military diplomacy and its role in foreign policy, particularly for smaller states. This study also aims to show how cooperation between the militaries of different states can help in fostering diplomatic ties.

China and India are two Asian giants with noted military strength. Nepal, given its lesser military strength, has a less option to use its military as a hard power to pursue national interests. Therefore, this study is significant for Nepal and hopes to inform policymakers about the legacy and possibilities of military diplomacy as Kathmandu seeks to consolidate relations with India and China, as well as the wider South Asian region.

## **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review is divided into four parts. The first part surveys the literature on the definition and purpose of military diplomacy. The second part examines the geopolitics of and Nepalese foreign policy with China and India, while the third part reviews the issues in Nepal's military diplomacy with China and India, and, finally, the fourth part reviews the NA's military-to-military engagement.

### **1. Military Diplomacy: Definitions and Purposes**

Defining the term "military diplomacy" is difficult as it requires careful consideration of the concept and its purposes. Part of this definitional challenge stems from the frequent use of similar terms such as "defense diplomacy," "security diplomacy," and more, which share certain overlapping concepts and purposes but are different from

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<sup>2</sup> Corey Ray, "U.S. Army Pacific, Nepali Army Co-Hosts Disaster Response Exercise," U.S. Army, September 26, 2018, [https://www.army.mil/article/211615/us\\_army\\_pacific\\_nepali\\_army\\_co\\_hosts\\_disaster\\_response\\_exercise](https://www.army.mil/article/211615/us_army_pacific_nepali_army_co_hosts_disaster_response_exercise).

“military diplomacy” (and each other) in their objectives and practices. Vinod Bhatia et al. note that the term “defense diplomacy,” describes all security-related diplomacy, going beyond the purely military.<sup>3</sup> They state that “military diplomacy” is mostly used in military parlance, whereas the term “defense diplomacy” typically refers to use of the military as well as other national resources. This study uses the term “military diplomacy” as it is concerned specifically with Nepal’s effort to pursue its foreign policy via military means.

Shafikul Alam defines military diplomacy as the peaceful use of military in the realm of diplomacy to achieve the goals of national foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> He lists many advantages of military diplomacy if properly executed, like enhancing defense relationships, strengthening defense capabilities in areas of defense equipment, major defense purchases, enhancing military capabilities, assistance to friendly foreign countries to develop their defense capabilities and promoting military interoperability. Bhatia et al. consider military diplomacy as a form of soft power that encompasses the government’s efforts illustrating the fundamental mechanism that renders military diplomacy effectively functional in geopolitical complexities.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, they elaborate that military diplomacy covers the whole array of non-aggressive efforts carried out by the military of any country with the intention to develop a positive perception of that country and secure the trust of the international community. At the same time, Bhatia et al. also point out challenges in military diplomacy that are both material and conceptual. They consider the biggest challenge is for each partner to consider that their ‘partnership’ is important and both partners must meet as equals.<sup>6</sup> The authors also state that in a state-centered world, national interest assumes prime importance and it may trump cooperation. Nepal has observed these challenges in relations with India; while many times it has worked perfectly,

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<sup>3</sup> Vinod Bhatia, Vijai S. Chaudhary, and Ranjit Singh, *Defense Diplomacy and International Military Cooperation* (New Delhi: Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, 2016), [https://cenjows.gov.in/pdf/Defence\\_Diplimancy\\_Inside\\_Layout.pdf](https://cenjows.gov.in/pdf/Defence_Diplimancy_Inside_Layout.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Shafikul Alam, “Military Diplomacy—A Tool to Pursue Foreign Policy,” Mirpur Papers 2013, accessed July 18, 2019, <https://dscsc.mil.bd/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/mp-i19.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Bhatia, Chaudhary, and Singh, “*Defense Diplomacy and International Military Cooperation.*”

<sup>6</sup> Bhatia, Chaudhary, and Singh.

in certain cases—in spite of having very good military-to-military cooperation—India has imposed economic blockades on Nepal.

Iis Gindarsah claims that military diplomacy assumed importance during the late 1980s and established communications and exchanges that focused on peacetime military-to-military engagements to further the objectives of foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Gindarsh largely agrees with Alam and Bhatia et al. on the nature and function of military diplomacy; however, he argues that military diplomacy serves two agendas: one, it helps to build amicable defense ties with regional powers; two, it helps the military's transformation aimed at upgrading defense industries. He further states that military diplomacy can be carried out by appointing defense attachés to partner countries, holding interactions between senior military and civil defense officials, furthering arrangements on bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation, facilitating exchange of training for military and civilian defense officers, and hosting bilateral or multilateral military exercises and workshops.<sup>8</sup>

Göran Swistek defines military diplomacy as a force to ward off enmity, while generating and maintaining trust and confidence in partner countries; and it supports building armed forces that effectively execute the democratic orders of the government.<sup>9</sup> He argues that military diplomacy is the peacetime activity aimed at “conflict prevention and resolution as against the traditional role of the armed forces which is defined by their capability and preparedness to use force and pose a threat for the purpose of defense, deterrence, compulsion, or intervention.”<sup>10</sup> He further notes that military diplomacy is achieved by defense cooperation among partner states, particularly those that are transitioning from a post-conflict scenario toward democracies, where it can promote modern foreign and security policy.

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<sup>7</sup> Iis Gindarsah, “Indonesia’s Defence Diplomacy: Harnessing the Hedging Strategy against Regional Uncertainties” (Working paper, S. Rajaratnam School Of International Studies Singapore, 2015), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WP293.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Gindarsah, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Göran Swistek, “The Nexus between Public Diplomacy and Military Diplomacy in Foreign Affairs and Defense Policy,” *Connection the Quarterly Journal* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26326276.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aa3b5b3aa308c263b7db5295abb99b2>.

<sup>10</sup> Swistek.

## 2. Geopolitics and Nepalese Foreign Policy with China and India

Nepal's military diplomacy in relation to China and India must be understood in the context of Nepal's foreign policy goals more broadly and its geopolitical relationship with those states. The official website of the Government of Nepal states that Nepal's foreign policy goal is "to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting the economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal."<sup>11</sup> Directive principles of the Nepalese Constitution (Article 50.4) declare that "the state shall direct its international relations toward enhancing the dignity of the nation in the world community by maintaining international relations on the basis of sovereign equality, while safeguarding the freedom, territorial integrity and independence and national interest of Nepal."<sup>12</sup> Considering the complex geopolitical situation, King Prithvi Narayan Shah—the founder of Nepal—outlined the critical aspects of foreign policy:

The Kingdom of Nepal is a yam between two stones. Friendship should be maintained between the Chinese and the southern emperor [the British]. The southern emperor is very clever as he has kept India suppressed and is entrenching himself towards outer territory. He is very clever. He has kept India suppressed. He is entrenching himself in the plains.... Fighting should be based on defensive basis than offensive [tactics].... If it is found difficult to resist, then even means of persuasion, tact and deceit should be employed.<sup>13</sup>

The statement demonstrates that, since its inception, Nepalese rulers were wary about Nepal's geopolitics, its geostrategic location, as well as the intentions and influence of its neighbors and had accordingly developed diplomatic policy to deal with them.

Andrea Savada describes India's dominating attitude towards Nepal during the 1950s after Nepal achieved its first democracy, ending the oligarchy of Rana rulers. Owing to India's increasing assertiveness, Nepal started to incline toward China in order to

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<sup>11</sup> "Nepal's Foreign Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://mofa.gov.np/foreign-policy>.

<sup>12</sup> "The Constitution of Nepal 2015," Ministry of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/np/np029en.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> S.D. Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973), 2.

counterbalance India.<sup>14</sup> Savada also details that after the 1962 China-India war, the relationship between Nepal and India softened considerably. Considering the geopolitical balancing, Savada discusses the policies adopted by India towards Nepal during the period 1950 to 1989. Relations between the two countries hit a low point when Nepal signed an agreement to purchase weapons from China, and in response, India clamped a blockade on Nepal.<sup>15</sup> Richard Weintraub claims that while Nepal has a history of being entangled with the overlapping security interests of India and China, the hostility seemingly started between Nepal and India once Nepal decided to acquire anti-air guns from China.<sup>16</sup>

This period from 1950 to 1990 depicts that the foreign policy efforts with respect to both countries were conflictual, and Nepal seems to have played the China card against the diktats of India. During this time, though Nepal seemed to engage in defense cooperation for the first time with China, it did not sit well with India. Having reviewed the geopolitics and Nepalese foreign policy, it is important to look into the historical and contemporary Nepalese military diplomacy.

### **3. Nepal's Historical Military Diplomacy**

Nepal has a history of employing its military as a diplomatic tool in its dealings with India and China. A knowledge of this history is necessary to understand the modern iteration of this practice. Nepal's earliest military-diplomatic relationship was with British India. S. D. Muni mentions that the decision by the Nepal Government in 1857 to support the British East India Company to suppress the Sepoy mutiny was a brilliant master stroke to enhance Nepal's national security and to get added favor from the British Raj.<sup>17</sup> He states that the British for their part responded favorably to the then Prime Minister Jang Bahadur's friendly overtures. Muni notes that, as a result of military diplomacy, the British

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea Savada, ed., *Nepal and Bhutan Country Studies* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division of Congress, 1993), 180.

<sup>15</sup> Savada, 182.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Weintraub, "India Shows its Muscle to Nepal," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 1989, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/04/13/india-shows-its-muscle-to-nepal/636ae049-d573-4d3f-912a-dda8cf072966/?utm\\_term=.e422092b7b6d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/04/13/india-shows-its-muscle-to-nepal/636ae049-d573-4d3f-912a-dda8cf072966/?utm_term=.e422092b7b6d).

<sup>17</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 8–9.

Raj observed a policy of strict non-interference in the internal matters of Nepal. He also mentions that because of this support, Nepal was given back a portion of its land that was annexed to British India in the Anglo-Nepal War. Muni states that under a tripartite treaty signed by Nepal, India, and the British in November 1947, Britain and India were permitted to recruit Gurkhas for their armies, and in return for such assistance, the government of India agreed to meet the defense requirements of the NA.<sup>18</sup> He also explains Nepal's foreign policy changed as needed to protect the national independence and sovereignty of Nepal. Thus, Muni describes the practices of military diplomacy by Ranas from the early 19th century until the first democratic period in Nepal.

Nepal also has a history of military diplomacy with India. Even when Nepal–India relations were ruined politically, military-to-military ties between the two countries were still intact. Nepal also has a history of military diplomacy with India. Hemanta Ojha states that the economic blockade of 2015, which Nepal's government blames on India, was applied after the promulgation of new constitution of Nepal through the Nepalese constituent assembly by an overwhelming majority.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this blockade, as Ojha states, was the denial of the rights of the Nepalese Madheshis living along India's border.<sup>20</sup> Kripendra Amatya mentions that during the 2015 Indian blockade, average Nepalese were greatly affected. Even when this blockade was going on, the Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) of the Indian Army visited Nepal to participate in the tenth battalion-level bilateral military exercise known as "Surya Kiran." The meeting of the two countries' Army Chiefs and thereby the NA Chief's meetings with the political leaders of India helped considerably to ease the blockade.<sup>21</sup> Thus, military diplomacy has relevance and can work significantly to diffuse the political tension between the two countries.

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<sup>18</sup> Muni, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Hemanta Ojha, "The India Nepal Crisis," *The Diplomat*, November 27, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/11/the-india-nepal-crisis/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ojha.

<sup>21</sup> Chiran Thapa, "Nepal India Relations in the Military Realm," *South Asia*, November 11, 2016, <https://www.southasia.com.au/2016/11/11/nepal-india-relations-military-realm/>.



#### **4. NA's Recent Military-to-Military Engagement**

Apart from participating in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, the NA also conducts various multinational peacekeeping exercises requiring multinational interoperability that intends to develop the common tactics, techniques, and procedures required to execute effective peacekeeping operations. Prominent among them is the Shanti Prayas (Peace Initiative) Exercise, which NA has co-hosted with the U.S. Pacific Command three times—in 2000, 2013, and 2017.<sup>22</sup> The number of friendly nations who participated in 2000 was four, but by 2013, the number of participating member states rose to 23 and participating soldiers were 445.<sup>23</sup> This demonstrates the high level of professionalism of the NA and its intent to increase military diplomacy with multinational partners; however, the efforts taken by the NA must be coordinated with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and in line with the foreign policy of Nepal.<sup>24</sup> In 2017, as many as a thousand army personnel from 28 countries participated in the two-week-long exercise, which was jointly hosted by the NA and the United States Pacific Command.<sup>25</sup>

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATION AND HYPOTHESIS**

The primary role for most militaries of any country is defending territorial integrity, national independence, and sovereignty. Nepal has been adopting military diplomacy as a significant tool to further these foreign policy objectives. The potential explanations on how Nepal has used or currently uses military diplomacy as a subset of foreign policy can be seen from the perspective of the limitations imposed on Nepal by its geopolitical status. For a small and comparatively weak country like Nepal, located between giant India and China, pursuing an aggressive approach remains unrealistic. Realizing changing patterns

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor Mohr, "Shanti Prayas Exercise Commences in Nepal," U.S. Department of Defense News, March 21, 2017, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1124708/shanti-prayas-exercise-commences-in-nepal/>.

<sup>23</sup> "Military Diplomacy," Editorial, *Kantipur National Daily*, March 13, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> *Kantipur National Daily*, "Military Diplomacy."

<sup>25</sup> "Exercise Shanti Prayas III Concludes," *The Himalayan Times*, April 03, 2017, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/exercise-shanti-prayas-iii-concludes/>.

of geopolitics and changes in the nature of Nepal's governance system during different periods, the hypotheses about the conduct of Nepal's military diplomacy are based on following three arguments.

The first is that, when it conducts military diplomacy wisely, a state can maintain its survival but also extract more concessions from larger states. A small and vulnerable state like Nepal, which was once contiguous to the more powerful British India, conducted military diplomacy through appeasement and provided security aid for the British. In response, the British protected the sovereignty of Nepal, albeit with some form of influence. By providing military support to the British, Nepal was able to survive as an independent protectorate when the rest of South Asia came under colonial rule.

Second, for a small country like Nepal, when managing relationships with two big neighbors, its military diplomacy must take into account geopolitical sensitivities or that diplomacy can be counterproductive. In particular, balancing against India, a state on which Nepal relies for trade and transit and with which it has close cultural and social ties, did not work well. After India's independence from the British in 1947, Nepal became more connected to and dependent upon India due to the expansion of trade. This dependency and proximity would create more frequent military-to-military engagements between Nepal and India; however, India as the dominant partner is able to dictate the terms of this relationship. On the other hand, after the mid-1950s, due to the emergence of China as a potential balancer in the north, Nepal started balancing India's dominance by aligning with China. Contrary to Nepal's expectations, this balancing act has proved to be detrimental for the development and survival of Nepal because of the complexities it has produced. Thus, it is important to understand the sensitivities of geopolitics while applying the military as a diplomatic tool.

Third, effective military diplomacy with two big neighbors means balancing military engagement with both countries simultaneously. Learning from its early experiences, Nepal has maintained military cooperation and assistance with both countries simultaneously from the beginning of the 21st century. Nepal has continued bilateral and multilateral relations with civilian military defense officials; joint military exercises, trainings, war games; and exchange of high level defense visits among many others with

both the countries simultaneously. Geopolitical realities remain an important imperative and will change the patterns of military diplomacy.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research is focused on the military diplomacy of the NA vis-à-vis India and China. This thesis utilizes the comparative method framework to understand the role Nepal's military can play in diplomacy. First, the researcher analyzes Nepal's geopolitics and military diplomacy from 1847 to 1950 during the Rana regime. Second, the researcher examines the role of the military in the first democratic period into the authoritarian Panchayat regime from 1950 to 1989 in Nepal's relations with India and China; and finally, the research examines the Nepal' role in having a balanced military diplomatic ties s India and China from 1990 to 2018. The research is qualitative and explanatory.

Primary data was collected from internet searches and seminar/workshop participation, government reports and documents, research papers, and personal observation made during his posting in the NA's headquarters. Other sources include parliamentary reports on debates on defense and security, policy documents as policy statements, discussion papers, MoD reports, and other related material.

The researcher also used secondary sources in the form of books, reports, articles, and newspapers with information relevant to the topic of this research. The study also reviewed archival materials such as historical records on civil-military relations and its impact on the foreign policy.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter II examines the nature of Nepalese military diplomacy from the viewpoint of protecting Nepal's vital interests from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century. The chapter commences with the review of foreign policy adopted by the Shah dynasty and continues to examine the nature and effectiveness of the military diplomacy embraced by the Rana regime against the mighty British India. Chapter III briefly summarizes the changed environment when the British withdrew from India in 1947, the fall of the Rana regime in 1951, and the first democratic period in Nepal

(1951–1960). The chapter goes on to critically analyze the different patterns of military diplomacy from 1950 to 1990, covering different contours of political systems in Nepal democracy and direct monarchical rule. Many military diplomatic efforts carried out during this period did not yield the intended results, and hence, this chapter concludes military diplomacy has to be carefully coordinated with the fundamental tenets of foreign policy; otherwise, it might be counterproductive. Chapter IV examines military diplomacy in terms of increased Chinese military assistance. It discusses the expansion of military diplomatic efforts with China and India in the form of military exchanges, bilateral military exercises, and most importantly, it analyzes the role played by the NA during the 2015 economic blockade. Chapter V finally presents the findings of the previous chapters and concludes providing with recommendations.

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## II. MILITARY DIPLOMACY WITH THE BRITISH RAJ IN INDIA AND WITH CHINA FROM THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Nepal has a long history of applying military diplomacy as a tool to engage with its strong neighbors to secure its vital interests. Starting in 1743, King Prithvi Narayan Shah made military alliances with many principalities to augment his military superiority as well as protect Nepal from external powers.<sup>26</sup> His strategy led to the integration of 54 princely states and established Nepal as a centralized modern state after conquering Kathmandu in 1769. After the debacle of the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816), in which Nepal ceded one-third of its territory to the British, the Rana regime (1846–1950) formulated a foreign policy based on geo-strategic isolation, which awarded Nepal relative freedom from external intervention and domination. Nevertheless, recognizing the rise of the British Empire, the Rana regime made an alliance with British India, executing a series of military-diplomatic measures, ranging from military assistance to allowing the recruitment of Gurkhas for the British army.<sup>27</sup> This pattern of using the military as a tool of foreign policy then continued throughout history and provides a guide for the future use of the military as an institution that has played an important role in the country’s foreign policy.

This chapter provides the background of the military diplomacy carried out by Nepal from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century. Initially, it examines the foreign policy adopted by the Shah Dynasty after the unification of Nepal during the latter half of the 18th century. Following that, the chapter discusses in detail the aftermath of the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816) and the Sugauli Treaty, and the nature and effectiveness of the military diplomacy embraced by the Rana regime vis-à-vis mighty British India to safeguard Nepal’s interest in preserving its independence. An examination of this history illustrates

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<sup>26</sup> Yuba Lamsal, “Unification Era Diplomacy,” *The Rising Nepal*, accessed August 28, 2019, <http://www.therisingnepal.org.np/news/14805>.

<sup>27</sup> The word Gurkhas comes from Gorkhas, who are soldiers native to Nepal and recruited for the British Army and Indian Army. The terms “Gurkha” and “Gorkhali,” which are used interchangeably, means “Nepali.” Historically, this term originates from a district of Gorkha, a hill principality, which is linked with the unification campaign of Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1743. In Nepal, they are called Gorkhalis, but in India and Britain they are called Gurkhas.

the long lineage of military diplomacy in Nepal, which may provide an example for the current geopolitical setting of the country.

#### **A. THE SHAH DYNASTY AND THE ORIGIN OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF NEPAL**

Nepal's modern-day politics dates back to 1769, when the Gorkhalis under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Kathmandu and he ascended to the throne of Nepal.<sup>28</sup> Not only did King Prithvi Narayan Shah unify and consolidate Nepal, he also laid out the fundamental tenets of foreign policy that are still relevant for Nepal in the 21st century. King Prithvi was aware that Nepal, due to its geostrategic location, was vulnerable. Thus, he always believed that Nepal was like a “yam between two boulders,” and he espoused the policy of maintaining good and equal relationships with China to the north and the British to the south.<sup>29</sup> He also warned his successors to avoid any entanglements with either power.<sup>30</sup> Nepal currently faces a similar situation, which is not a surprise given its geographical position. India is no longer a British colony, but Nepal continues to face similar pressure from both states, which is discussed in the next chapter.

According to Jayaraj Acharya, King Prithvi Narayan Shah's foreign policy displayed five basic tenets.<sup>31</sup> First, he engaged in a strategy to unify and consolidate the mountain states along the Mahabharat range, also known as Lower Himalaya, in order to become strong enough to ward off the expanding British colonial power in the south. Second was building up of a strong military power, for which he selected capable, intelligent, and decisive commanders who could effectively train and lead their men to success on the battlefield. Third, he maintained a watchful approach to his neighbors. Next, he always took a defensive posture toward strong enemies but would be aggressive towards

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<sup>28</sup> Leo Rose and Margaret Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Leo Rose and John Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 119.

<sup>31</sup> Jayaraj Acharya, “Nepal's Foreign Policy: A Geopolitical Reflection,” accessed June 26, 2019, [http://www.iids.org.np/sites/default/files/doc\\_events/Dr.%20Jayaraj%20Acharya\\_Nepal%27s%20Foreign%20Policy%20A%20Reflection.pdf](http://www.iids.org.np/sites/default/files/doc_events/Dr.%20Jayaraj%20Acharya_Nepal%27s%20Foreign%20Policy%20A%20Reflection.pdf).

smaller principalities with weak armies. Finally, he strongly emphasized the economic development of the nation, employing various policy measures to ensure growth. King Prithvi Narayan Shah used military as the hard power to integrate all the scattered smaller states to found Nepal; however after that, he believed that Nepal should maintain a defensive narrative in regard to its stronger northern and southern neighbors and only go into war if it was unavoidable.

After the death of King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1775, his practice of maintaining an equal friendship with China and India was not continued by his immediate successors, namely Rana Bahadur Shah and Surendra Bikram Shah. Ranas used the NA to challenge their neighbors, rather than using it as a diplomatic tool to mend their relationships with them. Nepal went to war first in the north with Tibet and China, later in the west with the Sikhs, and eventually in the south with the British.<sup>32</sup> The defeat at the hands of the British East India Company in the Anglo-Nepal War made Nepalese rulers realize the nation's interests could also be attained through diplomacy.

## **B. THE ANGLO–NEPAL WAR (1814–1816) AND ITS AFTERMATH**

The loss incurred by Nepal during the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816) put an end to Nepal's expansionist foreign policy and compelled Nepal to adopt British-centric foreign policy, which would eventually advance military diplomacy. The Sugauli Treaty signed between Nepal and British India, which put an end to the Anglo-Nepal War, is considered to be unequal, heavily favoring British India. Nevertheless, the treaty can be seen as a "testament of British not intending to colonize Nepal but rather establish an enduring relationship with influence."<sup>33</sup>

From 1805 to 1814, the British East India Company pursued the policy of preserving territories under its possession, preventing any alliance of Indian states against

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<sup>32</sup> Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Sparkes, "Two Hundred Years of Nepal-Britain Relations: A Way Forward," Foreign and Commonwealth Office, September 25, 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/two-hundred-years-of-nepal-britain-relations-a-way-forward>.



their regime, and avoiding unnecessary embroilments until.<sup>34</sup> The British had a tense relationship with Nepal, which had undermined their commercial strategy for the Himalayan states. The British therefore considered the war with Nepal necessary, and Nepal's continuous encroachment in the border areas in India gave the British another excuse to attack Nepal.<sup>35</sup> Leo Rose and John Scholz maintain that British launched an aggressive war against Nepal using minor disputes over Terai lands as a pretext.<sup>36</sup> British were distressed over the emergence of the powerful Nepal with demonstrated military capabilities astride their vulnerable and strategic communication lines in northern India.<sup>37</sup>

Initially, the British met with a series of failures that made them change their fighting strategy in the mountains. With the renewed strategy and additional military resources, the British East India Company staged a decisive victory over Nepal and threatened Kathmandu. The war was a setback for Nepal. The Treaty of Sugauli signed on 4 March 1816 brought the war to an end.

The Treaty of Sugauli was a costly affair for Nepal. The treaty allowed the British to open a British residency in Kathmandu. In addition, it made Nepal surrender all of its hill territories west of the Koshi River as well as the disputed Terai areas below the hills to the British, which was one-third of the Nepalese territory.<sup>38</sup>

The years from 1816 to 1846 continued to witness a widespread failure in the realm of Nepalese foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Nepalese attempts to fuse the neighboring Indian states into an effective anti-British alliance were unsuccessful. Prime Minister Bhim Sen Thapa dispatched envoys to the Marathas and Sikhs to urge them to stand with Nepal against the British, an offer that was declined.<sup>40</sup> In addition the efforts to extract cooperation from the

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<sup>34</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Rose and Scholz, 36–37.

<sup>38</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> Rose, 102.

<sup>40</sup> Rose, 86.

Chinese and Tibet met with disappointment. By 1846, Nepal firmly understood that the British had established dominance in India and that China was reluctant to offer the support required to preserve Nepal against British expansion.<sup>41</sup> In this changed environment, a new foreign policy that would appease the British seemed essential, and the period 1846–58 saw the beginning of an era of military diplomacy as a part of Nepalese foreign policy that appeared to be critical for the safeguarding of Nepal’s autonomy.

While the Anglo-Nepal War led to a realization in Nepal that it was the end of the expansion era, for the British it led to a realization that it was difficult to fight with the Nepalese on their terrain. The British also realized that it would be an uphill task to govern Nepal, and they gave up any notion of bringing Nepal under their empire and formed alliance to use the state as a buffer zone.<sup>42</sup> This alliance, which lasted for more than a hundred years, was due to military diplomacy.

### **C. THE RANA REGIME AND THE EXPANSION OF NEPAL–BRITISH MILITARY TIES**

The emergence of Jang Bahadur Rana and the Rana regime in 1846 recognized the importance of making ties with British India in order to secure the regime and the independence of Nepal. He was able to use Nepal’s military for this new diplomatic approach. Jang Bahadur took over power after he led the Kot Massacre against his opponents on 14 September 1846.<sup>43</sup> The weak and reluctant reigning monarch, King Surendra, approved the Sanad (royal decree) of 1856 that legitimized the Rana regime, and awarded Jang Bahadur and his inheritors complete power in matters of army,

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<sup>41</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> A crisis occurred on 14 September when a key supporter of the queen, Kaji Gagan Singh Bhandari, was assassinated. Being quite angry, the queen called all the key political figures to the Kot, a courtyard adjoining the palace. The Kot meeting got ugly where charges and counter charges were made against each other and that finally resulted in the massacre of most of the rivals of Jang Bahadur and his brothers. Around 30 key officials were killed during the Kot massacre. All of Jang Bahadur’s major rivals were either killed or expelled from Nepal. On 16 September, Jang Bahadur was appointed Mukhtiyar (minister) by King Rajendra. (See John Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers and Priests: Nepalese Politics and the Rise of Jang Bahadur Rana, 1830–1857* (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1992), 255–256.

administration, justice, and foreign relations.<sup>44</sup> The Ranas were also not subservient to the king's orders as he remained only a figurehead. Thus, with this royal decree, Jang Bahadur consolidated all executive powers within him and started a family rule in Nepal wherein the post of prime minister was filled through hereditary succession.<sup>45</sup>

Jang Bahadur's policy was formulated recognizing Britain as the unchallenged power in the region. Realizing the feeble existence of China on Tibet, Jang Bahadur concluded that the British could attack Nepal since there was no strong opposition to counterbalance them.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Jang Bahadur reversed the anti-British policy adopted by King Rajendra that would antagonize the British. In order to avoid the fate of other smaller Indian states, which were overtaken by the British, Jang Bahadur and his successors reoriented the Nepalese foreign policy that gave Nepal a significant role in upcoming events on the plains of India.<sup>47</sup>

#### **D. THE SEPOY MUTINY AND THE DAWN OF NEPAL'S MILITARY DIPLOMACY**

During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, Jang Bahadur saw a window of opportunity to ally with British India through military diplomacy.<sup>48</sup> The mutiny saw extensive uprisings in the British East India army that also included the Peasant Revolt, which threatened the British hold on India.<sup>49</sup> Rebels were successful in getting hold of the important cities of Bengal. In mid-May 1857, the news of mutiny reached Kathmandu. Jang Bahadur decided to leverage this event to make ties with the British.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Upendra Yadav, "Nepal-India Relations," *Nepal's National Interest: Foreign Policy, Internal Security, Federalism, Energy-Economy*, ed. Tomislav Delinic and Nishchal N. Pandey (Kathmandu: Centre for South Asian Studies, 2011), 222.

<sup>47</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 106–107.

<sup>48</sup> Beginning in May 1857, uprisings took place across the north India, which were referred to as the Sepoy mutiny, and seemed to threaten the authority of the British East India Company. See Andrea Matles Savada and George Lawrence Harris, *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993), 31.

<sup>49</sup> Savada and Harris, *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 128.

Jang Bahadur was looking for an advantage for his regime in Nepal; however, there was a debate between him and his ministers in the palace about whether or not to send troops. Initially, Jang Bahadur faced tough opposition from the NA, officials, and even from his own brothers as they sympathized with the rebels in India.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Jang Bahadur believed that the mutiny was not going to succeed, and he argued that the preservation of British rule would be in the interests of Nepal.<sup>52</sup> In response to their extensive opposition to sending troops to British India, Jang Bahadur held many council meetings in which he convinced his opponents that British were sure to win and that by assisting them, Nepal could regain the territory lost during the Anglo-Nepal War. On 31 May 1857, Nepal's government wrote to Ramsay, the British resident in Nepal:

There is no probability that this government will receive any orders from the British government on such a trifling occasion, yet in the consideration of the friendship which subsists between the two states it would not be consistent with the rules of friendship to keep silent on hearing such intelligence. I therefore desire to say that we are ready to execute any orders that may be given to this government by the Right Honourable Governor General.<sup>53</sup>

As a result, on June 1857, Governor General Canning of the East India Company acquired the services of 3,000 Gurkha soldiers from the regime to be dispatched to Lucknow to relieve the British position.<sup>54</sup> The Nepal government was ready and in June 1857 sent the first detachment towards Lucknow followed by two more detachments. On 10 December 1857, Jang Bahadur himself led 8,000 Nepalese troops into India. Commanding overall 15,000 Nepalese troops, Jang Bahadur assisted in the British campaigns of Gorakhpur and Lucknow.<sup>55</sup> The NA performed well, culminating in the capture of Lucknow. Prime Minister Jang Bahadur returned victoriously back to Nepal in

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<sup>51</sup> Rose, 128.

<sup>52</sup> Rose, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Rose, 129.

<sup>54</sup> Rose, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Savada and Harris, *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies*, 31–32.

March 1858, but kept supporting the British by clearing the rebels who had taken refuge in the Terai of the Nepal–India border.<sup>56</sup>

British India was elated with the support of Nepalese troops; they decided to reward Nepal for its service as Jang Bahadur had expected. Governor General Canning wrote on May 1858 to the Nepal government:

I have determined on the part of the British Government to restore to the Nepal State the whole or the former Gurkha possessions below the hills extending from the river Gogra on the west to the British territory of the Gorakhpur on the east and bounded on the south by Kreegurh and the districts of Baraith and on the north by hills.<sup>57</sup>

A treaty between Nepal and the British Government was concluded in November 1860. The treaty's Article 2 states:

The British Government hereby bestows on the Maharajah of Nepal in full sovereignty, the whole of the lowlands between the Rivers Kali and Rapti, and the whole of the lowlands lying between the River Rapti and the District of Gorakhpur, which were in the possession of the Nepal State in the year 1815, and were ceded to the British Government by Article III of the Treaty concluded at Sugauli on the 2nd of December in that year.<sup>58</sup>

This treaty was a victory for Nepal for its military support to the British India which helped Nepal establish better relations with the British and regain the territory lost during the Anglo-Nepal War. In addition, it also convinced the regime that if they continued to support the British, Nepal would be benefited.

With the restoration of the Terai lands to Nepal in 1860, the national boundaries of the modern state settled. In the post-1860 period, the British agreed not to intervene in Nepal's internal politics and economy and to respect Nepal's isolation policy, which barred British access to areas of Nepal besides Kathmandu and certain places in the southern lowland of Nepal. Nepal generally accepted British guidance on Nepal's external relations

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<sup>56</sup> Savada and Harris, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 131.

<sup>58</sup> Ram Shrestha, "BOUNDARY TREATY – 1st November 1860," *Complete Nepal*, January 15, 2011, <https://completenepal.wordpress.com/2011/01/15/boundary-treaty-1st-november-1860/>.

in what amounted to a limited subordinate status in the British Indian frontier security system.<sup>59</sup>

The British response after this support by the Nepal Government to quell the Sepoy Mutiny against the British set an example for future military diplomacy. This military support helped Nepal regain Terai land lost during the Anglo-Nepal War but also convinced the British to respect the sovereignty of Nepal and, thereby, established the beginning of good faith and understanding with the British. After that, this relationship continued, making the military the center of diplomacy with the British.

#### **E. GURKHA RECRUITMENT IN THE BRITISH INDIAN ARMY**

From 1885 onwards, the British continued to legally recruit Gurkhas into the British Indian army in exchange for Nepal's status as an independent country.<sup>60</sup> This practice allowed Ranas to pursue an isolationist policy protected from other external aggressions."<sup>61</sup> The British were fascinated by the bravery and fighting skills of the Nepali soldiers during the Anglo-Nepal war (1814–1816) and Sepoy Mutiny, and desired to enlist them in Indian army regiments.<sup>62</sup> Though British India had been illegally recruiting Gurkhas since 1815 without seeking the authority from the Nepal government, Jang Bahadur did not allow British India to recruit Gurkha soldiers from Nepal through any treaty or any bilateral agreements. The British desperately wanted to obtain the legal right

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<sup>59</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Rose, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Ali Riaz and Subho Basu, *Paradise Lost? State Failure in Nepal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>62</sup> Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 148.

to recruit Gurkhas from Nepal.<sup>63</sup> After the death of Jang Bahadur in 1877, his successors legalized this recruitment by the British.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, in 1885, the British formally gained the right to recruit Gurkhas for the Indian Army.<sup>65</sup> Prime Minister Bir Shamsher allowed the British to establish Gurkha recruiting centers in India along Nepale-India borders.<sup>66</sup> From 1885 to 1901, the British massively recruited Gurkhas from Nepal into their ranks and files. In 1886, two Gurkha regiments were raised.<sup>67</sup> From 1886 to 1892, around 7,662 recruits were provided to British India, and most of the recruits belonged to the favored martial races, Magars and Gurungs.<sup>68</sup> By 1901, four additional Gurkha battalions were also established.<sup>69</sup>

When Chandra Shamsher became the Prime Minister of Nepal on 27 June 1901, the recruitment became more organized and easier. He provided the British with support for further recruitment of Gurkhas. An additional Gurkha regiment was raised in 1902.<sup>70</sup> In 1908, the Gurkha brigade had 20 battalions organized into ten rifle regiments who worked for the British.<sup>71</sup> By 1914, the strength of the Gurkhas serving in the British Indian Army had gone up to 26,000.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Rose and Fisher, 147.

<sup>64</sup> Jang Bahadur in the years after his support for the Sepoy Mutiny was not much pleased with the reward Nepal got from British India. He wanted to be the King of Nepal, which was outright rejected by the British. In addition, he wanted back all the land which they had ceded to British India, but to his dismay, Nepal received much less land. Denying access to Gurkhas for recruitment, Jang wanted to strengthen negotiations to pursue his political ambitions and get those remaining lands from British India. Also part of the reason for not helping British India was to demonstrate to his brothers and council members that he also harbored anti-British sentiments like them. Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Rathaur, "British Gurkha Recruitment: A Historical Perspective," 20.

<sup>66</sup> Rathaur, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Eden Vansittart, *Gurkha, Handbook for Indian Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1906), 24.

<sup>68</sup> J.B.R. Nicholson, *The Gurkha Rifles* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1974), 23–24.

<sup>69</sup> Rathaur, "British Gurkha Recruitment: A Historical Perspective," 20.

<sup>70</sup> Nicholson, *The Gurkha Rifles*, 23.

<sup>71</sup> Sushila Tyagi, *Indo-Nepal Relations (1858–1914)* (Delhi: D.K. Publishing House, 1974), 211.

<sup>72</sup> Tyagi, *Indo-Nepal Relations*, 212.

Once their goal of recruiting Gurkhas was achieved, the British became friendlier towards Nepal. Over the years, the relationship between the Ranas and the British flourished. British India paid a subsidy to the Government of Nepal for the soldiers, and later, pensions brought a flow of cash into Nepal. Most importantly, the Rana regime not only had internal autonomy but also received the guarantee of British support against internal disorder and external hostility towards Nepal.<sup>73</sup> As a result of Gurkha recruitment for British India, Nepal received significant assistance from the British in carrying out its isolationist foreign policy.

## **F. GURKHA PARTICIPATION IN THE WORLD WARS**

During the two World Wars, Nepal continued to help the British by lending battalions, which brought Nepal ever closer to its southern neighbor. Pleased by the support of the Nepalese Government, British India formally acknowledged the independent status of Nepal in the international arena.

### **1. World War I (1914–1918)**

The military-diplomatic support that Nepal provided during World War I reinforced the ties between Nepal and British India, and most significantly resulted in the signing of a treaty that formalized the unrestricted independence of Nepal. During World War I (1914–1918), the Government of Nepal (GoN) assisted British India by dispatching ten battalions of the NA to India in order to relieve British and Indian soldiers in overseas battles.<sup>74</sup> In addition, approximately 55,000 Nepalese were recruited into new and existing units.<sup>75</sup> During the war, many of them served on all fronts in the European or the Middle

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<sup>73</sup> Though Nepal was not entirely independent in terms of foreign affairs, it did attain semi-independent status and could run its domestic affairs as a sovereign country. Until there was no treaty other than the Treaty of Sugauli, the improved relations were maintained by the commitment expressed by the Governor General of British India to the Prime Minister of Nepal; moreover, it was maintained through a “gentlemen’s agreement.” (See Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 148. See also Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 141.)

<sup>74</sup> Savada and Harris, *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies*, 201.

<sup>75</sup> Savada and Harris, 202.



Eastern theater and in the 1919 Waziristan campaign in Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup> Out of 200,000 Nepalese who served in the British war effort, the casualties were as high as 20,000.<sup>77</sup>

As a result of these troops' performance, the British rewarded the Nepalese leadership. Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher was awarded "an honorary general" in the British army and "an Honorary Knight's Cross of St. Michael and St. George" and was addressed as "His Highness" by the British. The Viceroy Lord Canning also rewarded Nepal with a gift of one million rupees annually.

The most important reward for Nepal was the Nepal-Britain Treaty of 1923, for the appreciation of the military support provided by the Rana regime to the British in World War I. The treaty, signed on 21 December 1923, was a landmark treaty in Nepalese history in that it legally recognized Nepal's independence and allowed Nepal to carry out its foreign policy as it deemed fit.<sup>78</sup> The treaty was documented in the League of Nations, which awarded Nepal to establish international relations with other countries to Nepal.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the treaty also allowed Nepal to procure defense requirements but stipulated that they must come from or through India.<sup>80</sup>

Nepal's independence was further reinforced when the British Government gave approval to establish the Nepali legation in London in 1934.<sup>81</sup> Realizing the ongoing nationalist movement in India and the dim future prospects of the British Empire, Nepal was seeking direct diplomatic relations with Britain. Simultaneously, the British envoy in Nepal was a designated Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary that recognized Nepal's dignified status in the international arena.<sup>82</sup> Nepal's diplomacy during World War

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<sup>76</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 170.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Valley, "The Big Question: Who Are the Gurkhas and What Is Their Contribution to Military History," *The Independent*, April 30, 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-big-question-who-are-the-gurkhas-and-what-is-their-contribution-to-military-history-1676354.html>

<sup>78</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 170.

<sup>79</sup> Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, *Political Relations between India and Nepal, 1877–1923* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973), 234.

<sup>80</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Muni, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 172.

I thus secured one of the most significant achievements of the Rana regime. The lessons learned here continued to pay off for Nepal as the Rana regime continued its policies into the next major conflict for the British.

## 2. World War II (1939–1945) and its Aftermath

The Rana regime's extensive military-diplomatic support for the British during World War II further fortified their relationship with the British and fetched considerable economic and military aid. This support to the British even exceeded that provided in World War I. As the war broke out, ten battalions of the NA arrived in India, where they were used in garrison duty until the end of hostilities.<sup>83</sup> The British also requested Gurkhas to fight overseas during World War II, to which the Nepal government gave its approval.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Ranas allowed the British to recruit 22 Gurkha battalions in British army units and also a large number of Nepalese were recruited for many Indian army units, the Burma Rifles, Assam Rifles, and Kashmir Infantry.<sup>85</sup> Like his predecessors, Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher also went all out to support the British authorities by contributing sufficient numbers of recruits. The total number of Gurkha recruits exceeded 200,000 in different recruiting centers to serve in all the theaters, including Burma, the Middle East, and North Africa.<sup>86</sup> Gurkhas sustained 32,000 casualties.<sup>87</sup>

After the war, the tripartite treaty signed in November 1947 by the British, Nepal, and India allowed Gurkhas' recruitment to continue for India and Britain. This agreement further stated that India could not mobilize Gurkhas against the "Hindus," "unarmed mobs," and "the Gurkhas."<sup>88</sup> The Government of India also agreed to cater to "Nepal's

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<sup>83</sup> Rose, 172.

<sup>84</sup> Rathaur, "British Gurkha Recruitment: A Historical Perspective," 21.

<sup>85</sup> Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, 172.

<sup>86</sup> Savada and Harris, *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies*, 203.

<sup>87</sup> Valley, "The Big Question."

<sup>88</sup> Andrea Matles Savada, ed., *Nepal and Bhutan Country Studies* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division of Congress, 1993), 204.

military requirements like training facilities, defense production, and army transport planes.”<sup>89</sup>

Immediately after this tripartite agreement was signed, the British Raj ended and India achieved independence in 1947. India’s independence also stirred the pro-democracy movement in Nepal against the Rana Regime. The new Indian government led by Prime Minister Nehru had more trust among the anti- Rana forces. In order to receive the continued support necessary for the survival of their regime, Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher not only tried to please independent India to get the continued support from New Delhi but also tried to diversify Nepal’s isolationist foreign policy to reach out to other potential partners. He said:

Our relations with India, a big country which has emerged through independence, should be neighborly and will be like between two sisters. Such a pure and friendly relationship had existed, and it will always be our effort to strengthen it and make it happy... it is neither wise nor possible for any country to remain completely detached from the worldwide developments. Therefore, we have also adopted the policy of searching for friends and establishing diplomatic contacts with various countries.<sup>90</sup>

Nehru was concerned over the increased interest of Chinese authorities in Tibet in 1950, and thus India longed for a “progressive government” that would address India’s security interests, for which India believed the Rana regime was not appropriate.<sup>91</sup> With independent India’s support to the anti-Rana movement led by the pro-democratic forces, cleavages emerged among the Rana family members seeking to attain power, and the Rana oligarchy was doomed to fail.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

Before the Rana regime, although Nepal was not a colony, it was not recognized as an independent and sovereign state by either the British or any other empires. After the losses incurred in the Anglo-Nepal War and anti-British policy adopted by the Shah

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<sup>89</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 20.

<sup>90</sup> Muni, 16–17.

<sup>91</sup> Muni, 14.

Dynasty, Jang Bahadur soon realized that the Ranas' rule and Nepal's survival were more connected with the support of British India than that of any other state. Jang Bahadur and his successors would appease the British by providing troops for suppressing mutiny, allowing recruitment to augment the British military power, and fighting wars on their behalf. British India responded handsomely to the service rendered by the Ranas by providing economic aid, not interfering in Nepal's internal matters, and ultimately providing independence through the Treaty of 1923, which was even recognized by the League of Nations.

Thus, through military diplomacy Nepal found that it could secure political and economic benefits. Yet, nationalists have critically argued that Nepal accepted an inferior position to British India and contributed all efforts to pacify the British, which hindered Nepal's economic and political modernization. As regards recruitment, it has been bitterly criticized that Nepal's military diplomacy efforts drained the country's youth in the service of foreigners rather than building up the home country. Moreover, such critics argue that fighting wars against countries like Germany and Japan with whom Nepal had no hostility as Nepal did in World War I and World War II was a diplomatic blunder. But at the same time, the preservation of territorial integrity and independence were the vital interests of Nepal, which was kept intact by the Rana regime.

Considering the unfavorable geopolitical environment in which the GoN had to function during that period, and with no external support, it can be concluded that the Rana regime was reasonably successful in maintaining independence for Nepal. Up against dominant British India, the independence of Nepal was preserved through a series of military diplomacy efforts with British India. Following the fall of the Rana regime in 1950 and the withdrawal of the British in 1947, new democratic governments were established in Nepal and India. While Nepal would still continue to allow India to recruit Gurkhas for their army, the emergence of China, as a powerful Communist regime in the north, would bring forth new challenges for Nepal. Nevertheless, the lessons learned under the Rana regime and its relationship with British India provide some lessons for the situation Nepal finds itself in today. The next chapter outlines such issues facing the country.

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### III. DIVERSIFICATION OF NEPAL'S MILITARY DIPLOMACY, 1951–1990

After the independence of India and the formation of the Communist regime in China in 1949, Nepal followed new patterns of military diplomacy. Once China absorbed Tibet, India believed that Chinese penetration from Nepal's northern border would give a strategic advantage to China, which would be unfavorable to the Indian security interests. Moreover, with the improvement in the bilateral relations between China and Nepal starting from 1955, China tried to influence Nepal to deter Tibetan rebellion and negate the Indian influence in Nepal. This trilateral relation of vested and conflicting interests between Nepal's two powerful neighbors created a complex geopolitical situation for Nepal to further its foreign policy.

Many Nepalese believe that the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nepal and India, which became the bedrock for the unique ties between the two countries, catered more to the strategic security interests of India in the Himalayas, negating Nepalese sovereignty.<sup>92</sup> The treaty deals with several issues of mutual security, trade and treatment of each other's nationals. The mutual security provisions in the treaty, brought Nepal under the overall security arrangement of India, which impaired Nepal's efforts to follow a nonaligned and independent policy.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Natasha Manhas and Mamta Sharma, "1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship: An Issue of Contention between India and Nepal," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 4, no. 11 (November 2014): 1, <http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-1114/ijsrp-p3547.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> When the treaty was signed in 1950, the Rana regime was still in place. Many Nepalese believe that the treaty was unequal and does not allow Nepal to pursue independent defense and foreign policy. The treaty was signed in haste as the Ranas thought that they could still save their regime with support from the Indian government by authorizing India to influence Nepal's internal matters from a point of strength. In addition to that, the invasion of China by Tibet in 1949 and the presence of Chinese troops along the northern border could jeopardize the security interests of the Rana regime and India. This led Nepal and India to sign the treaty as soon as possible without considering all the possible implications of the treaty in regard to Nepal's sovereignty. [See text of the 1950 treaty in A. S. Bhasin, *Documents on Nepal's Relations with India and China 1949–66* (Bombay: Academic Books, 1970), n.5. 32, quoted in Surya Subedi, "India-Nepal Security Relations and the 1950 Treaty: Time for New Perspectives," *Asian Survey* 34, no. 3 (March 1994), 273–284, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdf/2644985.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae6bb65ed64ff7a8d7ab6e9ea5966986e>].

India considers to have a “special relationship” with Nepal. India has tried to use the treaty to ensure that Nepal does not compromise India’s security interests in Nepal’s relations with China.<sup>94</sup> From 1950 to 1955, Nepal accepted the “special relationship” with India, because during early 1950s, relations with China did not assume much importance.<sup>95</sup> This policy made Nepal more dependent on India and allowed India to influence Nepalese sovereignty.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, from 1956 onwards, in contrast to the “special relationship,” Nepal started to maintain the policy of “equal friendship with China and India” considering the geopolitical implications created by the presence of Communist China in the north in Tibet.<sup>97</sup> Realizing the complex geopolitical, and changed regional and international environment after the World War II, this chapter inspects the overlapping and new patterns and consequences of Nepal’s military diplomacy with India and China from the first democratic period of Nepal (1950) to the fall of direct monarchical rule and the establishment of constitutional and parliamentary democracy (1990).

With King Mahendra’s accession to the throne on March 13, 1955, Nepal was accepted into the UN and began diplomatic relations with China.<sup>98</sup> Nepal also acknowledged Tibet as a part of China.<sup>99</sup> In addition, Nepal and China signed the 1960 China-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which underscored that the “two governments would recognize each other’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, peace, and friendly relations between them, [and] not interfere in each other’s

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<sup>94</sup> Surya Subedi, “India-Nepal Security Relations and the 1950 Treaty: Time for New Perspectives,” *Asian Survey* 34, no. 3 (March 1994): 274, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdf/2644985.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae6bb65ed64ff7a8d7ab6e9ea5966986e>].

<sup>95</sup> King Tribhuvan had a special relationship with India; he saw no threat from India related to Nepal’s independence and from maintaining a special relation with India, which he considered beneficial to both. (See Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 151).

<sup>96</sup> Yogendra Shahi, *Nepal Bharat Sambandha: Vishesh Hoina, Ashal Sambandha Ko Awashyakata: Bigat Bartaman ra Bhavishya* [Nepal-India Relation: Good Relation is required instead of Special Status; past, present and Future] (Kathmandu: Milestone Prakashan Tatha Prasharan Ltd, 2073), 33.

<sup>97</sup> King Mahendra’s accession to the throne marked this departure in Nepalese foreign policy. (See Rose and Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy*, 151–153).

<sup>98</sup> Rose, *Nepal Strategy for Survival*, 208.

<sup>99</sup> “Nepal-China Relations,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed May 25, 2019, <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-china-relations/>.

home affairs according to the principles of equality and mutual interests.”<sup>100</sup> The following sections analyze the major military diplomacy and carried out by Nepal with its neighbors and its impacts on the foreign policy objectives.

#### **A. INDIA AND NEPAL: MUTUAL CONFERRAL OF HONORARY RANK OF GENERAL ON EACH OTHER’S ARMY CHIEFS**

The Nepali and Indian armies have maintained an almost seven-decade-long tradition of granting the honorary rank of a general in the NA to the chief of the Indian Army and vice-versa.<sup>101</sup> This tradition commenced from the Rana regime in 1950 when Indian Army chief General K. M. Cariappa visited Nepal.<sup>102</sup> Even during the low phase in political relations, the two armies remained cordial to each other as the exchange of visits of army chiefs and their interactions did not cease.<sup>103</sup> There is also a customary practice in the NA whereby its chiefs make New Delhi their first international visit after taking over the command of the NA.<sup>104</sup>

A modern example of this cordiality is General Rajendra Chhetri’s maiden visit to India in 2016, when President Ram Nath Kovind conferred the rank of honorary general of the Indian Army at a special investiture ceremony organized at the Presidential Palace.<sup>105</sup> The press statement on that occasion provided by the President’s Secretariat reads:

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<sup>100</sup> Aashna Sharma, “Sketching Nepal’s Trade Relations and Ways to Buoyancy,” Nepal Economic Forum, April 12, 2019, <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/neftake/sketching-nepals-trade-repercussions-and-ways-to-buoyancy-neftake-nepaleconomicforum/>.

<sup>101</sup> “Nepal Army Chief to be Conferred Honorary Rank of ‘General of Indian Army’ on Saturday,” *The Economic Times*, January 11, 2019, [//economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67490015.cms?from=mdr&utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67490015.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst).

<sup>102</sup> Shirish Pradhan, “Indian Army Chief in Nepal to Receive Top Honours,” *Outlook*, December 20, 2010, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/indian-army-chief-in-nepal-to-receive-top-honours/705755>.

<sup>103</sup> Thapa, “Nepal India Relations in The Military Realm.”

<sup>104</sup> “Nepal Army Chief to Arrive In India on Friday on Six-Day Visit,” *The Economic Times*, January 11, 2019, [//Economictimes.Indiatimes.Com/Articleshow/67473890.Cms?From=Mdr&Utm\\_Source=Contentofinterest&Utm\\_Medium=Text&Utm\\_Campaign=Cpst](http://Economictimes.Indiatimes.Com/Articleshow/67473890.Cms?From=Mdr&Utm_Source=Contentofinterest&Utm_Medium=Text&Utm_Campaign=Cpst).

<sup>105</sup> “CoAS Thapa Returns Home Wrapping Up His Six-Day India Visit,” *My Republica*, January 16, 2019, <https://Myrepublica.Nagariknetwork.Com/News/Coas-Thapa>Returns-Home-Wrapping-Up-His-Six-Day-India-Visit/?Categoryid=Blog>.



General Rajendra Chhetri's selfless service, sincere devotion and commitment to excellence are in keeping with the finest traditions of Military service and reflect distinct credit upon himself and the Nepalese Army. Throughout his exemplary career, General Chhetri has demonstrated dynamic leadership and outstanding professionalism. General Rajendra Chhetri has contributed to promote the existing bond of friendship, based on goodwill and mutual understanding, between the Indian and Nepalese Army as well as other armies of the world. In recognition of his commendable Military prowess and immeasurable contribution to further fostering the long and friendly association with India, President of India is pleased to confer the honorary rank of General of the Indian Army on General Rajendra Chhetri.<sup>106</sup>

The visit symbolizes and reinforces the deep military-to-military ties between Nepal and India. Also, during the visit, the honorary general pays a courtesy visit to the president, prime minister and defense minister to discuss bilateral issues. These kinds of visits and bilateral talks help to revise and address security interests, defense needs, mutual military exercises and, during political crisis, may play an important role in resolving the crisis (The role of this tradition is more explicitly discussed in the next chapter.)

## **B. INDIAN MILITARY MISSION TO NEPAL**

Initially, India's military mission to Nepal in 1952 was considered a major step in forging military-to-military ties by training, reorganizing, and modernizing the NA. Yet, this mission failed to deliver on its purpose as India expanded the mission and began to pursue its vested interests of gathering information on Chinese activities along the Himalayan border.<sup>107</sup> Democratization processes in Nepal at this time also complicated the matters as the new political parties that opposed the king were backed by India.

The statements of Prime Minister (PM) Nehru indicated that India perceived China as an emerging threat to its security after the annexation of Tibet by China in 1950. Recognizing this threat, PM Nehru emphasized:

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<sup>106</sup> Press Information Bureau, Government of India, President's Secretariat, Press release of February 3, 2016, <https://Pib.Gov.In/Newsite/Printrelease.aspx?Relid=136045>.

<sup>107</sup> Sangeeta Thapliyal, "Contesting Mutual Security: India-Nepal Relations," Observer Research Foundation," June 26, 2003, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/contesting-mutual-security-india-nepal-relations/>.

Our interests in the internal conditions of Nepal became still more acute and personal, if I may say so, because of the developments across our border, because of the developments in China and Tibet, to be frank.<sup>108</sup>

By training and modernizing the NA, India saw an opportunity to send its troops to the Himalayan border to gather intelligence on any suspected activities of China that had an impact on the national security of India. India also started to expand and strengthen its mission, which was 20 officers and men in 1952, and rose to 197 officers and men in 1953.<sup>109</sup> By 1954, India had established posts on Nepal's northern border, and this stance brought Nepal directly into India's security sphere.<sup>110</sup> These posts were manned jointly by NA and Indian technicians, mostly radio operators, from India. The posts reported back the suspicious activities and movements from across the border, mainly the activities of Chinese troops in Tibet, to the governments of Nepal and India through encrypted messages.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to this, the Indian military mission recommended the downsizing of the NA from 25,000 to 6,000 men. This downsizing of the NA was viewed by Nepalese people as an Indian ploy to weaken the NA and increase their influence in Nepal, which formed strong anti-India sentiment in Nepal.<sup>112</sup> As the anti-India sentiment was increasing, surprisingly, King Tribhuvan (1911–1955) and the GoN maintained a silence over the activities of the Indian mission in order not to antagonize India.<sup>113</sup> The Indian mission, however, was criticized by the public for the spying role it assumed across the northern border.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, instead of advising the GoN on taking corrective measures for the

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<sup>108</sup> Thapliyal, "Contesting Mutual Security: India-Nepal Relations."

<sup>109</sup> A.S. Bhasin, *Documents on Nepal's Relations with India and China* (New Delhi: Academic Books, 1970), 37.

<sup>110</sup> Rose, *Nepal Strategy for Survival*, 197.

<sup>111</sup> Muni, *The Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> Rose, *Nepal Strategy for Survival*, 197. Also see Thapliyal, "Contesting Mutual Security: India-Nepal Relations."

<sup>113</sup> India had played a key role in the fall of the Rana regime, in the establishment of democracy, and the revival of monarchy in Nepal. Owing to this support, the king and political leaders who were in the government did not criticize the activities of the Indian mission in spite of the uproar in the political parties in the opposition and the general public.

<sup>114</sup> Rose, *Nepal Strategy for Survival*, 197.

Indian mission, the political parties led by the United Democratic Party, and not in the government, politicized the mission for their vested interests.<sup>115</sup> Later, when the same opposition parties came to power in 1957 they also stopped criticizing the Indian mission as they needed Indian support to remain in power. Muni states that:

Nepali Congress leader D. R. Regmi, who criticized the Government of India for its role in the “Delhi Settlement” and for not taking the “true representative of Nepalese people” into consideration at that time, later in the capacity of Nepal’s Foreign Minister said that anti-Indian feeling was the expression of “defeatism and frustration” among the Nepali politicians.<sup>116</sup>

China was not pleased with the establishment of Indian posts that spied across their territory.<sup>117</sup> With the new King Mahendra at the helm of affairs, the Nepalese perception on the Indian mission started to change, as he felt that the Indian activities breached the Nepalese sovereignty. The GoN started vociferously criticizing the mission and asked India to withdraw from the mission immediately. The PM Kirti Nidhi Bista of Nepal strongly stressed that “Nepal could not compromise its sovereignty for India’s so called security,” and demanded the “instant departure both of the Indian ‘wireless operators’ from the check posts on the Himalayan border and of the Indian military mission.”<sup>118</sup> Finally, through a formal agreement, between India and Nepal, after 17 years the Indian mission withdrew in August 1969 amid much criticism.<sup>119</sup> This withdrawal of the Indian mission marked a significant shift in the foreign policy of Nepal and signaled the variety of foreign policy options available to further Nepal’s national interests up against sole dependence on India for its survival. One of the options Nepal explored was joining the UN and participating in UN peace operations, and adopting Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

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<sup>115</sup> “Nepal 1946 to Present,” University of Central Arkansas, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/nepal-1946-present/>.

<sup>116</sup> Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 93.

<sup>117</sup> Rose and John Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 122.

<sup>118</sup> Sam Kowan, “The Indian Check Posts, Lipu Lekh, and Kalapani,” Record Nepal, December 14, 2015, <https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/indian-checkposts-lipu-lekh-and-kalapani/>.

<sup>119</sup> Rose, *Nepal Strategy for Survival*, 197. Also see Kowan, “The Indian Checkposts, Lipu Lekh, and Kalapani.”

### C. NA'S PARTICIPATION IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS—A STRATEGY FOR NAM AND PRESERVING INDEPENDENCE

In the mid-1950s, to reduce its dependence on India, King Mahendra was looking for a strategy to balance two powerful members and thereby keep the sovereignty of Nepal intact. The king believed the UN to be the guardian of national identity, integrity, independence and sovereignty of small states like Nepal.<sup>120</sup> Nepal was of the opinion that being a significant troop contributing country (TTC) to the cause of world peace, Nepal would be able to draw the attention of the UN should there be any act of aggression or encroachment by its strong neighbors. Thus, they saw an opportunity to throw Nepal's weight into the UN and participate in peacekeeping missions.<sup>121</sup> Thus, Nepal attained its membership in the UN in 1955.<sup>122</sup> Since its accession, Nepal has participated in 42 UN peacekeeping missions, to which over 123,188 NA personnel have contributed.<sup>123</sup>

In 1967, while highlighting the importance of the UN in the protection of independence of smaller states, King Mahendra stated in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that:

Nepal has come to the UN with as much faith in its organization as in its Charter, with as much faith in its effectiveness as in its ideal...the UN has more than ordinary significance for us because it provides, first, a feeling of collective security against encroachment and interference from others. And, secondly, a climate of peace so necessary for our development...we have come to the UN with a trust that is total and complete.<sup>124</sup>

Also, stressing Nepal's national interest to survive as an independent nation-state, PM Bisheswar Prasad Koirala, while addressing the 15th Session of the UNGA, stated:

The foreign policy of Nepal is wholly inspired by the purposes and principles of the UN. We regard the UN not only as a bulwark of our

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<sup>120</sup> Bhuwan Joshi and Leo Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 372.

<sup>121</sup> Muni, *The Foreign Policy of Nepal*, 54–55.

<sup>122</sup> "The Nepali Army in UN Peace Support Operations," Nepali Army, accessed April 20, 2019, [https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na\\_in\\_un](https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/na_in_un).

<sup>123</sup> "The Nepali Army in UN Peace Support Operations."

<sup>124</sup> Address by King Mahendra, 22nd Session of UN General Assembly, 1595 Plenary Meeting, <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/PV.1870>.

independence and security, but also as the protector of our rights and freedom. We believe in the independent exercise of our judgment in considering international issues. While we welcome and are grateful for the help that is being given to us by friendly governments—those of India, the United States, China, the USSR, the United Kingdom and others—as well as by the UN, we do not want any country to tell us how we should think, or how we should conduct our internal affairs.<sup>125</sup>

King Mahendra used the participation of the NA in the peacekeeping mission as a foreign policy tool to preserve the Nepalese sovereignty against its big neighbors. This strategy came to fruition when Nepal was twice elected as the non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1969–70 and in 1988–89.<sup>126</sup> Thus by making a visible presence in the UN and partnering with multi-lateral organizations, King Mahendra was carefully balancing both neighbors and was able to diminish the likely encroachment by India and China upon Nepalese sovereignty. Thus, when Nepal floated its “Zone of Peace” proposal in 1975 to pursue a non-aligned nature of foreign policy, it was supported by 116 countries, which included four permanent members of the UN, but it was rejected by India.<sup>127</sup>

In spite of the aforementioned successes, there were also diplomatic setbacks. Though the UN participation was founded on the notion of equidistance or NAM, in practice it was different. Until the 1960s, Nepal had aligned with India; however, after the beginning of the 1970s, Nepal tried to balance India with China. UN peacekeeping participation and foreign policy was not synchronized, which was an effect of the complex geopolitical reality. In spite of this, until the 1970s and early 1980s, King Mahendra was able to carefully balance major Indian pressure and ward off Chinese pressure on Nepal’s sovereignty. Nevertheless, this was not the case when Nepal tried to buy Chinese weapons in 1989, and India expressed that the purchase of arms contradicted the spirit of the 1950

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<sup>125</sup> Surendra Rawal, “United Nations Peacekeeping Participation and Civil-Military Relations in Troop Contributing Countries,” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2010), 55, [https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5435/10Mar\\_Rawal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5435/10Mar_Rawal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

<sup>126</sup> Rawal, “United Nations Peacekeeping Participation and Civil-Military Relations in Troop Contributing Countries,” 57.

<sup>127</sup> Madhukar Rana and Atul Thakur, “Nepal: New Geostrategic Hotspot,” Gateway House, March 30, 2017, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/a-case-for-nepals-new-foreign-policy/>.

Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal (this issue is discussed in the upcoming Section E).

Feeling threatened by Nepal's aligning with and buying arms from China, India clamped a 15-month-long economic blockade on Nepal in 1989 that strangled the Nepalese economy and had serious effects on all aspects of Nepalese life.<sup>128</sup> This was a case of a powerful neighbor's intervention on the internal matters of a smaller and weak state. The concept of "collective security" provided by the UN for the security and protection of the smaller states for their rights to sovereignty, though, was not pronounced in this case. The purpose for which Nepal had been a member of the UN and participated greatly in the peacekeeping mission to safeguard any intervention from the powerful members met with failure as the UN hardly contributed to lift the sanctions imposed by India on Nepal.

#### **D. NEPAL'S SUPPORT TO CHINA DURING KHAMPA OPERATIONS IN 1974**

The successful disarming operation against the Khampas in 1974 was a significant accomplishment in Nepal's military diplomacy as it contributed to the promotion of Nepal-China bilateral relationship by honoring Nepal's "One China" policy. By contrast, this support to China did not go down well with India. The Khampas were the warriors of a militant group that revolted in defiance of China's occupation of Tibet from 1950 until 1974.<sup>129</sup> When the Dali Lama escaped to India in 1959, China's intense military operations forced some Khampas to take refuge in the northern Himalayan border of Nepal.<sup>130</sup> The anti-China activities carried out by Khampas from within the Nepalese soil were against Nepalese foreign policy, which adheres to a "One China" policy. China was very wary of the Khampas rebellion and thus requested Nepal to support them in their efforts to control and disarm them. Otherwise, Nepal feared that Chinese troops could themselves carry out

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<sup>128</sup> Bhuwaneswor Pant, "Socio Economic Impact of Undeclared Blockade of India on Nepal," *Nepal Journal of Development Studies* 1, no. 1(October 2018): 18–19, <https://doi.org/10.3126/rnjds.v1i1.21270>.

<sup>129</sup> "Rebellion in Tibet," *History*, July 27, 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/rebellion-in-tibet>.

<sup>130</sup> Pramod Jaiswal, "Caught in the India China Rivalry: Policy Options for Nepal," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, March 01, 2014, [http://www.ipcs.org/issue\\_select.php?recNo=556](http://www.ipcs.org/issue_select.php?recNo=556).

operations against the Khampas from within the Nepalese territory.<sup>131</sup> To that end, an agreement was signed between the two countries and Nepal agreed to support China. According to the agreement, the Chinese government also promised to support the Nepalese efforts to quell and disarm the Khampa insurgents.<sup>132</sup> Nepal launched military operations against the Khampas on 1 August 1974 with the objective of disarming them. Meanwhile, the Khampas were reorganizing and rebuilding themselves by setting up camps to reoccupy Tibet, which had been taken by the Chinese regime. When the NA intensified its operations, many Khampas were killed, others fled, and some surrendered. The NA also launched massive search operations where it recovered large amounts of weapons and ammunitions. Once the commander of the Khampa rebellion, Wang Di, was killed on 15 September 1974, the Khampa revolt was decimated, and the disarmament operation came to an end.

China much admired Nepal for the successful disarmament operations against Khampa rebel forces but India was less happy, as it—along with the United States—had been supporting the Tibetans with material and financial assistance since the 1962 Sino-Indian war until 1971.<sup>133</sup> With this military support to China, not only could Nepal please China and strengthen the China-Nepal friendship, but it could also deter Chinese troops from entering Nepalese territory to operate against the Khampas, thereby preserving the territorial integrity of Nepal.

#### **E. 1989 DEFENSE DEAL WITH CHINA AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS—AN ACT OF BALANCING NEIGHBORS**

This section offers another paradigm shift in the pattern of military diplomacy—the balancing act. It is apparent that many countries conduct military diplomacy through transfer of conventional arms as it not only helps the recipient country to build up and retain military competence, but also strengthens military-to-military ties, ultimately resulting in

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<sup>131</sup> Prem Basnyat, “A Forgotten Story,” *My Republica*, June 22, 2019. <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/a-forgotten-history/>.

<sup>132</sup> Basnyat.

<sup>133</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 132.

better political ties between countries. B.S. Sachar argues that, since 1988, China started this arms export policy as a part of its foreign policy in order to establish healthier relations with countries that were earlier hostile to China, like Iran and Saudi Arabia because of anti-communist opinions, or Myanmar and Thailand because of previous Chinese assistance for domestic insurgencies.<sup>134</sup> This strategy may work for a powerful country like China, but for a small and a poor country enmeshed in geopolitical complications, it may produce problems and be counterproductive in balancing its other relationships.

With the rise of China in the world affairs and improving Indo-China relations especially after Nepal's support to Khampa operations, Nepal saw an opportunity in balancing India by aligning with China. Kings Mahendra and Birendra during the 1960s and the 1970s, in a bid to reduce Nepal's dependence upon India, started improving their ties with China. Their policy was shaped by India's clear interference in Nepal's economic and political issues. Citing the expiry of the trade and transit treaties with Nepal, India imposed an economic blockade on Nepal on 23 March 1989, closing 13 out of 15 transit points to Nepal which strangled the overall economy of Nepal.<sup>135</sup> Many analysts argue that "the economic issues were merely a pretext seized upon by India and that the real issue was the Chinese arms sale."<sup>136</sup> For India, Nepal's growing relations with China were major issues. This section describes another paradigm shift in the pattern of the military diplomacy-balancing act. Nonetheless, Nepal's trying to build better ties with China by striking a defense deal, ignoring India, proved to be one of the most trying phases in the recorded history of Nepal because of the Indian economic blockade.

Nepal's import of 500 truckloads of arms and ammunition including anti-air guns from China in 1989 is considered to be the initiation of worsening Nepal-India relations.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> B. S. Sachar, "Military Diplomacy through Arms Transfers: A Case Study of China," *Strategic Analysis* 28, no.2 (April 2004): 297, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160408450134>.

<sup>135</sup> The trade and transit treaties as well as the agreement of cooperation to control unauthorized trade actually expired March 23, 1988, and were extended twice by six months each time until March 23, 1989. (See Narayan Khadka, "The Crisis in Nepal-India Relations," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 54.)

<sup>136</sup> John Garver, "China-India Rivalry in Nepal: The Clash over Chinese Arms Sales," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 10 (October 1991): 956, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645066>.

<sup>137</sup> Khadka, "The Crisis in Nepal-India Relations," 65.



Dilip Mukherjee has argued that Nepal was obliged to inform India of the arms purchase and transport from China according to their treaty, but some other scholars think that “since the Chinese supplies came in over and along the road link with Tibet, there was legally no reason for the prior notice to, or agreement with India in this regard.”<sup>138</sup> With the arms sale, it was a given that China would also “train NA in the use, maintenance, and the repair of the equipment. Conversely, some view that Nepal’s import of arms from China is a blatant violation of the Nepal-India understanding on the purchase of arms.”<sup>139</sup> The Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 contains security-related clauses in the letters exchanged with the treaty, which were:

(1) Neither government shall tolerate any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor. To deal with such a threat, the two governments shall consult with each other and devise effective measures. (2) Any arms, ammunition or war-like material and equipment necessary for the security of Nepal that the government of Nepal may import through the territory of India shall be so imported with the assistance and agreement of the government of India. (3) Both governments agree not to employ any foreigners whose activity may be prejudicial to the security of the other.<sup>140</sup>

India stated that “Nepal has not observed the letter or the spirit of the 1950 treaty of Peace and Friendship ... [and thus] we have decided to look fresh at the ties with Nepal.”<sup>141</sup> Nepal maintained, however, that the “procurement of arms, in fact, is part of Nepal’s plan to meet the basic needs of the people by the year 2000 ... as a sovereign nation, Nepal feels strongly about its right to decide from where to buy its defense needs as long as they do not pose any threat to that country.”<sup>142</sup> When there was hue and cry over the arms sale, China tried to justify the sale on the basis that “military-to-military relations is a part of the normal gamut of state-to-state relations... [and] Nepal as a sovereign and

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<sup>138</sup> Dilip Mukherjee, “Himalayan Stalemate India Stake in Nepal Goodwill,” *Times of India*, April 4, 1989.

<sup>139</sup> Mohammad Ayoob, “India in South Asia: The Quest for Regional Predominance,” *World Policy Journal* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1989–1990): 118.

<sup>140</sup> “Nepal: India Objects to Arms Purchases,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 41 (October 1988): 2096, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4379147>.

<sup>141</sup> Khadka, “The Crisis in Nepal-India Relations,” 65–66.

<sup>142</sup> Khadka, 66.

independent state can acquire weapons as it deems fit for its security, and China as a sovereign country has a right to sell such weapons... [and that] such material sold to Nepal should not be understood as a threat to India.”<sup>143</sup> When Chinese Premier Li Peng visited Nepal, he explained that “such arms sales were intended to increase the defensive capability of the friendly countries and the arm sales were not directed against any countries.”<sup>144</sup>

Even China’s support did not extend to action in the UN. In October 1989, not directly referring to India, the Nepali Foreign Minister expressed the difficulties Nepal as a landlocked nation faced in all spheres of life due to the blockade.<sup>145</sup> China in this instance did not make any concrete statement on the matter in the UN. On the other hand, the Foreign Minister of China on 29 September 1989, without mentioning the Indo-Nepal conflict, expressed that “facts show that hegemonic practices and power politics still exist. From time to time there are causes ... such as the big bullying the small, the strong domineering the weak.”<sup>146</sup>

Summing up the effects of the blockade, King Birendra compared the economic growth rates for the year before and after the blockade, stating that, “the rate of growth that had been 9.75% in 1987–88, fell to 1.5% in 1988–89.”<sup>147</sup> The king also stated that every day 240 hectares of forest were cleared to provide wood in the place of gas and cooking fuel.

## F. CONCLUSION

While the first few years (1950–1955) of Nepalese military diplomacy continued to pursue the appeasement policy, after 1955 Nepal explored a range of military diplomacy.

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<sup>143</sup> Garver, “China-India Rivalry in Nepal: The Clash over Chinese Arms Sales,” 960.

<sup>144</sup> Garver, 962.

<sup>145</sup> Garver, 967.

<sup>146</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Provisional Verbatum Record, 21st meeting, 44th session, October 12, 1989, 97–98.

<sup>147</sup> Niranjana Koirala, “Nepal in 1989: A Very Difficult Year,” *Asian Survey* 30, no. 2 (February 1990): 142.

Nepal maintained internationalism by joining the UN, as well as non-alignment, using the NA to secure the interests of China, and ultimately a balancing act between India and China. Nepal used these different patterns to match the different nature of perceived threats from its neighbors.

Since independent India had played a key role in establishing democracy in Nepal by displacing the Rana regime, King Tribhuvan and the ruling political parties thought aligning with India was their obligation. Yet, when India started pursuing its vested interests of spying on Chinese activities by establishing posts along the Himalayan border, in the guise of modernizing the NA, Nepal thought these activities a serious encroachment upon its sovereignty and started to drift away from the sphere of India.

King Mahendra diversified the patterns of military diplomacy. He expanded the limits of the foreign policy by exploiting the conflicting security interests of India and China. Then after, to diminish Nepalese dependence on India and China, he used global platforms like the UN and the NAM to seek the support of the regional and international institutions for Nepalese interests. Through participation in UN peacekeeping missions and NAM, Nepal contributed significantly to world peace and also took active participation in world affairs as an independent state. Also, Nepal could avoid any encroachment on its territorial integrity, such as that which happened to other small states in the region like Sikkim and Bhutan at the hands of India. Nepal also warded off any possible encroachment from China when it honored the Chinese “One China Policy” by decimating the Khampa rebellion. The diversification of military diplomacy since 1955 helped Nepal, to a great extent, to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty until the end of the 1980s. As Nepal’s balancing act of inclined toward China against India, however, it cost Nepal very dearly. India’s economic blockade resulted not only in the acute shortage of essential goods but also became a reason for the fall of 30 years of autocratic monarchical regime in Nepal. The security provisions of 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty became a contentious issue during the 1989 India- Nepal controversy the purchase of arms from China. Both the governments have ample of times raised the issue of necessary revision of 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship but nothing has materialized. As evidenced by the Indian blockade, the treaty is an obstacle for Nepal to pursue an independent foreign policy.

Among the important lessons learnt during this period are the following: while conducting military diplomacy, each state should consider its relationship with another paramount and should engage as equals; during military-to-military engagement if a state wants to execute its ulterior motive under the disguise of common security interests, that state's plan is bound to fail; for a small state in between two powerful states, geopolitics comes into place and any attempt to adopt independent foreign policy or to play one country against another is disadvantageous. In addition, for a small country like Nepal, significant participation in UN may not be sufficient to preserve its independence and sovereignty.

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#### **IV. NEPAL'S MILITARY DIPLOMACY WITH CHINA AND INDIA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

As a follow-on to the earlier discussion of the different patterns of Nepalese military diplomacy during the Rana regime and under the king's rule, this chapter examines military diplomacy during the recent period of multi-party democracy when the security interests of our neighbors have intensified in Nepal. It is argued that India believes that China's political and military influence in Nepal represents unnecessary encroachment on its "sphere of influence" and, as a policy, circumscribes China in South Asia.<sup>148</sup> Increased Chinese and Indian engagement in the political and security realms in Nepal offers a new environment in which Nepal has to conduct its military diplomacy, considering the undesirable impacts of balancing one country against another. This period is witnessing a new pattern of military diplomacy, which is characterized by a movement toward non-alignment plus a balanced relationship with both neighbors.

Though this chapter mainly explores the military diplomacy conducted from 2008 onwards when Nepal was declared a Federal Democratic Republic by the first Constituent Assembly (CA), it also briefly looks into the military diplomacy during the Maoist insurgency and Royal coup (2001–2005). The significant aspect of military diplomacy during this period has been the astronomical rise in defense cooperation between Nepal and China, which has placed India on alert. Against this backdrop, this chapter examines the Nepalese military-diplomatic strategies taken by Nepal while dealing with these two countries in the current scenario.

##### **A. CHINA'S INCREASING MILITARY COOPERATION WITH NEPAL AND INDIA'S REACTION**

The end of the Cold War brought a new wave of democratization across the globe that also impacted Nepal. The democratic movement that started in 1989 received much needed support from India as it was infuriated with the "balancing act" of Nepal's King

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<sup>148</sup> Kamal Bhattarai, "India and China's Tug of War over Nepal," *The Diplomat*, January 6, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/india-and-chinas-tug-of-war-over-nepal/>.

Birendra when he decided to purchase arms from China against the spirit of 1950 treaty. The movement, which is also referred to as the ‘People’s Movement I,’ ended 30 years of an autocratic party-less Panchayat system in 1990 and replaced it with a parliamentary democratic system and constitutional monarchy.<sup>149</sup>

After 1990, Nepal did not have significant military ties with China; however, at the beginning of the 21st century and especially after the CA elections in 2008, Nepal’s and China’s military diplomacy grew many times over. When the NA was fighting the Maoist insurgency from 2001 to 2005, Nepal primarily purchased defense hardware from the United States, India, and the United Kingdom.<sup>150</sup> In the wake of a royal coup in 2005 by King Gyanendra, however, military support from these countries ceased. During this critical juncture when the NA had experienced a shortage of defense materials, China provided Nepal with military support worth USD 1 million to fight the insurgents.<sup>151</sup>

After China’s initial support, the defense agreement signed between Nepal and China in December 2008 was significant as China agreed to assist in modernizing the NA with assistance worth USD 2.6 million and also paved the way for the exchange of high level military and civilian defense officials’ visits.<sup>152</sup> In the 2008 CA election, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) stood as the largest party and the pro-China Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal became the PM of Nepal. Departing from the previous tradition of Nepalese PMs conducting their first official visit in India, the PM visited China as his first official visit. By doing this, the communist PM Dahal “stressed the importance of equiproximity with India and China instead of any special relationship with India.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Reecha Upadhyaya, “A People’s Movement in Nepal,” *India Currents*, July 18, 2006, [indiacurrents.com/a-peoples-movement-in-nepal/](http://indiacurrents.com/a-peoples-movement-in-nepal/).

<sup>150</sup> Kamal Bhattarai, “A Brief History of Nepal-China Defense Ties,” *The Annapurna Express*, May 19, 2019, <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/a-brief-history-of-nepal-china-defense-ties-1560>.

<sup>151</sup> Bhattarai.

<sup>152</sup> Bhattarai.

<sup>153</sup> Dhurba Adhikari, “A Small State between Two Major Powers: Nepal’s Foreign Policy Since 1816,” *Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 1 (July 2018): 67.

China has emphasized exchanges through high-level military visits, military cooperation, and mutual trust-building mechanisms in order to advance military diplomacy. As a result, from 2008 onwards, Nepal's civilian and defense officials have exchanged visits with their Indian and Chinese counterparts with increasing frequency. The year 2017, in particular, marked a significant development in Nepal-China military cooperation. After a 17-year gap, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan paid a three-day visit to Nepal in March of that year. He and his Nepalese counterpart signed an agreement where China agreed to provide military assistance worth USD 32 million to Nepal, to be spent on building the NA's capacity in disaster management and equipping NA for better UN peacekeeping performance. Nepal and China also agreed that the NA and PLA would conduct joint military exercises.<sup>154</sup>

In October 2018, PM KP Sharma Oli and Defense Minister Ishwor Pokhrel visited China. Defense Minister Pokhrel and his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe signed an agreement in which China agreed to build up the NA's capability in disaster management.<sup>155</sup> China also announced assistance worth USD 25 million to the NA for the next five years. Later a press statement from the Nepalese Embassy in China stated:

Defense Minister Pokhrel expressed the importance of military co-operation in military training, hardware in humanitarian and disaster management, and medical equipment and peace-keeping operations, and requested for Chinese support in establishing a Defense University in Nepal.<sup>156</sup>

Now the question arises, what could China's interest be in pursuing intensifying military diplomacy with Nepal? Considering the statement issued by Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fung after the meeting with the CoAS Rajendra Chhetri in 2018:

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<sup>154</sup> Kiran Chapagain, "China ko Gahiro Sainya Kutniti," [China's Deep Military Diplomacy] *Himal Patrika*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/13267>.

<sup>155</sup> Anuj Adhikari, October 27, 2018, "Nepal, China Sign MoU on Military Cooperation," *Kathmandu Post*, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2018/10/27/nepal-china-sign-mou-on-military-cooperation>.

<sup>156</sup> "Nepal Requests China to Support in Establishing Defense University in Nepal," *Spotlight Nepal*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2018/10/27/nepal-requests-china-support-establishing-defense-university-nepal/>.



China appears to be aiming to fulfill four objectives, mainly through its military diplomacy with Nepal. One, Nepal's strong support in its 'core interest.' Second, to assist the Nepal Army on a practical level. Third, strengthen the traditional relationship with the NA. Fourth, Nepal's cooperation in the BRI [Belt and Road Initiative].<sup>157</sup>

Analysts argue that Chinese military diplomacy with Nepal has two interests: One, balancing against India, and the other, averting the possible agitation of Tibetans and other separatists that threaten the Chinese authority in Tibet. At the same time, India would want to negate Chinese influence in Nepal as it perceives Nepal within its security domain. Though the governments have refrained from issuing any official deliberations on their real intention, they have increased their military assistance visits, which suggest the Chinese are competing for influence in Nepal. Conducting military diplomacy under these circumstances, respecting their security interests without endangering Nepal's own interests, presents both opportunities and challenges for Nepal.

## **B. 2015 INDIAN UNDECLARED ECONOMIC BLOCKADE OF NEPAL**

The military-diplomatic engagement of the NA and Indian Army significantly displayed a pacifying role during the 2015 undeclared economic blockade when civilian political leaders of Nepal and India were at loggerheads. When Nepal had not even recovered from the jolt of a 7.8-magnitude earthquake on April 25, it was further hit hard by the Indian undeclared economic blockade on 20 September 2015, which took Nepal close to a humanitarian crisis.<sup>158</sup>

Nepal's new constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015 by an overwhelming majority of the CA members. However, many Madheshi political parties did not participate in the voting as they felt that the constitution failed to present equal rights for the Madheshi people.<sup>159</sup> The southern low land of Nepal bordering India is called Madhesh and its indigenous inhabitants are called Madheshi. India also had asked GoN to

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<sup>157</sup> Chapagain, "China ko Gahiro Sainya Kutniti."

<sup>158</sup> "Nepal border blockade 'threatens the future of the country itself', says UN," *Guardian*, November 18, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/18/nepal-border-blockade-india-threatens-future-un-unicef>

<sup>159</sup> *Guardian*.

reconsider for the equal rights for Madhesis. When the GoN did not change the constitution to address those demands, India imposed the undeclared economic blockade on Nepal.

The economic blockade had a far-reaching impact on Nepal's public life as the import of important supplies like fuel, food, and medicines were held up.<sup>160</sup> Nepal felt the impact in six ways: the absence of liquefied gas or kerosene resulted in chopping up of forest trees for firewood; the acute shortage of essential medicines put millions of children's lives at risk; the absence of paper, ink, and transportation forced schools to give unscheduled vacations to the students for an indefinite period; the daily power cutoff of 12 hours made life worse; earthquake re-construction work had to be halted; and within the first three months of the blockade, the economy growth of the country fell from 6% to 2%.<sup>161</sup> PM KP Sharma Oli expressed that the blockade was unjust and an encroachment on Nepalese sovereignty:

It is unthinkable that a sovereign nation faces such an inhumane and severe pain, misery, and blockade in the 21st century for having a Constitution with progressive, pro-people and democratic contents through an elected CA with people's overwhelming participation and democratic franchise.<sup>162</sup>

PM Oli urged the Indian government and the concerned authorities to end the unjustified blockade and allow the smooth supply of essential goods and to avoid deterioration in the long-established relationship between the Nepal and India.<sup>163</sup> In spite of PM Oli's efforts and different diplomatic efforts carried out through visits by ministers of Nepal, the attempts to lift the Indian economic blockade failed.

In this political stalemate, the decades old tradition of granting each other's respective army chief with the honorary rank of CoAS proved to be a significant military-diplomatic tool in lifting the Indian blockade. Amid this political crisis, CoAS General

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<sup>160</sup> Pant, "Socio Economic Impact of Economic Blockade," 23.

<sup>161</sup> Mahesh Acharya, Surendra Phuyal, and Sanjaya Dhakal, "Nepal Blockade: Six Ways It Affects the Country," BBC, December 12, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35041366>.

<sup>162</sup> "India Willing to Airlift Medicines to Nepal," *The Statesman*, November 19, 2015, <https://www.thestatesman.com/latest-headlines/india-willing-to-airlift-medicines-to-nepal-105068.html>.

<sup>163</sup> "Agoshit Nakabandi Tatkal Banda Garna Pradhan Mantri Ko Agraha," [PM requests India to end the undeclared blockade] *We Nepali*, November 15, 2015, <http://wenepali.com/2015/11/15019.html>.

Chhetri was invited for a six-day-long official visit to India in September to receive the honorary title of CoAS of the Indian Army. Though it was hard to rationalize the visit considering the impacts of the blockade on the people of Nepal, it was also an opportunity to hold talks with the different power centers in India and to convince them to ease the trade and transit concerns and reinforce the Nepal-India friendship.<sup>164</sup>

A few weeks ahead of his official visit to India, an NA team comprising Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the NA, Major General Himalaya Thapa, along with two senior officers was sent to the Indian capital as the envoy of CoAS Chhetri. The visit was carried out in consultation with the top political leadership of Nepal. The team called on senior civilian defense and military officials and put forth the draconian impacts of the blockade and tried to convince them to arrive at a favorable solution to the crisis.<sup>165</sup> Speaking in a conference after his retirement, Major General Thapa said:

We went to Delhi as the envoy of the Nepali CoAS to inform the Indian CoAS Dalvir Singh and high ranking civilian officials about the dire situation in Nepal and convinced them that the blockade was unnecessary as it was hurting the Nepal-India relationship in a big way. The Indian Army was very positive and facilitated our meetings with the political leaders to put our position regarding the blockade.<sup>166</sup>

DGMO's visit set the much needed stage for General Chhetri's upcoming visit to India. Both the CoAS had been in constant conversation on the difficulties that Nepal was facing. During the visit, CoAS Chhetri met the defense minister, home minister, and other political leaders on the lifting of the blockade.<sup>167</sup> The soldiers complained to their leadership about the hardship their families in Nepal were suffering.<sup>168</sup> A noteworthy point here is that Indian CoAS General Singh also belonged to the Gurkha regiment and felt an

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<sup>164</sup> Thapa, "Nepal-India Relations in the Military Realm."

<sup>165</sup> *Diplomat*, "Camaraderie between Nepal Army & Indian Army Ended Blockade, not Politicians."

<sup>166</sup> "Nepali Sena Le Gambhir Hudai Bhanyo Surakshya Chunauti Thapiyo," [Nepali Army says security challenges have increased] *Dainik Nepal*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.dainiknepal.com/2017/02/211557.htm>.

<sup>167</sup> "Four Former generals of Nepali Army are visiting India at the invitation of Indian Army," Hamro Online, December 4, 2018, <http://www.hamroonline.com/2019/01/15329>.

<sup>168</sup> Yuvaraj Gautam. "Sainik Kutnikik ko Artha," [The meaning of military diplomacy] *Nagarik News*, June 17, 2019, <https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/news/79067/>.

obligation in resolving the issue.<sup>169</sup> General Singh himself is reported to have expressed to his political leaders that “such imposition would critically damage India’s security interests and bring enormous disrepute to the Indian polity in the regional and international spheres.”<sup>170</sup> In addition, the NA’s team’s further meetings with the Indian stakeholders and finally CoAS Chhetri’s visit to India finally succeeded in lifting the blockade.

The CoAS of both the armies had played a significant role in ironing out the faulty perceptions of the Indian establishment and succeeded in lifting the blockade. Much to the happiness of many Nepalese people, a day before the conclusion of General Chhetri’s visit, India lifted the blockade. Thus, the NA, the oldest institution of Nepal, displayed that it possessed prowess and dexterity in carrying out military diplomacy to good effect.

### **C. MILITARY DIPLOMACY VIA JOINT EXERCISES**

Nepal added another dimension to its military diplomacy by holding joint military exercises initially with India and later with China. This effort helped Nepal to achieve three purposes. First, Nepal strengthened military-to-military ties and strengthened ties with both neighbors. Second, it helped hone the professional skills of the NA and developed interoperability to tackle shared threats like insurgency, terrorism, and natural disasters, which know no boundaries. Finally, it helped Nepal to maintain a balanced military relationship with both the countries and especially with China. Nonetheless, the Indian media made hue and cry about Nepal’s first ever joint military exercise with China as Nepal’s effort to balance India, and later India officially declared that it was Nepal’s sovereign right to hold joint exercises with any country.

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<sup>169</sup> Approximately 40,000 Nepalese are serving in the Indian Army and most of their families are in the hilly regions of Nepal. See Vikram Deshpande, “Gurkhas of the Indian Army and India-Nepal Relations,” Study for Defense Study and Analyses, February 17, 2017, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/gorkhas-indian-army-and-india-nepal-relations\\_vdeshpande\\_140217](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/gorkhas-indian-army-and-india-nepal-relations_vdeshpande_140217).

<sup>170</sup> “Camaraderie between Nepal Army & Indian Army Ended Blockade, not Politicians,” South Asia, February 19, 2016, <https://www.southasia.com.au/2016/02/19/camaraderie-between-nepal-army-indian-army-ended-blockade-not-politicians/>.

#### **D. JOINT EXERCISE SURYA KIRAN WITH THE INDIAN ARMY**

Significant among the military-to-military engagements between India and the NA is the joint exercise titled “Exercise Surya Kiran,” which began in 2011.<sup>171</sup> The exercise occurs twice a year, and is organized in both countries alternately. The military cooperation which started from a platoon level has made significant strides and is now a battalion level exercise. As of June 2018, 13 iterations of the exercise have been held.<sup>172</sup> The main objective of the exercise is to establish mutual military coordination between Nepal and Indian troops, as well as coordinate development between the forces of the two countries for successful operation in counterinsurgency operations in inaccessible mountainous regions.

The Surya Kiran maneuver is the largest Indian military exercise organized in terms of troop’s strength with any country.<sup>173</sup> This military exercise emphasizes the important aspects of relief and rescue, including disaster management. In addition, the two armies get familiar with each other’s weapons, equipment, tactics, techniques, and procedures for working in an anti-terrorism environment in the mountainous region. Joint exercise helps in coordinating defense between the two countries as well as in building bilateral relations. As a press release from the Indian MoD stated “the joint training was undoubtedly, an unprecedented success. Besides promoting understanding and inter-operability between the two armies, it further helped in cementing ties between both the nations.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> “Combined India-Nepal Military Exercise Begins,” *Livemint*, August 18, 2014, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/N9UWGgHfN7V4hS0rO5yaLL/Combined-IndiaNepal-military-exercise-begins.html>.

<sup>172</sup> “13th Edition of Surya Kiran Joint Exercise Commences in Pithoragarh,” *The Pioneer*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2018/state-editions/13th-edition-of-surya-kiran-joint-exercise-commences-in-pithoragarh.html>.

<sup>173</sup> “13th Edition of Surya Kiran Joint Exercise Commences in Pithoragarh.”

<sup>174</sup> “Closing Ceremony: India-Nepal Joint Ex SURYA KIRAN-XIII,” Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, June 12, 2018, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179912>.

## E. NEPAL–CHINA JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE

The NA's and People's Liberation Army's (PLA) joint military exercise that started in 2017 is a significant feature of military diplomacy between Nepal and China.<sup>175</sup> The military exercise named "Sagarmatha Friendship" was a clear sign of growing ties between the NA and China. NA maintains that "the exercise is in line with our efforts to hold joint exercises with countries that have diplomatic relations with Nepal."<sup>176</sup> The decision to jointly hold this bilateral exercise on a rotational basis was struck during the Nepal visit of the Chinese defense minister in 2017. Nepal earlier conducted joint bilateral military exercises with both India and the United States, but this was the first exercise between the PLA of China and the NA.

First ever Nepal-China ten-day long military exercise "Sagarmatha Friendship-1" was conducted in Nepal in April 2017. Stating the purpose of the exercise, the NA maintained: The "Sagarmatha Friendship" joint military exercise is "aimed at sharing experiences, skills and professional knowledge, a practice common with nations that have diplomatic ties with Nepal."<sup>177</sup> The exercise focuses on fighting terrorism and disaster management. The exercise was conducted on a rotational basis.<sup>178</sup> The second edition of the exercise was held in China's Sichuan Province in September 2018.

The conduct of the exercise "Sagarmatha Friendship" has been viewed positively in Nepal; however, "a section of Indian media and intellectuals showed some signs of jitters over it, prompting Indian State Minister for External Affairs V K Singh to allay their

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<sup>175</sup> Binod Ghimire, "Nepal-China Military Drill in September," *The Kathmandu Post*, <https://kathmandupost.com/valley/2018/07/21/nepal-china-military-drill-in-sept>.

<sup>176</sup> "Nepal, China begin first-ever joint military exercises," *South China Morning Post*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2088059/nepal-china-begin-first-ever-joint-military-exercises>.

<sup>177</sup> "Nepal, China Military Drill to be Held in Sept," *Asian Voice*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.asian-voice.com/News/International/Nepal/Nepal,-China-military-drill-to-be-held-in-Sept>.

<sup>178</sup> "Second Nepal-China Joint Military Drill in September: Report," *The Hindu*, July 21, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/second-nepal-china-joint-military-drill-in-september-report/article24482667.ece>.

unfounded fears.”<sup>179</sup> V.K. Singh who is also an ex-CoAS of the Indian Army expressed in a press conference:

We have a very strong relationship between the Indian Army and the Nepal Army. We have a very large number of ex-soldiers who live in Nepal and their pension goes from India. I am also an Honorary General of the Nepal Army. Now, with this kind of a relationship which is so unique, it stands firmly on its own footing and in this we do not view relations through a third country prism. Two countries doing exercise does not imply anything at all. We do exercises with China, will also do exercises with the United States, we do exercises with France and we do with Russia. Does it mean anything? So let's not view it that way at all.<sup>180</sup>

The views given by the external minister is the only official statement of the Indian establishment on Nepal's joint exercise with China. The view depicts that India has shown some tolerance in increasing Nepal-China relations, which is a shift from their age-old tradition of keeping Nepal under their security control and away from China. These joint exercises represent a step forward for Nepal in conducting military diplomacy by treating both its neighbors as equal sovereigns.

#### **F. SETBACKS IN THE BALANCED APPROACH—BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL COOPERATION MILITARY EXERCISE**

The decision of the GoN to pull out at the last minute from participating in the week-long military exercise with the members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Cooperation (BIMSTEC), hosted by India in September 2018, was a display of immature diplomacy by Nepal.<sup>181</sup> India conveyed its annoyance with Nepal's decision to participate only as an observer instead of sending a platoon size force, after agreeing to

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<sup>179</sup> Ritu Subedi, “Joint Military Training to Cement China-Nepal Ties,” Nepal Foreign Affairs, February 16, 2017, <http://nepalforeignaffairs.com/joint-military-training-to-cement-china-nepal-ties/>.

<sup>180</sup> “Transcript of Mid Term Press Conference by Ministers of State for External Affairs, Gen. (Dr.) VK Singh (Retd.) and M J Akbar,” Ministry of External Affairs, January 4, 2017, <https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/27934/Transcript+of+Mid+Term+Press+Conference+by+Ministers+of+State+for+External+Affairs+Gen+Dr+VK+Singh+Retd+and+M+J+Akbar+January+4+2017>.

<sup>181</sup> BIMSTEC is a regional grouping comprising seven countries: Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal.

participate in the military drill.<sup>182</sup> The objective of the military exercise was to “bring about inter-operability and tactical cooperation among the armed forces of its members for combating terrorism, particularly of the semi-urban variety, synergizing their counter-terrorism efforts and sharing the best practices.”<sup>183</sup> Even the army chiefs of the BIMSTEC member countries were to participate on the final two days of the exercise and were to hold discussions on issues of terrorism and transnational crimes, bringing about the possibilities to endorse shared assistance in countering those threats.<sup>184</sup>

Matrika Dahal argues that during the May 2018 visit to India by CoAS General Rajendra Chhetri of the NA, there was an informal agreement with his Indian counterpart to participate in joint exercises, and he had intimated the same to the prime minister.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, Dahal states that with the approval of the defense ministry, the NA had started preparations with the nod from the MoD. Nevertheless, the agenda could not generate a consensus in either the diplomatic or the political arena before making the call on participating in the exercise.<sup>186</sup> There was criticism that the NA was participating in regional military exercises. Members of the ruling party, opposition parties, and security and military affairs experts opposed the decision to join military exercises as they warned that participation in military exercises could have serious implications for Nepal’s foreign policy and national security policy.<sup>187</sup> Bertil Linter argues that the military exercise was viewed by some experts from two angles, one as an anti-Pakistan event, and the other, as a design to balance China’s mounting clout in the region.<sup>188</sup> In March 2016, Nepalese PM

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<sup>182</sup> Gautam Sen, “Implications of Nepal Withdrawal from BIMSTEC Military Exercise in India,” September 19, 2018, Vivekananda International Foundation, <https://www.vifindia.org/2018/september/19/implications-of-nepal-s-withdrawal-from-bimstec-military-exercise-in-india>.

<sup>183</sup> Sen.

<sup>184</sup> Sen.

<sup>185</sup> Matrika Dahal, “Nepal Will not Participate in the Military Exercise,” *Karobar*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.karobardaily.com/news/society/10192>.

<sup>186</sup> Narendra Rawal, “BIMSTEC War Games,” *The Kathmandu Post*, September 5, 2018, <https://kathmandupost.com/opinion/2018/09/05/bimstec-war-games>.

<sup>187</sup> Dahal, “Nepal Will not Participate in the Military Exercise.”

<sup>188</sup> Bertil Linter, “Nepal Thailand Only as Observers at BIMSTEC Military Exercise,” *Asia Times*, 12 September 2018, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2018/09/article/nepal-thailand-only-observers-at-bimstec-military-exercise/>.



Oli signed the Transit and Transportation Agreement with China, which was supposed to end Nepal's sole dependence on India for goods and trade in the future.<sup>189</sup> It can be argued, though, that PM Oli's decision not to participate in the military exercise was more prompted by politics than by diplomatic acumen as he did not want to antagonize China, which had granted Nepal access to the China Sea and China's land ports. Though the GoN canceled the pre-determined schedule to engage in the military exercises directly, it decided to participate in the exercise only as an observer. The NA sent three observers as a tactic to remain associated in the exercise, one way or the other. This was a military-diplomatic setback that resulted from a lack of diplomatic understanding and coordination at the political level. It demonstrates that military diplomacy should conform to the fundamental tenets of foreign policy and should be conducted in unison with political parties, MoFA, MoD, and NA.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

Traversing through bandwagoning, nonalignment, distancing, and balancing this period mostly witnessed a healthy military diplomacy of having an equal, friendly relationship with both India and China albeit with some hitches. Having a balanced relationship with rival powers in Asia is easier said than done. Nepal cannot get away from the fact that both powerful countries are increasing their economic and military clout in Nepal. China is the super power and India is a rising power on whom Nepal is dependent for trade and transit. Therefore, our political leadership should display maturity in using military diplomacy while dealing with China and India in pursuing Nepal's foreign policy goals without sacrificing Nepal's interests.

Nepal's effort to conduct joint military exercises with China is a big step in developing military and bilateral ties with China. Nepal had already been conducting joint military exercises with India, the United States, and the UK. Yet, when Nepal started its joint exercise with China, India was a little cautious and India media were quite critical of

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<sup>189</sup> "Nepal-China Transit Agreement Ends Sole Dependence on India," *India Today*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/nepal-china-transit-agreement-ends-sole-dependence-on-india-1335863-2018-09-09>.

China's motives as encircling South Asia through Nepal. Nevertheless, India is also conducting joint military exercises with China. Putting all the media reports aside, the external minister of India put forth the Indian statement that Nepal as a sovereign state can have joint exercises with any country it wishes to. For Nepal, it is a welcome and quite unusual statement from India, which has respected Nepal's sovereignty in holding such exercises.

The engagement of the military leadership in easing the 2015 economic blockade is also a great achievement of Nepal's military diplomacy. The reciprocal awarding of honorary CoAS status between the NA and Indian Army is a unique tradition that could even contribute at the political level. Even so, this practice should be within the framework of civil-military relations. Having an equiproximal military diplomacy is sensitive. The BIMSTEC fiasco displayed a poor sense of conducting military diplomacy by the political leadership of Nepal. Overall, military diplomacy during this period has been successful in pursuing Nepal's foreign policy goals, and the lessons learnt from BIMSTEC should further enhance Nepal's military diplomacy.

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## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has examined the nature of Nepalese military diplomacy with its two neighbors, China and India, from the mid-18th to the early 21st century from the viewpoint of protecting Nepal's vital interests. Specifically, the study has explored the dynamics of Nepalese military diplomacy in three separate time periods: from 1857 to 1949, during Rana regime; from 1950 to 1990, after the fall of the Rana regime, the first democratic period in Nepal until the end of monarchical rule; and from 2008 to 2018, when Nepal was declared a federal democratic republic until now.

Every period of Nepal's military diplomacy has displayed distinct patterns; however, some patterns are common to several periods. The primary patterns of Nepal's military diplomacy have consisted of appeasing its powerful neighbors, balancing one neighbor against another, practicing nonalignment and internationalism with the UN, and maintaining equidistance with both neighbors. While some patterns helped Nepal secure its vital interests, others have contradicted its national interests.

### **A. APPEASEMENT POLICY**

Nepal's military diplomacy strategy of appeasing its powerful neighbors has successfully helped Nepal to preserve its territorial integrity and independence for almost a century; however, this pattern had certain limitations.

Nepal's defeat in the Anglo-Nepal War and the absence of any potential balancer in the Indian subcontinent left Nepal with no other options as a small state than to negotiate with the mighty British India. Jang Bahadur Rana in the mid-19th century wanted to avoid the fate of other princely states like Punjab and Garhwal, which had been annexed by British India. Realizing the support of the British India was indispensable for the regime to survive, Jang Bahadur and his successors appeased British India by providing troops for suppressing domestic mutiny, allowing Gurkha recruitment to augment the British military power, and fighting the World Wars on their behalf.

Primarily, there were three major achievements from this pattern of military diplomacy. One, Nepal could secure its territorial integrity and remain the only

independent protectorate in South Asia when the other states came under colonial rule. Second, Nepal was able to reacquire a portion of its territory lost during Anglo-Nepal War. Third, Nepal achieved the status of an independent state through the Treaty of 1923, which was also recognized by the League of Nations.

Despite these successes, this pattern of military diplomacy had its share of weaknesses. First, Nepal was under the political dominance of British India. Second, Nepal's external relations were tuned to the interests of British India. Third, British India had legal access to the men and resources of Nepal. Nevertheless, this appeasement policy was able to secure the territorial integrity of Nepal, albeit at the cost of thousands of Gurkhas who fought for the interests of British India.

## **B. DIVERSIFIED MILITARY DIPLOMACY**

The period after the fall of Rana regime, observed different patterns of military diplomacy: Nepal's special relationship with India, the practice of NAM and internationalism under UN membership, and balancing one neighbor with another. While NAM and internationalism served the interests of Nepal to a certain extent, balancing one neighbor against another proved detrimental to the interests of Nepal.

## **C. SPECIAL RELATIONS WITH INDIA (1950–1955)**

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship formalized Nepal's "special relations" with India, in which Nepal served the interests of India, at times even at the cost of Nepal's interests. Nepal and India conducted military diplomacy not as equal partners; India assumed superior partner status and it dictated matters related to India's security interests. Nepal's request for the Indian mission to train and modernize the NA in 1952 can be seen from this perspective. The Indian mission, which was invited to stay for a year, did not withdraw from Nepal until 17 years later, after several GoN attempts to expel it. Military diplomacy during this period suffered from the provisions of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty that allowed India to have a strong grip on Nepal's defense matters and curtailed Nepal's opportunities to reach out to the wider world on security-related issues.

#### **D. NAM AND INTERNATIONALISM WITH THE UN**

Nonalignment and internationalism as practiced by Nepal as a UN member helped Nepal's national interests by giving Nepal its own voice in the international forum. This, in turn, allowed Nepal to mitigate India's dominance over Nepal. Otherwise, Nepal as a buffer state would likely have suffered the same fate as Bhutan and Sikkim, which formally surrendered to India. The NA's contribution in UN peace operations and GoN's astute foreign policy helped Nepal to become an active player in world affairs incommensurate with its size and strength. Nepal's selection as the non-permanent member of the UNSC in 1969–70 and in 1988–89 by an overwhelming majority was a major diplomatic victory. Because of this diversification in its diplomatic approach, Nepal built clout in the world affairs and could avoid any encroachment on its territorial integrity. NAM also enabled Nepal to receive economic assistance from both blocs during the Cold War and sustained peace and the relaxation of pressure, especially from India.

#### **E. BALANCING INDIA BY ALIGNING WITH CHINA**

The balancing act practiced by King Birendra, which entailed aligning with China, was aimed at minimizing India's control over Nepal. It climaxed in the late 1980s when Nepal tried to purchase arms from China, ignoring India's security concerns. This proved to be one of the most trying phases in the recorded history of Nepal. In response to the arms deal with China, India imposed a 15-month long economic blockade on Nepal. The Himalayan barrier restricted imports from China and air lifting essential needs was costly and cumbersome during this period. India viewed that this purchase of arms was a blatant violation of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Analysts argue that playing the "China Card" would have succeeded if Nepal was self-sufficient in food and other necessities. Considering the geopolitical complexities facing Nepal, Nepal's level of dependence on India, and the restrictions posed by the legal treaties between Nepal and India, this balancing act proved so costly to Nepal that this blockade would remain fresh in the minds of many for generations to come. In all the patterns of military diplomacy discussed, the balancing act has been the most unproductive and even threatened the independence and national sovereignty of Nepal.

Military diplomacy based on equiproximity or balanced relations have evolved instead, with an increased level of military assistance and political engagements from both India and China. Nepal has more recently modeled its military diplomacy such that it shares equal military ties with India and China. Given the geopolitical setup and status of its two neighbors, Nepal does not have the luxury to follow an appeasement policy, nor can it balance one country against another. Though Nepalese political leaders and the NA have stated that they wish to have equal relations and no enmity with its neighbors, this desire seems idealistic. Geopolitically, in terms of trade and transit Nepal is very near to India, whereas China is still far away beyond the Himalayas. The 2015 undeclared economic blockade imposed on Nepal by India can be seen as evidence of this reality. Even during this trying time, it was the military diplomacy practiced by top army leadership of both the countries that played a crucial role in dousing the political animosity.

The NA has demonstrated equiproximity with both Nepal's powerful neighbors by holding joint exercises with India and China as equal sovereign nations. Nepal, with both the countries, holds interactions with senior military and civil defense officials, shares arrangements on bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation, and engages in exchanges for training for military and civilian defense officers. Yet, Nepal's last minute withdrawal from the BIMSTEC military exercise hosted by India does not help the cause of practicing balanced military diplomacy as that back-pedaling only created a trust deficit between Indo-Nepal relations.

## **F. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study makes three policy recommendations in order to carry out Nepalese military diplomacy more effectively.

### **1. Revision of the 1950 India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship**

Nepal should make serious efforts to reassess the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India and negotiate and reject any provisions that prevent Nepal from pursuing independent foreign relations with China or any other state. At the moment, this treaty certainly limits Nepal's intent to conduct similar military diplomacy with both its neighbors.

Though the treaty was signed between the Rana regime during its last days and the Indian government, the treaty still remains in place, and its provisions largely reflect India's interests. The treaty of 1950 was signed when there was no road or air link between Nepal and China. But now things have changed, Nepal and China have both air and road links. Nepal has a stable democratic government and it should review the provisions that challenge Nepal's national interests.

In particular, article 2 of the treaty requires "Nepal and India to inform each other of any serious friction with any neighboring state likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations between the two countries."<sup>190</sup> In addition to this, paragraph one of the letters exchanged with the treaty states, "Neither Government shall tolerate any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor. To deal with any such threat, the two governments shall consult with each other and devise effective countermeasures."<sup>191</sup> Such terms limit Nepal's intent and ability to practice a balanced military diplomacy with both countries, especially with China.

## **2. UN Diplomacy**

Second, UN peacekeeping is not only the job of the NA; the GoN should seriously make efforts to capitalize on peacekeeping as a tool of foreign policy and try to maintain Nepal's clout in UN affairs. UN peacekeeping is one realm where NA has been playing a significant role in supporting Nepal's foreign policy. Since its accession to the UN in 1955, Nepal has made significant contributions to the world peace. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, Nepal had significant clout over world affairs when it was twice elected as a non-permanent member of UNSC. Currently, Nepal is the fifth largest TTC, but in proportion to that it has less say in the international arena. Since 1989, Nepal has been unsuccessful in becoming a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Therefore, Nepal should more closely align its foreign policy and military diplomacy in the context of UN peacekeeping to regain its non-

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<sup>190</sup> Staff, "Nepal: India Objects to Arms Purchases."

<sup>191</sup> Staff, "Nepal: India Objects to Arms Purchases."



permanent member status in the UNSC and gain greater status in world affairs with respect to Nepal's national interests.

### **3. Formulation of Doctrine on Military Diplomacy**

Finally, the GoN should develop a doctrine for how it will use military diplomacy to support foreign policy. The doctrine should focus on Nepal's defense needs and priorities, and the parameters and means to assess military diplomacy's successes and failures.

To date, doctrine has been formulated and implemented on an ad hoc basis. Nepalese political parties have been polarized in regard to India and China. Generally, the Nepali Congress Party seems to have more inclination toward India and the Communist Party of Nepal inclines toward China. The military diplomacy conducted according to these preferential political affiliations suffers in delivering foreign policy goals. The last-minute withdrawal from the BIMSTEC military exercise is a case in point where the GoN and NA were working at cross purposes due to a misunderstanding of policy, which ultimately caused that diplomatic setback. Because of political instability, in the past there have been instances where India and China have directly dealt with NA and this practice may be counterproductive to the interests of Nepal. The MoFA and MoD should formulate objectives, guidelines, and parameters to assign NA to conduct military diplomacy in the best interests of Nepal. The NA should also formulate proper strategy to conduct military diplomacy to achieve the desired goals.

### **G. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK**

Historically, Nepal practiced diverse military diplomacy in pursuing its foreign policy goals. Currently, Nepal engages both its neighbors, who have a conflictual history and competitive interests in the subcontinent. With the BRI, China has been adopting more assertive diplomacy. Simultaneously, the United States has also floated an Indo-Pacific Strategy that would embolden India in the future. Given this circumstance, can Nepal carry out a tri-lateral military or economic cooperation with India and China? Different prime ministers of Nepal have spoken on the need for tri-lateral cooperation. During a recent visit of China's president to Nepal in October 2019, he hinted at his "two plus one" policy. It is

very obvious that “two” refers to India and China and “one,” although not clear yet, is generally interpreted as Nepal. From this perspective, can Nepal become a bridge between China and India? Study on tri-lateral cooperation would certainly give an insight into whether Nepal can play a decisive role in this approach. Furthermore, it is not yet clear whether military diplomacy could be dovetailed in this initiative and finally what opportunities and challenges such an approach would present. Thus, the study on tri-lateral cooperation merits consideration.

## **H. CONCLUSION**

How has the Nepalese state used military diplomacy to advance its foreign policy with India and China? This study found that the patterns of military diplomacy used by Nepal were primarily different in three different periods: during the Rana regime, monarchical rule, and multi-party democracy. In all periods, the use of military diplomacy has been shaped up by the nature of the domestic political system, geopolitics, and the international system. Overall, for a small, economically poor, and geopolitically constrained country like Nepal, military diplomacy has significantly helped preserve its territorial integrity and national independence. In this long journey, some military-diplomatic approaches have not delivered, but taking lessons from them, Nepalese military diplomacy has moved on.

Nevertheless, to have a sustained military-diplomatic approach, based on balanced and equal relationships with Nepal’s powerful neighbors, the GoN should negotiate with the Indian government to review certain security and trade related issues stemming from the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. In addition, to maintain clout on international affairs, Nepal should lobby for securing higher positions in the UN commensurate with Nepal’s contribution as one of the leading TCCs in UN peacekeeping. To avoid another unsuccessful balancing act like the one that resulted in the 2015 blockade imposed on Nepal by India or a diplomatic setback like the one caused by the NA’s last-minute withdrawal from BIMSTEC, Nepal should formulate a sound doctrine of military diplomacy based on Nepal’s foreign policy.

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