

# Nepal's Foreign Policy: A special bond with India

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## **Abstract:**

After the unification of Nepal, the founder of the nation, King Prithvi Narayan Shah formulated an underlying principle of Nepal's foreign policy based on Geopolitics. He described the geographical situation of Nepal as a 'yam between two boulders', referring to the two big neighbours of Nepal – China and India. King Prithvi Narayan Shah was not only a great warrior but a visionary leader, who had appropriately assessed the geopolitical sensitivities of Nepal and adopted non-aligned foreign policy. He also said it was important for the county to keep a balanced relationship with these two huge neighbours. He cautiously moved maintained distance and balance considering the imperatives of the fragile situation. Nepal's foreign policy thereafter has passed through the turbulent periods; extreme loyalty had been maintained to the southern neighbour and pro-northern approach surfaced consequently. With the formation of the elected government after the promulgation of new constitution, major shift is observed in Nepal's foreign policy- the diversification of Nepal's trade and transit to China. The main objective of this paper is to explore the foreign relation of Nepal India. This paper makes a brief description and analysis of Nepal's foreign policy, political and economic dynamics of these relations, and new developments in Nepal-India relation based on secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Nepal, foreign policy, Directive principles, SAARC, BIMSTC.

## ***Meaning of foreign policy***

Foreign policy is one of the important aspects in the field of international relations. In this globalised world it is not possible for any state to live in isolation and without maintaining inter-state relations. Therefore, to maintain such relations with other states of the world, a state has to formulate a foreign policy. In fact, inter-state relations can be understood by understanding their foreign policies. A nation's power also gets enhanced by foreign policy in the international community. In simple words, foreign policy is a course of action and inputs that a nation makes in order to influence behaviour of other states and to pursue its goals of national interest. It is a set of principles, decisions and means which a nation adopts to secure its goals in international relations. According to C. C. Rodee, Anderson and Christol, foreign policy implies "formulation and implementation of a group of principles which shape the behaviour pattern of a state while negotiating with other states to protect or further its own interests". Foreign policy gives a kind of direction to a state and also suggests adequate means to adopt for the easy journey of the direction. Padelford and Lincoln pointed out that foreign policy is the way through which a state decides "what course of actions it will generally pursue in world affairs within its limits of strength and realities of international environment". Foreign policy consists of two words 'foreign' which implies territorially sovereign units which exist beyond the legal boundaries of a particular state

and ‘policy’ means guide to an action or a set of actions intended for the realization the goals of an organization.

### ***Foreign Policy of Nepal***

The fundamental objective of Nepal’s foreign policy is to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal. It is also aimed at contributing to global peace, harmony and security.

Nepal’s foreign policy is guided by the following basic principles:

1. Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty;
2. Non-interference in each other’s internal affairs;
3. Respect for mutual equality;
4. Non-aggression and the peaceful settlement of disputes;
5. Cooperation for mutual benefit;
6. Abiding faith in the Charter of the United Nations;
7. 6 Value of world peace.

#### Provisions of the Constitution of Nepal on National Interest and Foreign Policy

##### National Interest (Article 5.1)

Safeguarding of the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, nationality, independence and dignity of Nepal, the rights of the Nepalese people, border security, economic wellbeing and prosperity shall be the basic elements of the national interest of Nepal.

##### Directive Principles (Article 50.4)

The State shall direct its international relations towards enhancing the dignity of the nation in the world community by maintaining international relations on the basis of sovereign equality, while safeguarding the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and national interest of Nepal.

##### State Policy (Article 51)

1. To conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, principles of Panchasheel, international law and the norms of world peace, taking into consideration of the overall interest of the nation, while remaining active in safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national interest of Nepal.
2. To review treaties concluded in the past, and make treaties, agreements based on equality and mutual interest.

Nepal’s foreign policy tends to be in the pursuit of three main objectives: first, asserting and protecting Nepal’s freedom of action and maintaining its own equilibrium vis-à-vis its two larger neighbours; second, economic development; third, upholding the principles of Panchsheel and the Charter of the UN, and strengthening the rules-based international order. However, Nepal’s foreign policy continues to be affected by its geo-strategic location between the two giants of Asia and preoccupied by its attempt to maintain a balance between these powerful neighbours.

Like any other nation, Nepal has its own challenges and opportunities offered by the fast-changing world events and the dynamics of the rapidly evolving formal and informal alliances of nations for various purposes. Professor Yadu Nath Khanal wrote about the fact that as a least developed country with a small volume of international trade and not much to offer by way of give-and-take, Nepal has little to offer to countries such as the United States to attract adequate attention. Nepal can be proud

of its past and ambitious for the future for itself and for the region. It wants to come out of the Sino-Indian preoccupation of its foreign policy and go even beyond the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the currently dysfunctional South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Nepal is well placed to shout loud from the top of the world a global message of change for the better and the world is bound to listen to Nepal's authoritative, legitimate voice of reason. As Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said, the gates of the future are wide open for any individuals and nations determined to succeed in their mission.

### ***India's Interests in Nepal***

India's security interests in Nepal were radically recast soon after independence when in 1949 China emerged as a communist nation and in 1951, militarily occupied Tibet. Unprepared, India had to accept this change and withdraw its presence from Tibet. The security concern was now redefined from 'threat from Nepal' to 'threat to Nepal'. India was forced then to fortify its strategic frontier, covering Nepal, in the Himalayas against an unpredictable and, suspected to be, expansionist communist China. The idea of Nepal being an integral part of India's sub-Himalayan strategic space was reinforced in this context. It was enshrined in the July 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal underlining 'the everlasting peace and friendship' between the two countries. India's first Prime Minister Nehru had no hesitation in accepting that India's security interests had a priority over Nepal's sovereignty and independence. In a speech in Indian Parliament on December 6, 1950, Nehru said

*Frankly, we do not like and shall not brook any foreign interference in Nepal. We recognize Nepal as an independent country and wish her well, but even a child knows that one cannot go to Nepal without passing through India. Therefore, no other country can have as intimate a relationship with Nepal as ours is. (Parliament Debates 1950).*

The most important natural resource of Nepal has of course been water. What initially started as harnessing of water resources for mutual benefit of the two countries has now been extended to protecting and promoting India's trade and investment interests in Nepal. India's first water harnessing projects in Nepal were on the Rivers Kosi (1954) and Gandak (1959). These projects generated considerable controversy as the Nepalese perceived them to be tilted heavily in India's favor (Gyawali 2011; Shrestha 2011). These agreements were revised in 1964 (Gandak) and 1966 (Kosi) to accommodate Nepalese grievances (Jha 2013; Dhungel and Pun 2009). However, a deep cleavage of distrust was created between the two countries in the area of water harnessing and no major project could be undertaken until the 1998 signing of the Mahakali Treaty. Not much movement is visible on the implementation of the Mahakali treaty as yet. Similarly, progress in the area of hydro-power development in Nepal has also been dismal. Out of a commercially viable potential of 45,000 MW of hydro-power, Nepal has hardly been able to develop 600 MW which is not even enough for Nepal's basic requirements. Instead of contributing to India's power needs, Nepal has periodically been buying power from India.

### ***Conclusion***

India's economic rise and political stability for the past decade and a half have opened new opportunities for India and refurbished its regional image. In the process, India has gained considerable self-confidence and has redefined its regional and global roles. India's Nepal policy has not remained totally

unaffected as was evident in India accepting a republican Nepal and working with a Maoist regime in Kathmandu, though only for a short while. Nepal has also been encouraged to take advantage of India's economic growth and integrate its economy with that of India. There are, however, two formidable challenges facing India's Nepal policy. One is the internal politics in both India and Nepal. It may be hoped that the Second Constituent Assembly will be able to deliver a viable constitution for inclusive democracy in Nepal. In India, the 2014 elections have produced a strong Bhartiya Janata Party led government which needs to continue to engage with Nepal's representative forces without being guided by its ideological and religious preferences if any. The developmental orientation of the new Indian political dispensation may provide greater pragmatism and rationale in dealing with Nepal.

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