

Chapter 1

Geographic Setting of Nepal

Nepal and India have been living as close neighbours of South Asia since the existence of the two countries. The relationship between the two countries is bound by history, geography, economic cooperation, socio-cultural ties and people-to-people relations. The bilateral relationship, which is marked by mutual trust, good will and cooperation, has been moving forward with the increased interactions and close cooperation between the two countries with the passage of time.

The Himalayan kingdom of Nepal has occupied an important place for India. The geopolitical location makes Nepal as the buffer state between India and China especially after the annexation of Tibet by China. The Himalayas have become the southern border of the People's Republic of China, but they do not occupy such an important place in the Chinese life and culture as they do in India. The Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and the erstwhile kingdom (now Indian state) of Sikkim were considered an integral part of the Indian regional system. As such, these three units are right in the middle of India's whole 'Himalayan frontiers', its northern 'borderland' flanks.

Political geographers and international relations experts have made several attempts to devise global geopolitical models of the relationships between states. Some of those are Mackinder's Heartland Theory (1904), Spykman's Rimland Theory (1942), and Cohen's Shatter Belt/Gateway Theory (1973 and 2005). Arguably, as any model and theories, those classical geopolitical theories are open to criticism or revision. Almost all discussions of global geopolitical perspectives begin with Halford Mackinder. Mackinder (1904) described the heartland in geographical terms as "the northern part and the interior of Europe-Asia," extending "from the Arctic coast down to the central deserts," extending westward to "the broad isthmus between the Baltic and Black Sea". The Heartland concept, Mackinder explained, was equivalent to the territory of the Soviet Union. In 1919, Mackinder revised his theory to include Eastern Europe and the theory became known as Mackinder's Heartland Theory.

Gearoid O'Tuathail (1996), one of the advocates of critical geopolitical theory, judges Mackinder's vision to be 'a triumphalism blind to its own precariousness'. He wrote that in

interpreting the 'end of geography' as a diversion from the struggle for territorial expansion to the struggle for relative efficiency among imperial states, Mackinder was oblivious to those who came to define it as the struggle for cultural and territorial independence. In 1942, Nicholas Spykman proposed a theory that countered Mackinder's Heartland Theory. In his book *The Geography of the Peace* (1944) he argued that the critical geopolitical area of the globe was Mackinder's inner crescent, which he renamed the "Rimland". He wrote that "The Mackinder dictum is false. Saul Cohen used the term shatter belt as roughly equivalent to the concept of the Rimland. Cohen defines a shatter belt as "a large, strategically located region that is occupied by a number of conflicting states and is caught between the conflicting interests of adjoining Great Powers". Cohen saw the Middle East and Southeast Asia as the primary shatter belt regions. Cohen modified his idea of which regions constituted the world's shatter belts several times. Cohen (2005) made the last modification of shatter belts in his recent article in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* titled "The Eurasian Convergence Zone: Gateway or Shatter belt? Throughout the study of geopolitics, the Middle East has always been a region of strategic importance as it connects Eurasia and Africa.¹ Whether in part of Mackinder's World Island or Spykman's Rimland, the Middle East has always been seen as a region of strategic importance. In Cohen's model, the Middle East is a shatter belt where the maritime realm meets the continental realm. Where once it was a powerful region of great empires and an important trade region, in more recent times the Middle East found itself susceptible to foreign influence in the form of colonial domination and as a pawn in an international chess match between the Soviet Union and the United States. The position of the region will always be important geographically. It is unclear if the Middle East will be able to overcome its economic and social difficulties to re-establish itself as an important region of trade and culture or if it will continue to be a shatter belt caught between colliding external cultural and political forces.

Cold War and Post-Cold War Geopolitics

John Agnew (2003) identifies three discourses in the evolution of geopolitical thought from the early 19th century until the end of the Cold War: civilizational geopolitics, naturalized geopolitics, and the 'ideological geopolitics' of the Cold War years, when the world was divided in line with the ideological leanings of the U.S. as capitalist and former U.S.S.R. as communist (Agnew, 2003). In a divided world, the dominant goal of U.S. foreign policy from

the late 1940s to the end of the Cold War was to contain Soviet power within the geographical boundaries established at the end of World War II. Containing Soviet power was the subject of George F. Kennan's famous 1947 article in Foreign Affairs, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." Kennan argued that, for historical and ideological reasons, the Soviet Union would seek to expand its political control beyond the immediate post-war geographical boundaries. He urged the U.S. to respond with a policy of "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment." He called for "the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy" (Kennan, 1947). Under the inspiration of the Containment Theory, U.S. presidential administrations started to form political and military alliances around the Soviet territory and the sphere of Soviet influence. In this context, as Erickson (2004) states, Turkey was a vital Cold War ally in the implementation of 'containment' and deterrence against the Soviet Union during peacetime.²

The present study aims to present the Indo-Nepal relations in the context three geo-political context which John Agnew identified as three discourse of the geo-political thought from 19th century to the end of cold war i.e. civilizational geopolitics, naturalized geopolitics, and the 'ideological geopolitics'.³

Literature Review

There is number of books and articles on Indo-Nepal relation. But none of the academic work so far has given a clear cut picture of Indo- Nepal relations and during this period. Books and articles on Indo-Nepal relations and India's foreign policy are useful as they help in understanding the bilateral relations and the shifts in their ties.

Jayantnuja Bandyopadhyaya, "The Making of India's Foreign Policy, examines the issues of cooperation and discord between India- Nepal relationship. While these two nations in Asia, issues like continued trade imbalance and competition for depleting resources, the unresolved border and Terror issue are still creating friction in their relations

N.S. Sisodia, "Towards A New Asian order", is fine work to understand the China's hydro hegemony in Asian Region. As China is an upper riparian nation, its policies construction of

the dams and mega water projects on the rivers which originate from Tibet would create water problems for lower riparian country India.

Vidya Kanaskar Bir Singh Nepal-India Open Border: Prospects, Problems and Challenges, describes the positive and negative issues between India and Nepal. India-Nepal relations are struggling with many unresolved issues like unbalance trade, terror, open border issues and China's military assistance in Nepal.

Rahul Bedi, "China's Expanding Feet in Nepal," Chinas interfere in Nepal explains China's rise in the field of military and infrastructure development I Nepal. Bedi describes that these Chinese efforts will definitely impact on India.

India-Nepal relations, though occasionally showing signs of peace and cooperation, have often been afflicted by tension and mistrust. With the potential to make big contribution to regional peace and development, and several external powers would have significant bearing on the equation and relations between them.

Objective of Study:

1. To understand the Indo- Nepal relation.
2. To examine the real ground of diplomacy of India toward Nepal in context of China.
3. To identify the Border problems between India and Nepal.

Hypothesis:

1. Open Border is a big problem for India.
2. China is making Problems for India in Nepal.
3. India and Nepal can stop the terror on the border.

Methodology:

The present study is based on historical and analytical method. By taking all the dimensions of problem in its bilateral, regional and global context, it follows a holistic approach. This

work largely is based on both primary sources such as government white paper, India parliamentary debates, foreign ministry publications, discussions and speeches of various leaders of India as well as secondary sources such as academic writing such as book, newspaper, journal and online resources.

Geographical Setting of Nepal

Nepal is located in a buffer state situation between India and China. Nepal is sandwiched between two Asian giants--China and India, traditionally has been characterized as a “root between two stones. Its shape is roughly rectangular, about 650 kilometers long and about 200 kilometers wide, and comprises a total of 147,181 square kilometers of land. Of the three Himalayan units, Nepal is the largest, covering an area of 140,797 sq. km. Bounded on the north by China (the Tibetan region) and on the south, east and west by India, Nepal is a land-locked state, smaller in size than several states of the Indian Union. Nepal is separated from the Tibet region of China by the great Himalayan range. Except for 8,000 sq. miles of the southern plain strip, 80% of the total area of Nepal is mountainous.⁴

Nepal surrounded by India on three sides, Nepal is separated from Bangladesh by an approximately 15-kilometer wide strip of India's state of West Bengal. Nepal is almost totally dependent on India for transit facilities and access to the sea, that is, the Bay of Bengal, even for most of the goods coming from China. Such a confined geographical position is hardly enviable. For a small country, Nepal has great physical diversity, ranging from the Terai--northern rim of the Gangetic Plain situated at approximately 70 to 300 meters above sea level in the south--to the 8,848 meter high Mount Everest, in the north.⁵ Nepal is divided into three distinct regions: the Mountain region, the Hill region, and the Terai region. The Mountainous region, which lies above the altitude of 4,877, because of its geography and climatic conditions, is the most sparsely populated region compared to other two and it accommodates 7.3 percent of the total population. The Hill region, in contrast to the Mountain Region, is relatively densely populated and represents 44.3 percent of the population. The Terai (plain) region, being an extension of the northern plains of India accounts for 23.1 percent of total land area of the country and accommodates 48.4 percent of population. The population in the Terai region is increasing at a faster rate compared to the other two regions. One reason for this faster growth is internal migration. It can be estimated that in the census of 2010, the Terai, will have more than 50 percent of the total 29 million¹³² population of Nepal. The

geographical features of Nepal show that movement in the south is highly accessible, whereas movement in the north, bordering China, is much less accessible due to the northern high Himalayan ranges and rugged terrain.⁶

The three principal river systems of Nepal (the Karnali, the Gandak and the Kosi) all have their sources in Tibet, and enter Nepal through three gorges that cut across the Himalayas. Nepal's strategic importance can be fathomed not only from its geo-political location, being sandwiched between the two rising Asian giants but also from its transformation into a new buffer zone between India and China in the 1950s. This buffer has assumed even more importance in the current times with Royal Nepal being transformed into a People's Nepal in the aftermath of the Maoist victory in the election to the Constituent Assembly on April 10, 2008. The victory of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) CPN (M) a one-time rebel group has significant geopolitical repercussions for the region. If one stands back, then 'Indian-Chinese rivalry in Nepal' indeed continues to provide the main strategic feature surrounding Nepal.

Changed status of Tibet and its implications for Nepal

The withdrawal of Britain from the Indian subcontinent in 1947 brought India's inheritance of British pre-eminence in Nepal. Nehru's sense in 1948-49 was that 'politically our interest in Nepal is so important' and that Indian policy was 'to prevent the exploitation of Nepal by other foreign interests', but to 'help in developing Nepal to the mutual advantage of Nepal and India'. However, one new 'foreign interest' raising its head was the emergence of a strong People's Republic of China. On 6 December 1950 summing up India's security concerns vis-à-vis Nepal, Nehru had said to parliament: 'from time immemorial the Himalayas have provided us with magnificent frontiers . We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India. Therefore, as much as we appreciate the independence of Nepal, we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal or permit that barrier to be crossed or weakened, because that would be a risk to our own country'.⁷ The Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship had the two states 'agree mutually to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other'. However, with regard to sensitive military-defense matters, Article 5 gave India an important role . 'The Government of Nepal shall be free to import, from or through the territory of India, ammunition or warlike material and equipment

necessary for the security of Nepal. The procedure for giving effect to this arrangement shall be worked out by the two governments acting in consultation’.

Himalayan frontiers after Indian independence

The Himalayas were the arena for competition between British India and China in imperial times, with important buffer considerations being in play. The ‘ring fence’ system operated by Britain resulted in an independent but friendly and co-operative Nepal, with Sikkim and Bhutan as Indian protectorates, and with Tibet as an autonomous buffer state guaranteeing India’s commercial and strategic interests there.⁸ One hundred years later and similar dynamics and similar concerns were in play for India. Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s architect of foreign policy, wanted to continue the British policy towards the Himalayan states, but he failed to do so. It might have happened due to the lack of long-term strategic vision or excessive idealistic structures of Indian foreign policy.⁹

The fault lines started with the Indian policy on Tibet. From 1946 to 1951 the Tibet policy of Nehru and his associates reflected that of the British Treating Tibet as an autonomous buffer state between that of India and China, recognizing vague Chinese suzerainty but not sovereignty over Tibet.¹⁰ Thus, in March 1947 a Tibetan delegation was invited to the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, despite protests from Chinese (Kuomintang) delegates. When the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Tibet in 1950, Indians (including Nehru) vociferously protested against the invasion. Such actions indicated India’s preference for continuing the British policy towards Tibet. Nehru wanted to protect the Indian security interests in the Himalayan regions. As the Chinese communists neared their revolutionary victory, Nehru rushed through a series of defense treaties with Bhutan (August 1949), Nepal (July 1950) and Sikkim (December 1950).¹¹ These countries constituted Nehru’s definition of a redrawn security zone. Throughout the 1950s Nehru demonstrated his serious commitment to this Himalayan doctrine. In February 1951 he established the North and North-Eastern Defense Committee, and visited the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Sikkim and Bhutan.

In public statements in August and December 1959, Nehru offered support in the defense of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim in case of Chinese invasion. Gradually, though, India started losing ground in the Himalayan regions vis-à-vis China. Neither India’s vital interests in the

Himalayas nor its stand on the border problem were recognized in writing or respected in practice by China nor was the autonomy of Tibet respected by China. In recognizing full Chinese control of Tibet, as a 'region of China' in the 1954,¹² strategically India surrendered its outer ring of defense without gaining anything substantial in return from China. Ginsburg and Mathos, in their study on Communist China and Tibet (1964) clearly brought out the geographical importance of Tibet in this domino-theory type logic 'he who holds Tibet dominates he who dominates the Himalayan piedmont threatens the Indian sub-continent; and he who threatens the Indian sub-continent may well have all of south-east Asia within its reach, and with it, all of Asia. The Chinese occupation of Tibet brought home to India the urgency of taking effective steps to safeguard its national security in the north.¹³

The occupation of Tibet by China was in itself a grave threat to India's security. To add to India's woes, the Chinese claimed that the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim were in fact Chinese 'Middle Kingdom' territories that China had lost to the imperialist in her bad days and now that China had acquired strength it would try to regain the 'lost territories'.¹⁴ Occupation of Tibet by a strong China exposed the Himalayan states and India's northern frontier to a grave potential threat, with Nepal-Bhutan-Sikkim constituting what Dawa Norbu described as a 'new buffer zone', after the old buffer (Tibet) had fallen under China's sovereign political-military control in 1951.

The Importance of Nepal's International Boundary with China and India

Like most of the countries of the world, the existence of Nepal had been recognized even before the international boundaries had been fully and finally established. Mention of Nepal is found in the ancient history of both China and India. Nepal-China boundary is as old as the history of the two countries, but in contrast to the very ancient cultural, social, political and economic relations, Nepal-India boundary has a comparatively recent origin and its present boundary demarcation and delimitation took place after the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-16. In contrast to Nepal's boundary with India on three sides: west, south and east, the boundary between Nepal and China lies in the north only. However, the demarcation of Nepal-China boundary had been a problem in the past, because more than 90 percent of the frontiers run through high altitudes with rocks and snow, glaciers and ice fields which are entirely uninhabited. Both countries have respected and continue to respect the existing traditional and customary boundary line and have lived in amity. No remarkable or noticeable territorial

dispute has existed between Nepal and China.¹⁵ The few territorial disputes that existed were over rival claims for the settlements of *Kimathanka* in the *Sankhuwasabha* and *Taplejung* districts, the area adjoining the border of Rasuwa, and Nara Nangla of Humla district with the origin of dispute dating back to 1815, 1818 and 1834 respectively. These disputes were resolved by the Nepal-China Joint Boundary Commission on October 5, 1961.

The ruggedness of Nepal-China boundary is clearly revealed by its length which is 1415 kilometers, while Nepal-India boundary which runs along three sides of Nepal is only 1850 kilometers, 465 kilometers longer than Nepal-China boundary. The 1415 kilometer length of Nepal-China boundary is based on measurement in the maps. If the actual measurement is made on the ground along the slopes and ridges of the mountains, the length of the boundary will be more than that indicated by the measurement in the maps. So far as Nepal-India boundary is concerned, the mountainous portions of the boundary lie in Sikkim State and Darjeeling district of West Bengal State in the east, while rest of the boundary runs along the plains in the south and along the Mahakali River in the west.¹⁶

End Notes

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