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# The Evolution of Nepal's Foreign Policy in a Dynamic Political Landscape

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## Abstract

*Foreign policy is a vital part of national policy. Foreign policy is the cornerstone of any sovereign country's foreign relations. The foreign policy of Nepal has been implemented in the same manner despite the changing circumstances in the country. The current constitution with an updated structure has come into force. In addition to the design of the constitution, Nepal's governance system has also been altered. Even in the changing context, Nepal has continued its old foreign policy. A country's foreign policy also plays an important role in its development. Nepal's foreign policy has always been guided by its primary interests. Research should be conducted to determine why the situation could not be changed. Nepal's foreign policy is based on its initial interests. During this study, the effect of foreign policy with primary and secondary interests on the development of the country as well as the current foreign policy of Nepal have been examined. In this study, only secondary data is used, and it is qualitative in nature. Data and facts derived from secondary sources were gathered from the library and related literature reviews. To conclude, the data is interpreted and analyzed in the context of Nepal's foreign policy considering the changing political situation.*

**Keywords:** Federal, Foreign policy, National interest, Politics, Unitary.

## Introduction

Following a long experience with a unitary system, Nepal has adopted a federal system. As a result of the change in the form of government, many policies have also changed. The changing situation has also affected the foreign policy from the internal policy of the country. Clause 4 of Article 50 of the Constitution of Nepal mentions that foreign policy shall be decided based on the national interests of Nepal. Article 5 of the Constitution directs that the national interests of Nepal shall be based on primary interests. Nepal has adopted its traditional foreign policy. Its history is tied to a yam between two stones of *Divyodeśa*. Since the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nepal has adopted a non-aligned foreign policy. This has been continuous since the Panchayat period.

At present, the Shah Dynasty has left Nepal and a republican system has been implemented with a federal system. During the implementation of the new governing system, the new constitution implemented in Nepal has addressed many issues including the restructuring of the state. In this context, there was no in-depth discussion about how Nepal's foreign policy would be practiced in the new stage. Since foreign policy also has different dimensions, the issue of what theoretical basis Nepal's foreign policy will be decided in the new environment did not get central importance. Due to the focus of the country on the restructuring of the state, it is seen that the fundamental foreign policy has been continued since the unification period. In this article, an attempt has been made to study the foundations of the foreign policy of Nepal, how the foreign policy has been decided, and how many theoretical foundations have been mentioned in the foreign policy mentioned in the new constitution.

A serious issue like foreign policy should become a subject of intensive discussion in Nepal's new environment and it is also an important responsibility for people in terms of country building. A new constitution was inaugurated for the development of all regions and communities, and the need for restructuring of the state was pointed out. Along with the changing political developments of Nepal, due to the changing international events, there may be changes in some policy matters of the country. In that regard, due to the new times and changing political phases, it becomes natural to search for the necessary analysis of foreign policy.

The foundation of the foreign of Nepal is non-aligned. There has been no change in the essence of Nepal's foreign policy from the time of Prithivi Narayan Shah to the adoption of a non-aligned policy. It was completely assimilated by the Panchayati system which was also applied during the period of restoration of democracy. After the collapse of the democracy of the constitutional monarchy, Nepal has entered the era of a social republic. During the period of restructuring of the state or the period of constitution-making of the Federal Republic of Nepal, the question of whether to advance the foreign policy of Nepal from the state of primary interest-based foreign policy did not become a matter of general interest in the then Constituent Assembly or among the common citizens. There is a need for discussion about this. In this article, the foreign policy of Nepal and the dimensions of foreign policy studied is in the central part.

The foreign policy of Nepal has been in a very critical situation since its inception. In a new environment, a foreign policy change should be necessary, but the usual policy has been implemented. Such kinds of research are necessary in changing phases. This research has been done with this objective in mind. The study's main research question is the implementation of the foreign policy of Nepal in a changing place. There are some research questions in the study which are: What kind of foreign policy has been adopted in Nepal? What kind of influence does foreign policy have within the country?

## **Methodology**

Foreign policy also plays an important role in the development of any country. Even in the changing context of Nepal, the previous foreign policy has been continued. Research has focused on Nepal's foreign policy and analyzed its historical basis. The research is structured in a descriptive design and completed. The study depends on a theoretical approach. Only secondary data has been used in the research. Descriptive and analytical methods are applied in research. Based on the theoretical review of the foreign policy of Nepal, different information is used in the library. In the appropriate circumstances, identification, dependent variables, and other methodological components are consulted.

### **Foreign Policy**

'Foreign policy is considered a complex subject of international studies. Foreign policy develops gradually in mutual relations and interests of sovereign countries. It is a form of gradual development because of the transitional situation and the national interest, this subject becomes difficult to study in itself', (Palmer and Perkins, 2000). Any sovereign country's internal political, and regional reasons and some international events can also affect foreign policy. 'Foreign policy is a part of the state's policy and principles, which works to integrate the national interests of its state with other countries in inter-state relations. Foreign policy is a system that emerges from community-created activities. Those who try to change the behavior of other countries and the international community to suit their national interests,' (Kumar, 1995). Foreign policy can be successful only when the sovereign nation is awakened from the feelings of the people whose backbone is stuck in the national politics of the country.

In international studies, foreign policy is considered part of state policy. Foreign policy is also divided into different parts based on national ideology and political activities. 'The basis of classification is the effectiveness of foreign policy. Such categories include foreign policies of primary and intermediate nature. Foreign policy based on primary interest is based only on saving and saving the nation, while intermediate foreign policy refers to foreign policy based on the security and interests of citizens outside the country in addition to the citizens inside the country. Apart from this division, there is also a foreign policy of a static and foreign nature. In such a foreign policy, the specific goal of the nation and the influence of national interests on other countries and the influence of national interests on the international community remain,' (Lohani & Thapa, 1996). The foreign policy of the United States and the then Soviet Union can be placed in this type of foreign policy. The influence of foreign policy also shows how strong the internal situation of the country is.

After assessing the immediate situation of the unification of Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah's policy of 'Yam between two stones' was necessary for that time. Due to the two friendly countries of Nepal, this policy has also been reconciled with the politicians involved. The foreign policy of Nepal is based on a non-alignment policy, but a non-alignment policy is not a policy outside of primary interest. The non-alignment policy and the 'Yam between two stones' policy are not different in terms of interest. The purpose of foreign policy of this nature is only to protect the national existence. If the purpose of making the country competent and powerful is to remain in the context of Nepal's

construction, then it is necessary to discuss the foreign policy of Nepal. In Nepal, it is relevant to interpret and analyze the matter of whether to continue the primary level of foreign policy or to change the nature of foreign policy. The foreign policy of Nepal has been continuous since the time of *Divyodeśa*. It always advocates the defense of national independence and national integrity. This type of foreign policy cannot aim to influence the specific goals and national interests of the nation in other countries and the international community.

### **Foreign Policy of Nepal and its Formulation**

‘The foundation of the foreign policy of Nepal is found to be based on the *Divyodeśa* of Prithvi Narayan Shah. The shape of the foreign policy of Nepal has been prepared based on geography in the historical background. At that time, the statement of Shri 5 Prithvi Narayan Shah, the creator of the united Nepal nation, that Nepal, ‘from now on, this kingdom like a yam between two stones’ (Pant, 2059) was the main principle in the formulation of the national policy of the unitary system. That topic is considered as the first official statement regarding the foreign policy of Nepal. Nepal has changed a lot politically. Nepal has been determining its foreign policy based on the main principle in national policy formulation of a unitary governance system even before the country arrived during the republic. Even today, this belief can become a subject of controversy in the matter of building the form of government or in the construction of the form of government. This topic became a topic of discussion during the change of government in Nepal. The oracle of Prithvi Narayan Shah has played a very important role in the development of Nepal in the issue of taking the country to a unitary government or a federal government. During the state restructuring period, these subjects were seen as debated.

From the time of the unification of Nepal in the unitary system of Nepal to the time of the establishment of the republic, the foreign policy of Nepal has been determined based on tradition. The effectiveness of institutions at the level of policy-making of foreign policy was weak. It is an important issue in the state where its policies are made. In the panchayat system, the basis of the system of unitary governance and the basis of policymaking were in the same position. Since the time of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, that role had been performed by the *Rāja Sanstha*. Even after the end of the monarchy, the foreign policy of Nepal is still operating on the same historical basis. Whether it is an interim constitution or a democratic republic constitution, the basis of the foreign policy of Nepal has been determined on a historical and geographical basis.

The grounds of the foreign policy of Nepal are the historical concept of a ‘yam between two stones’. The foreign policy of Nepal has been determined on this basis. The two big neighboring countries are allies and Nepal's relationship with India has always had a place because of its centuries-old relationship and complicated geographical boundaries. ‘The main reason for this is to maintain a balanced relationship with both big neighboring friendly countries. Even in some difficult situations in the relationship with the East India Company government and China at that time, the policy questioned by Nepal has confirmed its historical relevance’, (Khanal, 1998).

‘Nepal also participated in the historic Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations (1955). To participate in this conference, Nepal has accepted the principle of *Pañcaśīla*. The first principle includes the principle of non-aggression, the second is non-aggression, the third is respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the fourth is acceptance of co-existence and the fifth principle is mutual interest. The historic Bandung conference has two important implications for the foreign policy of Nepal. First, Nepal accepted the principle of *Pañcaśīla*, and secondly, diplomatic relations were established between Nepal and China based on *Pañcaśīla*,’ (Verma, 1981). During the speech of the late King Mahendra at the historic Belgrade conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1971, Foreign policy of Nepal and foreign relations, assimilating the Non-Aligned Movement, establishing relations based on the policy principles of the Non-Aligned Movement during other international events, and Nepal always working hand in hand with other emerging countries and the economic development of that country. He raised the matter of assisting in the efforts to be made. This provision is consistent with the 1964 Geneva Convention on Development and Trade. It seems that the powerful nations decide their foreign policy based on the interests of the nation and the people. Going ahead of the foreign policy on elementary interest and giving the highest priority to the sovereign country and race, such countries are trying to show themselves as the best through foreign policy.

‘Even if the American nation is called as the supreme country by Trump, the Chinese nation or Prime Minister Modi in India also called their country the number one country. The reason for saying that is that they want to bring the building of nationalism and self-respect to the people. Their national interest is the highest. However, the foreign policy was prepared when Nepal became sovereign. It is not a policy that was prepared according to the will of the people,’ (Pande, 2017). ‘The foreign policy of Nepal has been practiced since the 1990s when democracy was achieved. That movement achieved two achievements in Nepal: the achievement of democracy and the use of foreign policy with people's participation. Because of this, an opportunity was created for common citizens to understand and participate in international events,’ (Verma, 1981). Foreign policy is always interpreted as the history of the country. It is also interpreted about the geography and culture of that country. Even after the establishment of democracy in Nepal, foreign policy does not seem to have become a matter of general interest.

The role of the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the only role in the foreign policy-making of Nepal. In this context, there has been no development of the practice of exposing the building and interest of the common citizens in the policy-making of the country and preparing the policy based on this. After the restoration of democracy, Nepal has been able to see very good examples of political changes and economic and social transformations at the international level. In the same way, it is necessary to examine foreign policy and adopt and implement it systematically, but governments have not succeeded in implementing foreign policy in the changed situation based on international norms.

When evaluating the political system after the People's Movement 2062/63 in Nepal, it is found that the national sentiment has been exposed on the issue of institutionalizing democracy. The main goal of the Maoist uprising was the end of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic. The republic established by the movement has yet to be institutionalized. In the Republic of Nepal, the foundations of foreign policy and a clear outline of the state's goals should be prepared. It was necessary to pay attention to the policy and directive principles of the state at the time of the historic responsibility of restructuring the state and determining the form of government. During the restructuring of the state, it was the best time to discuss and revise the foreign policy. Because that was the time when the monarchy was removed and federalism was implemented along with the republic, but the country was left with a foreign policy based on tradition way, that was a situation where a great opportunity was lost. Due to the importance given to nationalism in Nepal, it should not be discussed.

Nationality and nationalism are considered important in the present era. Nationality is seen as a powerful element for a sovereign nation. Especially in eastern countries, the feeling of nationalism is given more priority. Asian countries that have become independent, including the third world countries that are becoming victims of neo-colonialism and imperialism, such countries interpret nationality more for their survival and freedom. South Asian country Nepal is also ranked as an underdeveloped country on the world map. A country like Nepal, standing in the ranks of poor and weak countries, cannot move forward with the policy of vital interest decided during the unification period forever. Being landlocked, it is difficult for a country like Nepal to move forward by fully following international values and norms. For this reason, it is necessary for Nepal to always accept its stable principles for nationalism and independence.

The Non-Aligned Movement played an important role in the changing international environment after the Second World War, especially after 1945. The significance and justification of the non-aligned movement in the then world map, which was divided into two poles, has decreased in political terms in today's world map. Especially after 1990, even though the political justification of the Non-Aligned Movement is less, it is not considered to be practically justified for underdeveloped and poor countries. On the other hand, about Nepal, even today, Nepal's heads of government and heads of state have been accepting the justification and relevance of the Non-Alignment Movement during their speeches at the summits.

Regarding regional cooperation, Nepal has maintained the recognition of humanitarian cooperation. Nepal is seen in the policy of humanitarian cooperation and brotherhood at the regional level. When the spirit of regional cooperation developed in the countries of South Asia, Nepal has been playing a supportive role since the beginning. In recognition of regional cooperation developed in the countries of South Asia, the incident of atomic testing by India has left a negative impression on this feeling, while at the same time, Pakistan's activities of the same nature have harmed regional cooperation and peace in South Asia.

Among the South Asian countries, countries like India and Pakistan are countries that are governed by foreign policy based on intermediate (variable) interests. That kind of foreign policy wants to spread its national interests to other countries or the international environment. On the other hand, the foreign policy of weak countries including Nepal is based on vital interests. This type of foreign policy only aims to save the nation and regional integrity. Different natures in this environment and questions can also be raised about the purpose and justification of cooperative organizations established based on regional cooperation in the targeted countries. After the differences in the policy interests of countries with a foreign policy based on primary interest and intermediate interest, a single objective cannot be achieved in a collaborative spirit.

The competition between India and Pakistan regarding weapons has added a challenge to the regional peace and security of the South Asian countries. In this situation, the regional peace carried by Nepal and the principle of peace zone Nepal should also be analyzed pragmatically.

It can be said that the role played by King Birendra in regional peace and stability was commendable. He addressed the regional conference by emphasizing the need to maintain peace at the regional level, and on this basis, he addressed the proposal of Nepal's peace zone at the Colombo conference in 1976,' (Verma, 1981), but the public opinion of Nepal on this matter could not be implemented in its domestic behavior.

Nepal's proposal for regional peace and a peace zone was overshadowed by the assassination of King Birendra. With the assassination of Birendra, there was a big stir in Nepal's internal politics. As a result of the same incident, the monarchy of Nepal came to an end. After the formal end of the monarchy in Nepal, such important issues that have a positive and far-reaching impact on Nepal have been overshadowed and none of the leading classes are concerned about such national interests. In the current political relationship, it has become mandatory for the neighboring countries to immediately review their foreign policy. Our foreign policy is being pushed back due to the ignorance of the national interest in the leadership class. The vested interest in political leadership has influenced the internal and foreign policy of the entire country.

Late King Mahendra also played an important role in the foreign policy of Nepal. King Mahendra had contributed to Nepal becoming a member of the United Nations with the commitment to fully follow the non-aligned foreign policy. Ever since Nepal became a member of the United Nations, it has been playing an important role in international peace and security. To the north and south of Nepal are the big and powerful countries China and India. In terms of foreign policy and foreign relations, these countries are becoming established as powerful countries. These countries want to spread their influence in the international community as a member of a good international community, not through the medium of war', (Verma, 1981). Due to this type of policy of the neighboring friendly countries, it is difficult for Nepal to maintain its balanced policy in some cases.

Despite the values and beliefs of Nepal's good relations with neighboring countries, there are times when we must try again to maintain good relations. Nepal India Trade and Transit Agreement, border issues, and some other important bilateral issues are becoming sensitive issues. Behind the new political changes in Nepal, there have been political analyses of whether the recent events have led to a new definition of Nepal-India relations and Nepal-China relations. In this current context, one can get the impression that the foreign policy of Nepal is looking for a new definition.

China is expressing that there is mutual freedom in China-Nepal relations, India-Nepal relations, and China-India relations. However, the blurring of the relationship between India and China is reflected in the behavior of neighboring friendly countries, both north and south, that are sensitive to the issue of Nepal having independent relations with India or China. China-India relations have always been sensitive for Nepal. India has always felt uneasy about the growing relationship between Nepal and China', (Verma, 1981). Due to being landlocked, it is not easy for Nepal to expand its relations with third countries. In this environment, Nepal must expand its diplomatic and political relations with other countries in a democratic and political capacity. Economic, social, and political direction should be ensured in Nepal's relationship with third countries.

'The late King Birendra, while addressing the 20th session of the National Panchayat, mentioned that Nepal would continue the non-aligned policy adopted by Nepal', (Bajracharya, 1993) but the definition of the power center of the world has also changed in the world map after 1990. While the influence of a polar power center in the United States has spread around the world, competition from new power centers is also taking place. These kinds of developments on the international stage also affect Nepal. Due to the great changes in the domestic politics of Nepal and the changing political environment of the world, there is a need for a new dimension to the Panchayat-era foreign policy in Nepal. The relationship of fraternity and friendship that Nepal has accepted since history can be brought to newness if it is analyzed in detail at present. It was announced that this recognition will be maintained in the Panchayati system. Even after the restoration of democracy, Nepal continued this policy, while the foreign policy of Nepal continued to be based on primary interest until it reached the republican era.

In the constitution of Nepal, it has been mentioned that the foreign policy of Nepal is based on national interest. The national interest of Nepal is based on the policy of brotherhood based on non-alignment, (Article 5). The policy of non-alignment is the basis of national security and economic and social development, while the basis of non-aligned foreign policy is the policy as the primary interest of foreign policy. It simply accepts the principle of live and let live. This type of policy cannot increase its influence at the international level as in foreign policy based on intermediate interests.

## **Conclusion**

The traditional and panchayat-era foreign policy of Nepal underwent significant shifts following the transition from monarchy to republic and the establishment of a federal



system. While traces of the king's foreign policy persisted after the removal of the king's recognition system, public interest in foreign policy remained limited. As the effectiveness of a nation's foreign policy plays a pivotal role in determining its global standing, it is crucial to examine Nepal's role in international organizations and the regional context. The changing dynamics brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the assertiveness of the United States, the rivalry between India and China, the arms race between India and Pakistan, and Nepal's shift to a federal republic have reshaped the foreign policy landscape. Given these transformations, there arises a need to transition Nepal's foreign policy from one predominantly based on primary national interests to a secondary approach that accommodates the evolving geopolitical environment.

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