

Journal of Political Science

(A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; JPPS Star Ranked and Indexed in NepJOL)

ISSN 2362-1273 (Print); ISSN 2773-8132 (Online)

Volume 25, February 2025

<http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/jps/>

Published by

Department of Political Science, Prithvi Narayan Campus, TU, Pokhara, Nepal

Email: polsc@pncampus.edu.np; URL: www.pncampus.edu.np

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development Perspectives from Nepal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v25i1.75777>

Submitted 10 Nov. 2024; Reviewed 22 Nov. 2024; Accepted 11 Dec. 2024; Published 15 Feb. 2025

Abstract

This article examines the connection between development and geopolitics in Nepal. The primary assertion made here is that development cannot be viewed solely through its principles, as commonly perceived, but is also significantly shaped by geopolitical motivations. It investigates the interactions among geopolitics, non-state entities, and foreign aid, offering a systematic qualitative evaluation. It also explores the relationship between development and geopolitics, indicating that development frequently hinges more on geopolitical factors than on the process of development itself. This might clarify why, despite continuous external assistance and internal initiatives, development has not advanced to a stage that can offer economic opportunities for all individuals. Support and initiatives for development from the outside often reflect an external perspective on Nepal's progress. Furthermore, development in Nepal has become highly (geo)politicized and the country struggles to determine which projects to undertake and which to avoid this trend will continue in the coming days as well. It contends that Nepal must take a proactive approach to tackling existing geopolitical issues while furthering its development goals.

Keywords: Cold War, development, foreign aid, geopolitics, new-geopolitics

Introduction

Development and geopolitics have become the most discussed topics in Nepal in recent years. And there certainly are reasons behind that. Yet the relationship between the two is seldom discussed. In fact, both concepts are understood independently of each other. While economists view development from an economic perspective, political scientists and sociologists, for their part, analyze it from their respective fields, arriving at their own conclusions (Khadka 1992). Despite being influenced by various factors, the relationship between geopolitics and development has been under-studied. While Marcus Power's (2019) contribution presents interesting dynamics, his framework may not be universally applied. In the context of Nepal, Khadka (1992, 1997) has made a significant contribution, but circumstances in recent years have fundamentally altered the economic and geopolitical landscape. Extensive analyses of Nepal's economic development, mainly conducted by foreign researchers (Reidinger, 1993; Zurick, 1993; Pigg, 1993), often provide interpretations that significantly differ from the actual on-ground realities. Nepali scholars (Pandey, 2011, 2022; Gyawali, 2017; Gyawali, 2024; Bhatta, 2017; Pyakural, 2008, 2013) are critical of the existing developmental model—particularly the donor and NGO-led approaches—but they have not explored why and how development occurs as it does, despite their critique. The National Planning Commission (NPC) – an important government institution – rarely reflects on the legacy of Nepal's failed development (Panday 2012). In contrast, it primarily focuses on carrying out developmental activities designed by donors, as well as international and multilateral organizations, which reduces its role to that of merely an implementing agency. It appears that Nepali policy-makers have understood development in a very simplified and sanitized manner. What has not been considered is that it can also be used for other purposes, including geopolitics and creating sustained dependency on others. Hence, understanding the connection between geopolitics and development is crucial for states like Nepal, whose geographical locations are juxtaposed as a matter of concern.

Nepal's position between India and China, both rising powers in Asia, renders it significant to these countries, even though it does not possess substantial geopolitical influence or aspirations. Nevertheless, their resurgence in the global political arena is not well received, particularly by established powers (Mahbubani 2020). They refuse to accept that others can also gain power (Rachman 2016, Mahbubani 2021, 2024). Instead, they seek to make them subservient, employing a two-pronged strategy: either inventing internal contradictions within these countries or using neighboring countries against them. This is why location is crucial for residents and emerging powers. In recent years, they have concentrated on both soft power development (civilizing missions) and hard power development (connectivity and infrastructure development). Nepal needs infrastructural development and economic opportunities for its growing youth population but lacks sufficient capital and external support; these sectors are not receiving significant attention from outside sources. Nepal relies heavily on external donors for assistance, often in the form of aid, loans, or grants. However, this support is often contingent on specific conditions, with donors expecting significant foreign policy changes and unspoken expectations for societal restructuring.

While for a long period of time, countries from the global north and their agencies have

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

been imposing their developmental model on Nepal, of late, there are others, including China, publicly criticizing Nepal's development model (Giri, 2024; also in Bhatta, 2024). Chinese officials have suggested that Nepal should adopt its developmental model, which they believe might be more relevant to the country. The 'West Plus' countries (including Japan, Australia, and Canada) and also countries from the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) have consistently remained major contributors to Nepal's development through aid. They have their own recipe for development. Similarly recently, West Asia (the Gulf Region) has become a new reality for Nepal. It is not only a labour destination but also emerging as a new actor in Nepal's development. Taken together, the major stakeholders in Nepal's development prefer that Nepal align with their geopolitical lines either to protect, claim their stake, or expand their interests. That being said, to a great extent, we can argue that Nepal's foreign policy and internal political dynamics may be influenced by its developmental needs in the future, which could often translate into a geopolitical trap as well.

The role of the US—a country that established diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1948—is worth investigating, as it recognized Nepal in 1947, even before the fall of the Rana regime. The US and its allies have further increased their involvement in response to the re-emergence of China and India in global politics. In this context, Nepal has emerged as a geopolitical flash point for maintaining geopolitical balance, as reflected in various forms, including developmental activities. Hence, any external developmental support or approaches may not always have benevolent intentions. In this context, it can be stated that Nepal's development and politics have always remained dependent on geopolitics—regime changes and frequent government changes also find their link here (Bhatta, 2013). The global developmental initiative is, in part, intrinsically linked to a reflection of wider geopolitical dynamics, as noted by Parmar (2012) and Essex (2013). Many countries in the Global South might have advanced independently; yet, those that have achieved development have successfully directed geopolitical dynamics and established their development agendas based on their own criteria and stipulations.

The key factor to examine is how geopolitics affect developmental advancements or whether external development efforts are always motivated by geopolitical agendas. Such inquiries are significant because Nepal has not developed in parallel despite continuous external support and its desire for development. In contrast, Nepal's increasing dependence on external influences has led to a rise in its geopolitical vulnerability across multiple dimensions. Therefore, understanding the interface between these two concepts is crucial, as they are frequently intertwined. Harry Truman, the American President in the early '50s, introduced the Point Four program for developing countries, which marked the intersection of development and geopolitics. The Point Four program was a technical help initiative for "developing countries" announced by United States President Harry S. Truman in his inaugural address on January 20, 1949 (Bass, 2009). The US provided technical and economic aid to underdeveloped countries but also pursued foreign policy objectives. The division of the world into developed and underdeveloped categories has created a unique momentum in world politics. From Rousseau's perspective, such a division is merely a tool of distraction (Williams, 2024, September 25). Those classified as underdeveloped were

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

prioritized to ensure their progress, at least in theory. The term "development" has become a crucial part of political communication, making it almost impossible to avoid its mention in any political speech or public discourse, with Nepal being a prime example of this trend.

To begin with, Nepal's modern developmental laboratory was initiated by external actors. Notably, the United States took the lead in these efforts in 1951 (Skerry, Christa A., Kerry Moran, and M. Calavan, 1992), which has been reflected in many areas, including intervention in agricultural extension through 4-H (its Nepali equivalent is Charpate Club, denoting head, heart, hands, and health) in 1953 (Ghimire et al., n.d.). Other countries, including India, China, and the former Soviet Union, started to follow suit in subsequent years. These countries, along with various other actors (both state and non-state), have continued to be the primary participants in this laboratory. Consequently, since then, external support—both in the form of aid and soft loans—has been flowing in from bilateral, multilateral, and other organizations. Over the past seven decades, billions of dollars in investments and thousands of years of expert advice have been provided. The effort to support Nepal may have two objectives: to help it catch up with other countries through a benevolent approach under liberal internationalism and to fulfill geopolitical ambitions for which donor countries have chosen such efforts as foreign policy tools. The division of 'nation-states' along developed and underdeveloped lines has led to individuals in inequality looking more below than above them, making domination dearer than independence, as noted by Rousseau (Williams, 2024, September 25). Although it may seem paradoxical, this philosophy has driven the developmental debate and activities for many decades. In this context, many countries, including Nepal, were tasked with achieving designated objectives, such as sustainable development goals. Additionally, they received specific guidelines and were instructed to comply with them rigorously. From this aspect, we can argue that development has simply evolved into a project that is not intimately connected with people. The 'dependent developmental' philosophy has led to the mistreatment of countries like Nepal as 'infantile' and 'inferior.' The Global North has created a hierarchy where peripheral states are guided by the core and work in their interests, leading psychological and cognitive problems for many countries, hindering their ability to catch up with others.

Since 1951, Nepal's economic size has grown, and per capita income has increased. Nepal has made significant achievements in education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and reducing the gender gap, which is a widely discussed issue in any country. Nepal is now well connected via roads and is undergoing electrification of rural villages, demonstrating significant improvements in its communication infrastructure. Nepal is nearing the transition from LDC status to developing country status and intends to join the club by 2026, which is a significant achievement considering the country's progress. There are both positive and negative aspects to this. The development of villages has come at a heavy cost. By the time development has reached villages, many people have already migrated either to urban centres or outside the country because of a lack of economic opportunities there. Over one-fourth of Nepal's population lives abroad, and the rest of the population relies on remittances for their livelihood. Mass resignations from villages are occurring, showing a decline in people's trust in the state and society. Unfortunately, the developmental model's trajectories

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

and consequences are well anchored through folklore and other popular writings (Saput, 2023). Multiple factors could contribute to this situation. Yet many scholars argue that the current development model is heavily influenced by external factors (Bhatta 2017, Wagle 2021), with geopolitics potentially being the primary reason for this interconnection. In that regard, it may be important to examine the dynamics between the two, specifically how the narratives of development have evolved. This is relevant during key historical moments, such as the end of empires, the Cold War, the post-war terror period, and more recently, the rise of re-emerging powers (Sachs, 2023). With each political transition, whether involving system or regime changes, there has been a subsequent reshuffling of the developmental model (Williams, 2024, September 25). Interestingly, developmental and political models, both external and internal, are often developed to meet market demands rather than those of the state and society (Bhatta, 2013, Sripathi, 2024). Global changes often coincide with development, leading to consequences that extend beyond development and reshape social interactions. Against this background, this article aims to explain how global geopolitical rivalry affects Nepal's development initiatives and vice versa.

Methodology

This article employs secondary sources to analyze Nepal's development patterns, examining academic publications, books, research studies, and policy documents. It also considers developmental patterns with geopolitics, non-state actors' involvement, and foreign aid. This comprehensive approach offers a systematic qualitative analysis, enhancing our understanding of the profound implications these elements have on Nepal's trajectory.

Literature Review: Discourse(s) on Development

The concept of 'development,' as we perceive it today, emerged in the late 1940s during a period when global politics was experiencing significant changes: colonial dominance was rapidly diminishing, and the political landscape of the world was shifting toward a bipolar structure, with one side represented by the US—the so-called democratic bloc and the other led by the then USSR—the socialist bloc. Until the conclusion of the Second World War, both the United States and the Soviet Union were members of the Allied Powers. After the Second World War, they separated and established their spheres of influence in global politics. In reality, a rivalry developed between the two regarding who ought to guide the world or whose ideology should dominate, which contributed to the emergence of bloc politics founded on bipolarity. Interestingly, both the US and USSR were part of the Allied Powers until the end of World War II. After World War II, the two countries separated and formed their own political blocs. The competition for global leadership and ideology led to the rise of bipolar bloc politics. Although global governance was established through Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), both countries emphasized their own worldviews, which were well articulated through their policies and programs. They were also seeking the support of nations to align with them. They were vying with one another in multiple areas in this respect. The concept of development proposed by US strategists came to the forefront, which, in a way, turned out to be a hidden advantage for influential nations from Northern Europe, the Anglo-Saxon world, and their allies. The concept became so prevalent that it inadvertently transformed the global socio-economic framework.

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

The concepts of development that have emerged throughout human history have proven to be extraordinarily influential in reshaping societal nuances. No other ideas could reshape societies in such a way. This development has afforded colonial powers ample opportunity to sustain their existing dominance in interactions with other nations. This period marked the genesis of formal sovereignty, during which exerting direct control over states, regardless of their size, became increasingly unfeasible. In this context, it was crucial to mitigate the sentiment of sovereignty and guide nations toward a developmental trajectory. Undertaking such an initiative would enhance their allegiance to the dominant powers, as every country aspires to progress and emulate its more developed counterparts. The concept of development played a significant role in curbing the proliferation of communism and reinforcing enduring influence (Power 2019), which was sweeping across the globe.

The necessity of this action in Asia became evident, particularly given the communist takeover of China in 1949. Consequently, development was employed as a strategy to contain communism in regions where it was deemed necessary, while simultaneously promoting progress in newly decolonized states to ensure their alignment with Western interests. Over time, this instrumental application of development has effectively transformed it into a geopolitical tool, manifesting in various forms. From this perspective, one can observe a compelling interaction between the two dynamics.

Furthermore, development is significantly associated with the process of modernization, which establishes the necessary conditions for the former to occur. Therefore, it can be posited that development and modernization are intricately connected. Development encompasses a wide-ranging concept that refers to a favourable transformation across various dimensions of life, including social, political, economic, and cultural aspects, while modernization serves as a mechanism to attain these developmental objectives. Furthermore, modernization can be understood as an endeavour to cultivate a modern perspective and conduct among individuals. In this context, it is often characterized by alignment with Western ideologies, perceptions, institutions, and worldviews, which are juxtaposed with the traditional beliefs and frameworks present in the society undergoing modernization (Power, 2019). Alternatively, development can also be perceived as an ultimate objective aimed at "civilizing" populations deemed "backward" through the lens of modernization. The foundational philosophy underlying this discourse is deeply rooted in Western civilization, which regards its own historical experience of enlightenment as a benchmark. Consequently, it posits that all other societies must conform to this tradition of enlightenment to achieve modernity. By promoting the notion of modernity and establishing institutions aligned with this concept, the West has undeniably gained an advantage in various geopolitical conflicts worldwide. The strategies arising from modernization theory were instrumental in facilitating the transition from the post-World War era to the Cold War (Power, 2019). The Point Four Program, as mentioned earlier, proposed by President Harry S. Truman, significantly contributed to the development of U.S. foreign policy. This initiative, identified as a fourth goal of foreign engagement, aimed to provide technical assistance from the United States to facilitate modernization around the world, encapsulating strategies that had been evolving since prior to World War II. The program introduced initiatives that laid the groundwork for the establishment of formalized and

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

enduring foreign aid bureaucracies within the U.S. government, designed with a global mandate. Over time, these initiatives evolved into what is now known as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), along with various affiliated organizations (Mihaly, 2002, 1965).

The emergence of modernization theory within American social sciences seeks to elucidate the observed expansion of social activities. This theory is predicated on the belief that all societies tend to converge toward a singular model, which is characterized and represented by the Western industrialized way of life, with a specific emphasis on the United States as a prime example (Price 2013, Gilman 2003, Parmar 2013). One of the most prominent figures associated with modernization theory is Walt W. Rostow, an economist renowned for his seminal work, "The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto" (1960). In this influential text, Rostow articulated a sequential framework that nations could adopt to transition into modern, high-consumption societies. His work served as a direct rebuttal to Marxist developmental theories, highlighting the ideological rivalry that underpinned much of the modernization efforts undertaken by the United States. Indeed, modernization theory posits that countries such as Nepal can achieve economic prosperity and social cohesion only by embracing modernization, relinquishing traditional values, and following a prescribed developmental trajectory (UN Expert Group Report, 1951).

The allure of development and Western modernization became so compelling that even communist nations, such as China, along with various Marxist factions, began to embrace these concepts, albeit discreetly. This shift facilitated the expansion of geopolitical interests. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the extent to which these influences succeeded in alienating societies from their traditional values, thus laying the groundwork for civilizational geopolitics. This dynamic undoubtedly contributes to the current resurgence of powers that leverage development to further their geopolitical ambitions both regionally and globally.

Data Presentation

This article examines the evolving content that, over time, has influenced discourse and actively contributed to the developmental processes within the country. Furthermore, it considers various factors that may potentially impact not only the discourse itself but also its resultant outcomes.

Interface Between Geopolitics and Development

How should we understand Nepal's development process and its achievements? Likewise, what has been the relationship between development and geopolitics? Understanding the dynamics between them is important precisely because some of the developmental initiatives pursued by the developmental states were/are not fitting with local realities (Shrestha, 1997). Nepal's romance with development and its Nepali equivalent VIKAS entered through donors wherein they provided a certain amount of money both in cash and kind sometime from late 1940 onwards. Yet it has created its momentum. VIKAS, as we understand, may certainly have been happening even before that but we may not have used

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

the same terminology to explain human activities as we do now but *Vikase* culture is the recent phenomenon. This culture has deeply gone into the minds of people that anything that is *Vikase* is good but all others are not (See Shrestha, 1997 for details).

However, the etymology of the word itself is problematic and confusing to the core as it has more than one meaning. What is true, however, is that discourse has gripped all of us. Shrestha (1997) articulates that there was a moment when actual *Vikas* became confused with *Vikase* objects, and how *Vikase* became identified with western *things and ideas* (Fisher, 1992, emphasis added). Striving for these objects and idolized goals alter world views and social interactions (Fisher, 1992). Such an appetite to become like the West or others for that reason can certainly pave the way for the geopoliticization of development. There exists a significant relationship between political transformations and developmental frameworks. Political changes often introduce new developmental models, impacting both domestic and international contexts. Notably, global political shifts in the late 1940s, 1980s, and at the turn of the century resulted in considerable upheaval within political systems and developmental paradigms. In this context, the 1950s marked a pivotal moment for Nepal, as it experienced the introduction of external actors into the development sector alongside substantial political changes. In the aftermath of the collapse of democracy and during the initial phase of the Panchayat era under King Mahendra, the concept of *VIKAS* became intrinsically associated with engaging with the global community. King Mahendra's preoccupation with 'Vikas' was so profound that his speeches and declarations invariably included this term, and he endeavored to actualize this vision through a process of industrialization (His Majesty King Mahendra's Speeches between December 16, 1962 – November 10, 1963). The primary focus, therefore, was directed toward the advancement of rural communities. The state maintained an optimistic perspective, asserting that the realization of *VIKAS* is contingent upon the prosperity of villages. Notably, this period was characterized by the formulation of both ideology and theoretical frameworks, with a discernible integration of the two. It is important to note that King Mahendra, at least in principle, was not in favour of ideological considerations in development.

King Mahendra demonstrated considerable acumen in fostering balanced relationships with both superpowers of the era, namely the USSR and the United States, particularly regarding their developmental aid to Nepal. A comparable strategy was adopted for neighboring countries as well. He believed that neither capitalism nor socialism—two dominant ideologies of the period—would benefit societies like Nepal. He likely recognized these ideologies as primarily materialistic, rendering them incompatible with a fundamentally spiritual society. He preferred to integrate the beneficial aspects of various ideologies, striving to achieve a harmonious balance among them. The mixed economy that Nepal adopted until the mid-1980s exemplified this approach. Furthermore, he believed that a natural integration of the political system—specifically, the Panchayat, which he deemed appropriate for the local context—and economic policies was essential for establishing equilibrium, a crucial factor for development (Bhatta, 2017). However, during this period characterized by intense geopolitical dynamics, he successfully guided the nation through these challenges, even though the foundations of geopolitics had already been laid out.

Secondly, upon King Birendra's ascension to the throne in 1972, his rule was set against a

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

backdrop of geopolitical instability. In terms of development, this period was marked by an emphasis on slogans. The architects of development had already outlined a trajectory for future progress, proposing diverse initiatives tailored to the specific circumstances of different nations. Nepal's approach to development, exemplified by the trickle-down theory, initially categorized its geography into four distinct development regions, which were later expanded to five. Furthermore, the incorporation of the International Labour Organization's basic needs theory contributed to the establishment of the development slogan "Asiyali Mapadanda" within the country. Moreover, this period marked the emergence of VIKAS in a new form on the national stage. Concurrently, neoliberalism was beginning to assert its presence on a global scale.

The Reagan-Thatcher administration introduced a variety of economic reforms aligned with neoliberal principles and structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which have become the prevailing approach to addressing developmental challenges. Nations such as Nepal were compelled to adopt these measures, as they represented the sole viable option for advancing their developmental agendas. Additionally, the designated developmental regions within Nepal were instructed to undertake 'integrated development projects' in multiple formats. The emphasis on flexible and market-oriented development has taken precedence in promoting the roles of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and local federations among them (Sripati 2024, emphasis added). In conjunction with this, the de-bureaucratization of development has emerged as a critical priority, aiming to enhance the essential resources necessary for driving social transformation and dismantling the existing state hierarchy, which is perceived as vital for achieving development. The outcome, nonetheless, was disheartening. Over time, the Nepali state increasingly weakened its control over both society and politics. Aside from the emergence of Chetana within society, there were no significant advancements in terms of development. Nevertheless, this societal awakening, coupled with widespread public discontent, catalyzed yet another shift in governance, leading to the replacement of the 'Panchayat' political system with a multiparty liberal democracy. The decline of the Panchayat system is notably aligned with the collapse of numerous regimes globally, which were overthrown during what is referred to as the Third Wave of Democratization (Huntington, 1993).

Following the political transformation, Nepal entered a third phase of development characterized by an emphasis on what are termed liberal values, necessitating the establishment of a market-oriented liberal economy. Consequently, the primary objective shifted towards the reconfiguration of government, the state, and societal structures. During this period, the state was urged to privatize public services, while society faced the challenge of navigating various transitions. The entire policymaking framework became dominated by donors and various multilateral and intergovernmental organizations as part of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). After that, the Nepali state experienced a loss of autonomy, extending beyond the domains of politics and policy formulation to encompass the legislative process as well.

The current situation has undermined the essence of the state, consequently dampening the enthusiasm of the populace for democracy and development, as noted by Bhatta (2017). The

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

tension between democracy and liberalism became so pronounced that people at large began scrutinizing fundamental notions of democracy and development. Individuals perceived the emergence of a rentier state (Bhatta, *ibid*), characterized by significant contradictions between the outcomes of market-oriented liberal economic policies and the constitutional mandates of the welfare state. The disparity between the two has contributed to the rise of Maoist insurgency within the nation, ultimately resulting in the overthrow of Nepal's 2,500-year-old monarchy and its associated institutions (Krishnamurti, 1966: pp. 1-9).

Fourthly, after the regime change in 2006, a new *modus vivendi* was established. The principles of inclusion and a rights-based approach (RBA), along with the active participation of people, emerged as fundamental elements of Nepal's developmental strategy. Federalism was introduced as a mechanism for decentralizing both political and economic authority. Nevertheless, it is important to note that neither political nor economic powers were genuinely decentralized in the true sense of the term.

Developmentalists have historically attributed societal issues solely to the structure of society itself. Instead of fostering support for societal improvement, their focus has shifted toward seeking retribution against the societal norms and values that have been passed down through generations. Conversely, donors, in collaboration with the state, intensify their efforts in social engineering, aiming to reshape societal structures and rights to align with market demands. A pertinent illustration of this phenomenon is the discourse surrounding constitution-making, where the inclusion of rights—particularly regarding gender—has been heavily influenced by market considerations (refer to Sripati 2024 for further details). The economic performance of the country has been inadequate, leading outbound labor migration to become a primary focus for political leaders, policymakers, and bureaucrats, all of whom have derived advantages from this trend. The past seventy years of developmental experience in Nepal have not been promising, as previously noted. The resurgence of geopolitical considerations has significantly transformed both the narrative surrounding development and the methods employed to achieve it. The current landscape of development is increasingly intertwined with geopolitical considerations. As a result, significant economic elements of development—including aid, trade, transit, transportation, and markets—have become intricately linked to geopolitical dynamics.

Decline of the State and Rise of Non-State Actors in Development

The deterioration of state authority and the rise of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are rooted in a conceptual framework that positions the former as emblematic of moral integrity while casting the state and its institutions as representations of malevolence. This perspective is further supported by recommendations from various experts, policymakers, and academics, who assert that states in the Global South lack the necessary capabilities to oversee developmental initiatives effectively. Poor governance and corruption have been recognized as significant challenges in this context. Notably, this situation illustrates that genuine development is contingent upon the involvement of Western 'experts' and their associated organizations. This (re)colonization of both individuals and states (Shrestha, 1997; Sripati, 2022; Sripati, 2024) has emerged through contemporary development practices, which have fostered a patron-

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

client dynamic. For these entities, it has been perceived as the responsibility of Western nations (Easterly, 2007) to facilitate the development of others—both the ideology of development and the process of modernization have predominantly originated from the West (Stacy, 1993). This narrative has been constructed to the extent that it has enabled Western donors to establish and mobilize their extended networks—namely, civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—within aid recipient nations.

In addition to executing developmental initiatives, these entities have played a significant role in shaping developmental trajectories. This situation has not only facilitated the proliferation of NGOs and CSOs but has also systematically undermined public trust in the state. Their so-called 'civilizing' mission has had profound implications for both the state and society. As states began to lose their Weberian legitimacy, civil society and NGOs found themselves in a strengthened position, increasingly influencing state policy formulation. This division has resulted in what scholars describe as 'divided sovereignty' (International Security, 2004, 85-120).

The role of the state has been significantly diminished, leading to a lack of sole autonomy in matters of development. Despite this, their actual contributions to meaningful development have been rather disappointing. Conversely, it has been observed that they are legitimizing their own interests. Many stakeholders possess their own visions for the development of others, which has further exacerbated the disparity between demand and supply. Additionally, their developmental initiatives are often intertwined with geopolitical aims, resulting in a symbiotic relationship between civil society organizations and geopolitical interests. A thorough analysis reveals an increasing reliance of states on donor support, a dependency of society on non-governmental organizations, and a growing need for individuals to look beyond their immediate environments for sustenance.

One might inquire about the genuine impact that development has had in this context. The NGO-oriented model of development has primarily served to commodify the process of development (Bhatta 2017). This commodification has resulted in a significant disparity between actual problems and those that are constructed or exaggerated. Concretely, real issues are often neglected while fictitious concerns take center stage. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the 'social engineering' initiative launched by donors and their affiliated organizations, framed as part of a civilizing mission, which does not accurately reflect the true issues at hand.

Nepal's developmental trajectory reveals that the nation has effectively served as a testing ground for various development theories and approaches, which have, as previously mentioned, contributed to a sense of subjugation and inferiority among its populace. This situation has led to a lack of self-trust and ambiguity regarding the community's developmental needs. Consequently, the narrative of development in Nepal does not align with the concept of development characterized by a capital 'D' or a lowercase 'd'. The former denotes intentional interventions in the development process, while the latter pertains to the results of such developmental initiatives (Lewis, 2019; Hart, 2009).

Geopolitics and Securitization of Development

For an extended period, Western nations viewed themselves as stewards of international development, actively influencing its theoretical frameworks and practical implementations (Power 2019). Recently, however, the situation has evolved differently. The traditional dominance of these countries is increasingly contested by the emergence of "new" state donors from the Global South, including nations such as China, Brazil, and India, as well as several West Asian countries. As these re-emerging powers from the Global South assume a more prominent role in international development, the implications for global politics have become evident. The rise of China (Ross 2008), where the ruling communist party has dismissed the notion that capitalism must be accompanied by democracy, has particularly shaken the confidence of the West and confidence in the West (ibid). The dynamics of development cooperation have shifted significantly, resulting in a reversal of the ontological hierarchy between Northern donors and Southern recipients (Power 2019). This shift has profoundly influenced methods, approaches, and trends within developmental partnerships. Heightened anxiety appears to permeate both factions, with fierce competition emerging among established powers and rising nations over who will occupy the leadership role on the global stage soon. Such rivalries have already manifested in conflicts across various regions. Additionally, the reclassification of the "Third World" as the Global South has emerged as a significant geopolitical concept, leading to a phenomenon known by scholars as the "securitization of development" alongside the "developmentalization of security" (Power, 2019). The events of September 11, 2001, have significantly influenced security policies, highlighting that underdevelopment in any region poses a threat to global stability (Power, 2019). In response to this security dilemma, Western donors have escalated their investments not only in software development but also in hardware development (Power, ibid).

Furthermore, they have created mechanisms to safeguard their interests. Unfortunately, in this framework, the United Nations has often been perceived as a tool for advancing specific agendas (Sripati, 2024), resulting in policies that, while intended to be universal, fail to serve all nations equitably. Numerous classic examples illustrate this phenomenon, although many people may disagree. These include structural adjustment programs, the concept of sustainable development goals, poverty reduction strategy programs (PRSPs), and the initiatives of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), among other market-oriented advocacy efforts (refer to Sripati, 2024 for further details). These initiatives operate alongside mechanisms promoting what is normally known as exporting capitalism through foreign policy (Kapstein, 2022). Beyond security concerns, Western nations perceived a potential threat of being marginalized in the global political and economic landscape due to the emergence of other powers. This line of thinking has effectively geopoliticized internal development cooperation, which has now become integral to foreign policy objectives. The ramifications of this "geopoliticization" of international cooperation and the law-making process are evident, as donor countries are increasingly formulating their own "country frameworks" and cultivating support within political parties, civil society, and the broader community. The emergence of the Global South has fundamentally contested the prevailing narratives that suggest development is solely a product of Northern donor influence. This

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

shift is fostering a discourse aimed at reconfiguring the global economic and political framework (Acharya 2007). Presently, nations within the Global South are establishing new multilateral institutions, with the development of BRICS serving as a significant illustration of this trend. Notably, China and India have assumed prominent roles within the Global South, emerging as leading investors in infrastructure development.

The emergence of Southern donors has significantly diminished the reliance of numerous underdeveloped and developing nations in the Global South on Northern financial assistance for their development needs. This shift has instigated a sense of insecurity among Northern donors, while Southern donors have seized the opportunity to assert their rightful roles in the realm of international politics. Nevertheless, the implications of this development have led to direct competition and confrontation between both Northern and Southern donors in various countries across the Global South. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in Nepal, where China and the United States have prominently showcased their competing interests. This rivalry has manifested visibly in the streets of Kathmandu, particularly in the context of the impending parliamentary approval of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) agreement. During a visit to Kathmandu in 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping employed stark rhetoric, issuing a warning that anyone seeking to "split" China would face severe repercussions, including threats of being "crushed" and having their bones shattered (Al Jazeera, 14 October 2019).

In addition to possessing institutional mechanisms, all major powers, whether established or (re)emerging, have developed their own geo-economic tools. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), spearheaded by China with its trillion-dollar investment strategy, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework introduced by the United States and its allies serve as prime examples. Each of these initiatives is designed to fulfill specific geopolitical aims and objectives. Notably, it is intriguing to observe that these frameworks actively promote developmental activities across various regions globally. For example, China aims to engage with the global community through its Global Development Initiative. In response, Western nations and their allies have formulated the Indo-Pacific strategy, alongside the US-led G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the European Union's Global Gateway. Although these initiatives overlap in several key areas, such as climate change, recovery from COVID-19, digital infrastructure, healthcare, and gender equality, the US initiative places greater emphasis on 'soft infrastructure,' whereas the EU's approach is more concentrated on physical infrastructure, particularly in the transportation sector (The White House 2022). Additionally, India is actively working to enhance its influence in South Asia and beyond by revitalizing previously stalled rail and road projects, including a significant connection from southern Nepal to its capital, Kathmandu.

The emergence of these powers has undoubtedly bolstered the confidence of numerous nations across Asia, Africa, and globally, which had previously been predominantly oriented toward the West for guidance in development and democratic practices. However, this rise also presents challenges for the smaller states in South Asia, complicating their efforts to maintain a strategic equilibrium in foreign relations. There are perspectives suggesting that,

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

on various occasions, the more powerful nations in the region and beyond may exploit smaller states as platforms to advance their own agendas. While such involvement can offer economic benefits, it simultaneously introduces significant geopolitical ramifications.

The geopolitical tensions in the Himalayan region and the Indian Ocean present a unique dilemma for smaller states. The competition among significant geopolitical players is evident in various forms, leading nations such as Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to grapple with alignment decisions. Nepal finds itself in a complex position, as it cannot overlook the long-standing partnership with the United States that has persisted for nearly seventy years, along with its Western allies. Conversely, it is equally imperative for Nepal to maintain close relations with its immediate neighbors, with whom it shares deep cultural and civilizational connections. While international support is essential for Nepal's development and job creation initiatives, the country must skillfully navigate the challenge of balancing the interests of its rapidly developing neighbors with those of its other international partners.

Discussion

The objective of this paper as mentioned in the beginning was to explore the interface between geopolitics and development. In this regard, the literature review and empirical evidence suggest that the intrinsic relationship between geopolitics and development has resulted in various challenges for states like Nepal. The new geopolitics, emerging in global politics, will introduce its own momentum in the development realm. Meanwhile, the old geopolitics, often referred to as geopolitics 1.0, has directed development towards fulfilling its own objectives. The contemporary geopolitical landscape, for its part, increasingly focuses on advancing essential technologies and geo-economics, both of which are set to stimulate fresh discussions regarding development paradigms. Moreover, unlike in the past, when the global financial architecture predominantly influenced economic frameworks, the forthcoming era appears to be dominated by the sovereign territories of technology enterprises (Cadwalladr, 2023). The Cold War era was characterized by a prevailing geopolitical framework centered on ideological competition. In contrast, the post-Cold War period witnessed the emergence of a new dominant logic that emphasizes 'liberal order' and 'geoeconomics,' accompanied by a selective approach to globalization. Although both logics are widely observed, they exhibit significant overlap in various aspects. A crucial element that has emerged is the geopolitical competition manifesting in domains such as science, innovation, data exchange, economic activities, technological advancement, and outer space, which were once primarily influenced by global market dynamics (Fagersten et al., 2023).

New geopolitical dynamics present both opportunities and challenges. Although critical technologies can create economic wealth, they simultaneously introduce risks to national security and individual privacy, a phenomenon known as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2018). Furthermore, some researchers argue that emerging technologies may exacerbate the digital divide, a situation they describe as 'tech feudalism' (Varoufakis, 2024). Moreover, the evolving geopolitical landscape, combined with advancements in technology, is compelling societies such as Nepal to shift from traditional lifestyles to more modern paradigms, driven by the pressures of a materialistic civilization characterized by substantial financial

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

resources and military capabilities. George Orwell wittily remarked that affluent nations possess everything they require; their vast resources can indeed procure civilization itself. In contrast, those with lesser material wealth often find their true riches lie in their cultural and civilizational values. Nevertheless, the imposition of a homogenizing 'civilizing standard' (Sripati, 2020) under the guise of development and modernization could prove detrimental for nations such as Nepal, as it threatens to erode their cultural and civilizational heritage (Bhatta, 2022).

During the Industrial Age, emphasis was placed on the manufacturing of tangible goods; however, in the post-industrial era, the predominant or 'hegemonic' mode of production has shifted away from physical items (Pinchbeck 2018). In contemporary developed societies, a significant portion of labor is now situated within the domain of 'immaterial production' (ibid). This encompasses the creation of concepts, memes, narratives, visuals, financial instruments, and social technologies that influence how individuals establish both commercial and personal connections (ibid). This represents a substantial shift, with emerging geopolitical dynamics increasingly centered on these matters (ibid). In this context, the evolving geopolitical landscape is also reshaping the processes of capital formation. For instance, the largest taxi service globally, Uber, does not possess any vehicles, just as the leading accommodation provider, Airbnb, does not own any hotels (ibid). Nevertheless, these enterprises have successfully established their own networks and exert control over capital.

As the new global economic order takes shape, forecasting the trajectory of 'development' becomes increasingly complex, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for governments, communities, and individuals alike. Development encompasses both geopolitics and politics, and policies are shaped accordingly. However, the developmental policies implemented by Nepal to date have resulted in economic impoverishment, social instability, ecological degradation, and increased geopolitical vulnerability.

Conclusion

With the resurgence of geopolitics, the discussion on development has significantly changed. Many scholars contend that the current discourse on development is largely 'geopolitically oriented' because it neither addresses real developmental challenges nor creates economic opportunities. In contrast, the focus is on maintaining dominance over others, employing various methods such as sam, dam, dandha, and bheda. If it had been a secular approach, there would have been a delicate balance between economic and political factors, individual and collective interests, as well as national and global concerns. In fact, the merging of geoeconomics and geopolitics could lead to additional challenges for countries like Nepal.

While analyzing over seventy years of development, it is clear that the country has made significant achievements in various areas. However, this period has also led to a dependency trap for Nepal in multiple ways. In this regard, economic dependency in particular has caused the erosion of people's confidence in their own state and society. Nepal's journey with development does not necessarily yield positive results in this respect. On the contrary,

Development for Geopolitics and Geopolitics Through Development

it has created grounds for broader geopolitical influence in one way or another, and its continuation may become dangerous if not fatal. The current developmental model seeks to dominate everything, including Mother Earth—Basudha—which aims to control, as they say, the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all other living creatures on land. While this model may assist in the process of capital formation, it is ultimately unsustainable for future generations. There is a strong need to find a balance between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, which can only occur when we change the current economic model, in which capital is primarily used to generate more capital rather than to create employment opportunities.

When countries become dependent, they often find themselves trapped in geopolitical and geo-economic dilemmas. This means they struggle to make independent decisions regarding politics, policies, and the law-making process, as previously explained. This situation represents a significant tragedy for any nation. As Shookra states, "Great misery comes from dependence on others." "There is no greater happiness than that which comes from self-rule." The resurgence of geopolitics has pushed both established and emerging powers to adapt their international cooperation mechanisms to align with their foreign policy agendas. A classic example of this is the merger of the International Cooperation Department with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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