

**UCL**

Université  
catholique  
de Louvain

Faculté des sciences économiques, sociales, politiques et de communication  
Ecole des Sciences Politiques et Sociales

## **Great Power Politics and Nepal**

Dissertation written by

**Andrej Osterman**

Mentor

**Tanguy Struye De Swielande**

Academic year 2020-2021

**Master et finalité**



Université catholique de Louvain

## ECOLE DES SCIENCES POLITIQUES ET SOCIALES

### Code de déontologie

Je déclare sur l'honneur que ce TFE a été écrit de ma plume, sans avoir sollicité d'aide extérieure illicite, qu'il n'est pas la reprise d'un travail présenté dans une autre institution pour évaluation, et qu'il n'a jamais été publié, en tout ou en partie. Toutes les informations (idées, phrases, graphes, cartes, tableaux...) empruntées ou faisant référence à des sources primaires ou secondaires sont référencées adéquatement selon la méthode universitaire en vigueur.

Je déclare avoir pris connaissance et adhérer au Code de déontologie pour les étudiants en matière d'emprunts, de citations et d'exploitation de sources diverses et savoir que le plagiat constitue une faute grave.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'A' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

OSTERMAN Andrej, 15 août 2021

## Contents

Introduction.....	4
Theories and Concepts.....	6
Buffer States .....	6
Offensive Realism and Great Power Politics .....	7
Spykman’s Rimland .....	8
Geography, Nepal’s Curse .....	10
Nepal and China.....	13
Nepal and India.....	18
Nepal and the USA .....	23
Climate Change and Security Risks for Nepal.....	25
Conclusions.....	29
Annex 1: Comparison of Principal Actors.....	33
Annex 2: Interview – Changing Tibet.....	36
Annex 3: Conversation with Mr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa on China .....	44
Annex 4: Interview with Mr Christophe Hodder – Effects of Climate Change on Nepal’s Security.....	45
Bibliography.....	47

## Introduction

*“Yam between two boulders”*.<sup>1</sup>

Prithvi Narayan Shah<sup>2</sup>

Nepal is a landlocked country, squeezed between two powers, China in the north and India in the west, south and east. While in the north the Himalayas with its eternal snow offer only limited possibilities for trade routes, the western, southern and eastern borders represent Nepal’s window into the world.

From its creation until today, *“Nepal’s geographical position between the two potentially rival big powers has proved to be the greatest constraint to its independent foreign and economic policy”*.<sup>3</sup>

Nepal is deeply connected to India through geography, history and tradition and consequently heavily dependent on it economically, politically and militarily. While perusing its foreign policy goals<sup>4</sup>, it recently turned towards China, or better, China increased its engagement with Nepal. This approach became more pronounced after a succession of events which started with the Nepal’s new Constitution adopted in 2015, India’s 2015/2016 border blockade, which crippled even more the earthquake stroke Nepal, followed by the 2017 parliamentary elections, the first after 1999. The elections concluded Nepal’s democratic transition.

*“A closer relationship with China rules the average Nepali mindset as an existential lifeline, for which no price appears to be too expensive, at least at the moment. But Nepal is equally sensitive to the fact that she cannot afford to jeopardize relations with India. It is a delicate balancing act the country is out to play”*.<sup>5</sup> Emboldened by the end of the democratic transition, Nepal wants to widen its possibilities for economic development and trade, and looks for opportunities beyond the traditional Indian dependence.

India and the USA, the offshore balancer, are afraid that Nepal will come under the Chinese sphere of influence like many other Asian countries. A succession of events, high-level visits

---

<sup>1</sup> (Rishi Adhikari, 2013, p. 11)

<sup>2</sup> 18th century king, the creator of modern Nepal.

<sup>3</sup> (Rishi Adhikari, 2013, p. 10)

<sup>4</sup> <https://mofa.gov.np/foreign-policy>: “to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal”.

<sup>5</sup> <https://thediomat.com/2019/10/nepal-between-china-and-india>

and agreements since 2015 show an increased interest in Nepal from the three main powers, which are shaping its destiny.

How does the competition among the great powers in the anarchic world, with the decentralised distribution of power in the international system, reflect on Nepal? If the “actors have to rely on self-help to defend themselves”<sup>6</sup>, how can Nepal, located in the “shatterbelt”<sup>7</sup> and one of the poorest countries in the world, defend itself? Can Nepal’s balancing between India, China and the USA be successful, or will it be swirled into a game of great power politics? How can this strategy play-out on the long term?

I will look into these questions through the prism of the three theories: the buffer state theory, the offensive realism theory as defined by John J. Mearsheimer in his book “*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*” and through the prism of the Rimland theory as defined by Nicholas John Spykman in his book “*The Geography of the Peace*”.

In the first part of the paper, I will define the theories and the concept of climate-related security risks.

In the continuation of the paper, I will clarify the importance of Nepal’s geographical location and what it means for Nepal, and analyse the most important events, which shaped its relations with the three powers.

In the last part of the paper, I will try to answer the above questions and present my observations. My main assumption is that on the long run, Nepal will be swirled into the great power politics, which will have negative impact on Nepal economically, politically and socially. The climate change can only add to these insecurities.

*Key words: offensive realism, Rimland, buffer state, climate change*

---

<sup>6</sup> (Nau, 2015, p. 37)

<sup>7</sup> “a large, strategically located region that is occupied by a number of conflicting states and is caught between the conflicting interests of adjoining Great Powers” (Swielande T. S., *China’s Objective 2049: From Rimland to “World-Island”?*, 2015, p. 1)

## Theories and Concepts

Theories or perspectives, as Nau calls them (Nau, 2015, p. 5), of international relations help us understand and explain past events. The theories used herein will be used to understand and explain the events which happened in Nepal as of 2015 and which affected Nepal's internal and foreign policy.

### Buffer States

A classical definition describes a buffer state as *"a small political or administrative unit located between and separating two larger opposing powers"* (John Chay, 2018). However, this definition can be further expanded to better understand the characteristics of the components of the buffer system and the relationships within it.

The two opposing powers and the buffer state constitute a buffer system. The location or the proximity of the three is one of the most important characteristics of the system. While the classical definition implies that the buffer state is located between two larger opposing powers and all three are contiguous, Ross *"suggests that this location need not necessarily be contiguous"*. He gives South Africa as an example<sup>8</sup>. This is very important for the understanding of the Nepal/USA relations.

The purpose of the buffer state is to separate two opposing powers with conflicting national interests (conflicting security, ideological, cultural, racial or economic interests). The buffer state is less powerful in terms of political, economic and military power than the opposing powers. *"The smaller and weaker states, whether one or more, incapable themselves of determining the outcome of the rivalry between their powerful neighbours, act to preserve their own security by refusing to enter into alliance with either of the larger rival powers which may or may not also be members of more encompassing rival alliances"* (John Chay, 2018). Another important feature of the buffer state which can help determine the buffer system is sovereignty and its commitment to national autonomy and independence.

---

<sup>8</sup> *"In its efforts to mitigate the threat of this non-state regional rival [black nationalism, rooted in South Africa, but also supported externally in the region] South Africa has acted in many ways similar to a state faced with powerful rival state by moving to prevent any neighbouring state from close alliance with its declared opponent [black nationalism]. Although South Africa's neighbouring black-ruled states have limited manoeuvrability by virtue of their weakness and the lack of a strong proximate black-ruled state to rival South Africa, they have attempted to keep their distance from South Africa. In so doing they have shown behaviour similar to that of some buffer states elsewhere geographically caught between two proximate larger state rivals... The South African buffer system is unique in its two-tiered nature [having created buffer zones inside South Africa and in the region] and in the geographical location of its components"* (John Chay, 2018).

The opposing powers have a relative power parity between them. This relative power parity defines the stability of the system: *“The greater the relative power disparity between the small buffer state and the two larger powers, and the greater the degree of power parity between the larger powers, the stronger will be the buffer effect and the greater will be the stability of the buffer system”* (John Chay, 2018). If one of the opposing powers becomes more powerful than the other, the system becomes unstable, and the buffer state can be pulled into other’s sphere of influence.

## Offensive Realism and Great Power Politics

According to John J. Mearsheimer, the structure of the international system is in large part responsible for how states behave. He builds his theory, the offensive realism, based on five assumptions.

The first assumption is that the inherent characteristic of the international system is anarchy. This means that there is no higher authority to which a state could turn for help; there is no *“government over governments”* (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 30).

The second assumption is that great powers possess some offensive military capability, allowing them to attack and destroy each other.

The third assumption is that the states which comprise the international system do not know each other’s intentions. This is a so-called security dilemma which *“results from the fact that, as each group or state amasses power to protect itself, it inevitably threatens other groups or states”* (Nau, 2015, p. 41). The states do not know for sure if somebody else’s offensive military capability will not be used against them. They fear each other and anticipate danger. States in such a system rely on self-help *“and almost always act according to their own self-interest and do not subordinate their interests to the interests of other states, or to the interests of the so-called international community”* (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 33).

The fourth assumption is that survival is a primary goal of great powers. The best way for a state to survive and feel secure is to maximise its relative power and to be the most powerful state in the system. The goal of big powers is to become regional hegemons. Furthermore, states want to make sure that no other state becomes a regional hegemon. This is important because a regional hegemon is free to roam around the globe with the military power.

The fifth and last assumption is that great powers are rational actors. They think strategically about the system and their position in it.

Briefly, Mearsheimer assumes that *“the principle motive behind great-power behaviour is survival... the structure of the international system, not the particular characteristics of individual great powers, causes them to think and act offensively and to seek hegemony”* (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 53, 54).

The table below illustrates and compares the major realist theories (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 22).

	<b>Human Nature Realism</b>	<b>Defensive Realism</b>	<b>Offensive Realism</b>
<b>What causes states to compete for power?</b>	<i>Lust for power inherent in states</i>	<i>Structure of the system</i>	<i>Structure of the system</i>
<b>How much power do states want?</b>	<i>All they can get. States maximise relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.</i>	<i>Not much more than what they have. States concentrate on maintaining the balance of power.</i>	<i>All they can get. States maximise relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.</i>

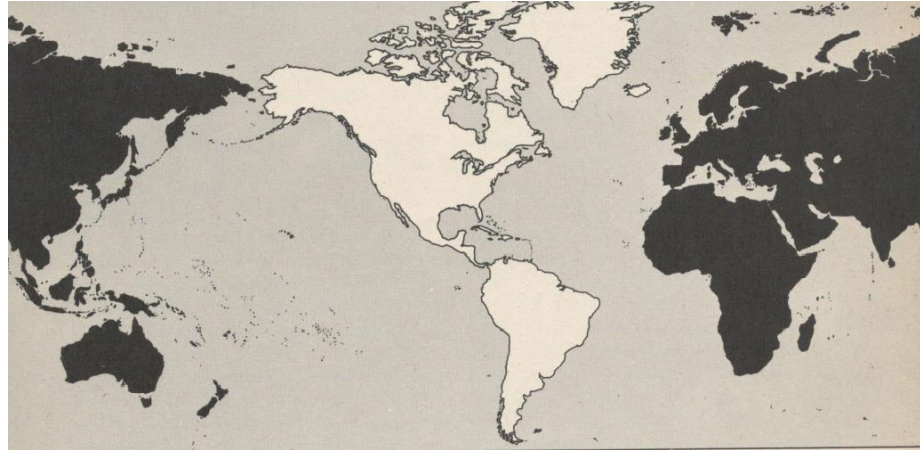
Now, the USA is the only regional hegemon. It has no competition in the Western Hemisphere and is free to roam into others’ neighbourhoods. It faces two threats, Russia and China; the latter being the USA’s greatest concern.

### Spykman’s Rimland

Nicholas John Spykman wrote that the following factors determine the position of a state in the international relations: (a) geographical position, (b) size, (c) topography and (d) natural resources. However, it is the geographical position which *“conditions and influences all other factors for the reason that world location determines the climatic zone and thereby the economic structure, and regional location defines potential enemies and allies and perhaps*

*even the limits of a state's role as a participant in a system of collective security*" (Spykman, 1944, pp. 22-23).

He positioned the Western Hemisphere in the centre of the map and concluded that the *"position of the United States in relation to the rest of the world can best be described as encirclement"* (Spykman, 1944, p. 19).



9

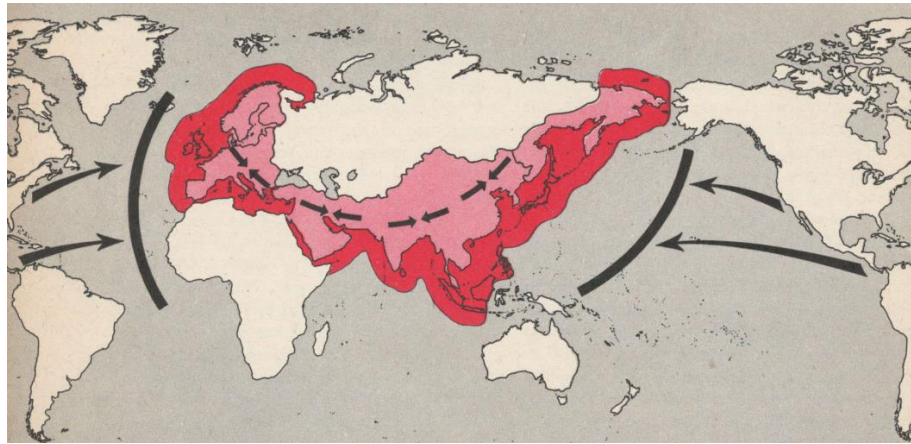
The USA is encircled by Asia and Australia on one side, and Europe and Africa on the other. These areas are greater than the New World in terms of the size of the territory, population and the natural resources. Spykman argued that the *"safety and independence of this country [the USA] can be preserved only by a foreign policy that will make it impossible for the Eurasian land mass to harbour an overwhelmingly dominant power in Europe and the Far East"* (Spykman, 1944, pp. 59-60).

Unlike Mackinder who believed that the Heartland defines the destiny of the world, Spykman believed that it is the *"demographic giants"* Europe, Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, China and Japan, together called the Rimland, which are *"the key to the world power... because in addition to dominating Eurasia, the maritime-orientated Rimland was central to contact with the outside world"* (Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (Kindle Version), 2012).

The power struggles took place in the Rimland and against the Rimland powers: *"in the three great world wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, and the Second World War, the British and Russian empires have lined up together against an intervening Rimland power as led by Napoleon, Wilhelm II, and Hitler"* (Spykman, 1944, pp. 43, 44).

---

<sup>9</sup> Source: (Spykman, 1944, p. 33)



Mearsheimer also maintains that the USA took part in both world wars for the same reasons, when Wilhelmine and Nazi Germanies and the Imperial Japan threatened to dominate the regions of the Rimland.

While Mackinder argued that whoever controls the Heartland, will control the World Island (Eurasia and Africa) and thus the world, Spykman claimed that whoever controls the Rimland will control Eurasia and thus the World Island. Or, as Swielande: *“The control of the Rimland and the seas by a maritime power doesn’t necessarily mean that the Heartland will be under its control, but it unequivocally underlines the impossibility of world domination through the latter”* (Swielande T. S., *China’s Objective 2049: From Rimland to “World-Island”?*, 2015).

## Geography, Nepal’s Curse

The foundations of Nepal’s foreign policy are spelled in its Constitution:

- *“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.*

---

<sup>10</sup> Source: (Spykman, 1944, p. 52)

- *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”<sup>11</sup>.*

The words like *freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and dignity* echo in Nepal’s foundations of foreign policy, as if it is difficult for it to maintain these basic values common to so many states. In the context of its geographical location this is indeed difficult for Nepal.

If the USA is “*the most favoured state in the world from the point of view of location*”, according to Spykman (Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (Kindle Version), 2012), then Nepal’s location is its curse. Geography is a permanent and an obvious element conditioning Nepal’s foreign policy. This was clear to the founding father of the modern Nepal, Pritvi Narayan Shah, and the modern Nepali pandits. There are other elements, temporary and hidden, which also condition its foreign policy, but the former is the subject of this paper. Nepal’s location is equally important through the prism of all three theories presented above.

In the regional context, Nepal must consider China and India, while in the global context it must also consider the USA, the offshore balancer, when defining its foreign policy.

Firstly, Nepal is a buffer state. It lies between India and China, two opposing regional powers. China is on the way to become a global power, challenging currently the only truly global power, the USA. Even thou the latter is not contiguous to Nepal, [it can be considered as a part of the buffer system](#). Nepal is much smaller in terms of political, economic and military power than the three opposing powers which it separates, India, China and the USA. Its “*raison d’être*” in the context of the buffer system is to separate the three opposing powers with the conflicting security interests. None of them has an interest in Nepal to become a failed state, nor have they an interest in any other of the three states to take too much

---

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://mofa.gov.np/foreign-policy/>

control in Nepal. The buffer system can only be stable if the buffer state is weaker than the three opposing powers and if the opposing powers are more or less equally powerful.

Secondly, Nepal lies in the Rimland area, where according to Spykman the power struggles took place against the Rimland powers in the past. India and China both lie in the Rimland area and are both competitors of the USA. While Nepal never was and will never be a part of the great power struggles, it can quickly become swirled in the power struggles of the others because of its status as a buffer state. Nepal therefore has to skilfully manage the relations with all three.

Finally, India, China and the USA all have a great power status and are competitors. According to Mearsheimer, the quest for survival (or security) is the main reason for great power competition. States do not stop increasing their power until they reach regional hegemony, which allows them to roam the world. The USA being the only regional hegemon and global power, will go to great lengths to prevent China or any other state from becoming a regional hegemon. The *“quest for security may drive states to interfere pre-emptively in the domestic politics of others<sup>12</sup>”*. As we will see in the continuation, all three powers try to influence Nepal and thus bring it into their spheres of influence. Under particular circumstances, Nepal can again<sup>13</sup> become a place where a proxy war is fought.

If Nepal would be in a different region of the world, for example like Portugal, geographical location would still influence its foreign policy, but it would be different and maybe not as unfavourable as it is.

If its location determines the neighbours and other players, in this case the USA, Nepal's topography defines the nature of contacts with others. This is especially important for Nepal's relations with India and China. Nepal is deeply connected to India through geography, history and tradition. *“Landlocked Nepal depends heavily on India for trade (imports, exports, energy, etc.), and also for its security (Swielande T. S., Note d'analyse 21, China - India: Expected tensions in the bufferzone, 2012).”* While the Gangetic Plain offers better geographic possibility to India, the eternal snows of the Himalayas offer none to China. Or at least it looks like that. In fact, as we will see in the continuation, China is quickly closing on the geographical gap and is coming closer and closer to Nepal.

---

<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/guide/jervissecdil.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Reference to the 1996-2006 Nepalese civil war. Source: [https://www.lemonde.fr/asi-pacifique/article/2009/05/30/le-nepal-theatre-d-une-apre-lutte-entre-inde-et-chine\\_1200208\\_3216.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/asi-pacifique/article/2009/05/30/le-nepal-theatre-d-une-apre-lutte-entre-inde-et-chine_1200208_3216.html)

## Nepal and China

China's presence in Nepal was until recently mostly linked to protecting its interests as concerns the Tibetans in Nepal. Today an estimate of 20,000 Tibetans live in Nepal<sup>14</sup>, mostly without an official status. Nepali authorities respect their part of the "contract", with the focus on Nepal's commitment to One China policy and commitment to stop any Tibet-related anti-Chinese activities in Nepal. In 2016 the author of this paper witnessed an incident when the Nepal Armed Police prevented the Ambassador of the USA to Nepal and the Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union to Nepal to enter the Boudha Stupa<sup>15</sup> area in Kathmandu where the Tibetans organised a celebration to honour the birthday of Dalai Lama. Only after a long insistence from both, the Ambassador and the Chargé d'Affaires, the police allowed them to enter the area to participate in the celebrations. In 2019<sup>16</sup> the police simply cancelled the celebrations and prevented the Ambassadors from many Western countries to participate in the celebrations. Reportedly, the authorities allowed private celebrations at home.

In the recent years, China increased its engagement with Nepal. There are several reasons for this; one of them is China's growing status as a regional and global power. *As Thapa, "China is not a distant power anymore. It is very confident these days and the Chinese behaviour very subtle yet pronounced. The reasons are geographical and "natural", in a sense that it is a result of regional and global movements/changes... its increasing presence in Nepal is also a natural extension of China's rising power and interests of both. China's emergent power and Nepal's determination to stay sovereign, especially in the face of India, are bringing them together"*.

Another reason for China's increased presence in Nepal is the staggering development of the infrastructure in Tibet, which brought both countries closer together and made it easier for China to engage with Nepal and to offer more, especially infrastructure connectivity with Nepal. The latter, traditionally deeply linked to India, needs such diversification of possibilities. If twenty years ago traveling from Kathmandu to Lhasa was a journey reserved for adventurers, China built hundreds of kilometres of roads and railways which today lead to the Nepalese border. It also constructed many airports close to the border ([see Annex 3](#)).

---

<sup>14</sup> Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/a-state-within-a-state-tibetans-in-nepal>

<sup>15</sup> Boudha Stupa in Kathmandu is one of the most sacred monuments of the Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet. Many Tibetan refugees live around the area.

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/government-halts-dalai-lama-birthday-celebration>

These airports reportedly have double usage, civilian and military: ... *integration of civil-military airports to "strengthen aviation safety and combat support capabilities"*<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, Nepal, traditionally deeply dependent on India economically, politically and militarily, sees opportunities in deeper relations with China.

China's increased presence in Nepal is seen on several levels: high-level meetings, increased direct foreign investment, recently finished and planned infrastructure projects, social and economic engagement, etc. And it is as much positive as it is negative for Nepal, especially considering China's interference in its internal affairs, previously "reserved" mostly for India, and the reported land encroachment.

The 2015/2016 Indian blockade of the border with Nepal was the moment which brought Nepal and China closer together. Biswas Baral wrote in February 2017, "*this was a major departure*"<sup>18</sup> from the usual China's approach to Nepal, which was mostly related to Tibetan diaspora in Nepal. This is not to say that China and Nepal did not have established relations before. It is just that the moment was "ripe" for a deeper connection. Nepal's democratic transition was coming to an end, China's status as a growing global power became clear to everyone and with it also its assertiveness, China brought infrastructure to the Nepal's border, etc. China simply seized the moment.

In March 2016, just when the blockade came to an end, Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli met the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The latter "*stressed that China and Nepal need to strengthen the political leading role of high-level contacts, and ensure the China-Nepal relations advance steadily based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*"<sup>19</sup>. They announced collaboration on many fronts, such as energy, infrastructure, trade, tourism, education, culture, youth and media.

The same month, the Chinese Defence Minister arrived on a three-day visit to Nepal. During the meeting, the two sides expressed the wish to "*strengthen military and security cooperation*"<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-dual-use-of-airports-in-tibet.html>

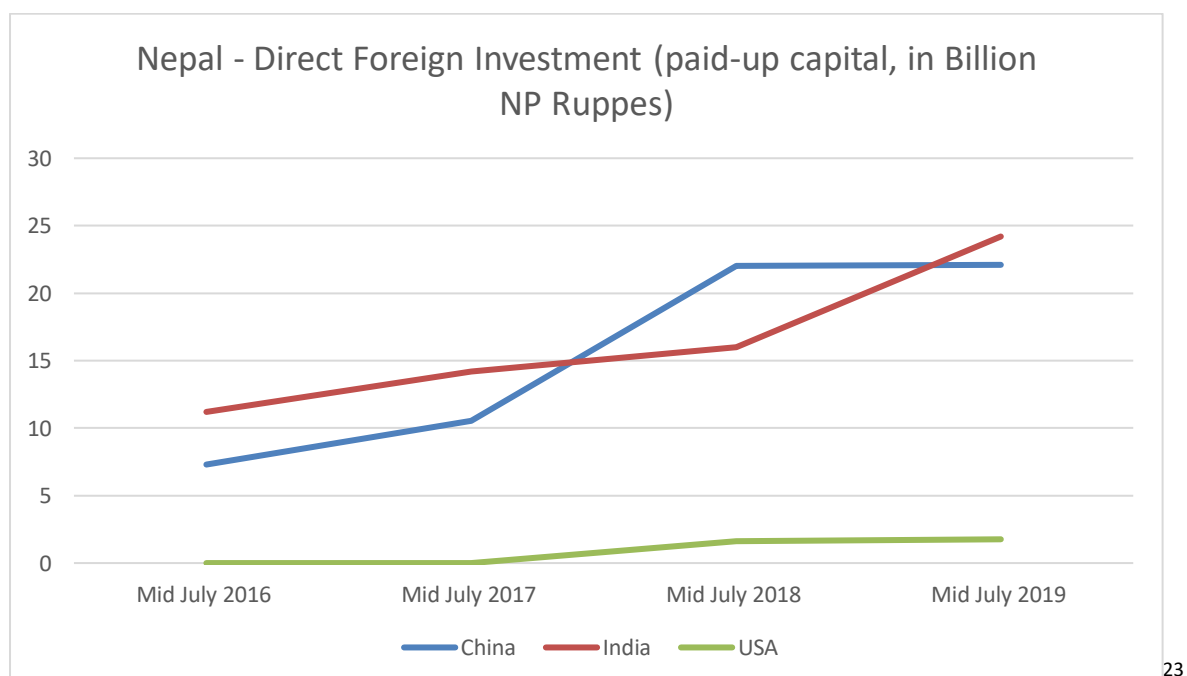
<sup>18</sup> Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/02/after-the-blockade-chinas-push-into-nepal/>

<sup>19</sup> Source: <http://np.china-embassy.org/eng/News/t1350392.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2017/03/23/chinese-defence-minister-arrives-on-3-day-visit>

At the time when the Chinese Defence Minister was in Nepal, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli visited China. In the Joint Statement<sup>21</sup> *“both sides agreed to strengthen connectivity, further step up the land and air links and improve the land transport infrastructure”*. China promised to help Nepal with the disaster reconstruction of Nepal, they agreed to conclude a commercial deal on the supply of fuel to Nepal, to strengthen the cooperation between the law enforcement agencies, to support each other's tourism promotion activities in their respective countries to enhance people-to-people contacts, etc.

These meetings were only an announcement of what was about to come. The chart below shows the progress of direct foreign investment in Nepal from China, India and the USA<sup>22</sup>. It clearly demonstrates how Chinese investments rapidly increased in recent years and at one point even outmatched India.



23

An in-depth analysis of the reports performed by the Nepal Rastra Bank uncover that China and India invest differently; while the biggest part of India’s investments goes to the agriculture sector, followed by industries and services, China invests the biggest part in industries, followed by the service sector. *“More generally, China’s investment in Nepal can be understood to fall into one of two categories—state-owned or private. There are stark differences in the way these investments function. State-owned enterprises are largely involved in projects related to critical infrastructures such as hydropower and road*

<sup>21</sup> Source: <http://np.china-embassy.org/eng/News/t1350761.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Source: <https://www.nrb.org.np/?s=foreign+direct+investment+report>

<sup>23</sup> Chart 1

construction. It is through such investments that China wants to project its image in the region as an ally committed to spurring economic activity”<sup>24</sup>. Nepal needs exactly what China offers – regional connectivity.

Nepal and China signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the One Belt, One Road initiative (OBOR) on 12 May 2017. The meeting of June 2018<sup>25</sup> detailed the OBOR projects in Nepal. In the Joint Statement both sides agreed “to intensify implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative to enhance connectivity, encompassing such vital components as ports, roads, railways, aviation and communications within the overarching framework of trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network”. The list of agreed projects is almost overwhelming. It includes the reparation and/or reopening of the exiting road connections between Tibetan region in China and Nepal, such as the reopening of the Zhangmu/Khasa port; improvement of the operation of the Jilong/Kerung port; ensuring the sound operation of the Araniko Highway; reparation and improvement of Syaphrubesi-Rasuwagadhi Highway; speeding up the construction of the Pokhara International Airport; etc. In addition, the agreement contains several new projects, such as the construction of a bridge over Karnali river at Hilsa of Pulan/Yari port; construction of the railroad connection... and several new memorandums (on Energy Cooperation; on Human Resource Development Cooperation, etc.)”<sup>26</sup>.

Many of these much-needed projects have been finished in the recent years, while others are underway or planned. Now there is only one functional dry port on the Nepal/China border, the Tatopani dry port. Another one is under construction, in Rasuwa<sup>27</sup>, and many others are planned<sup>28</sup>.

Nepal has only one international airport, the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu. Another one is under construction in Pokhara, an important tourist location, and is expected to be opened in 2022<sup>29</sup>. This project should increase Nepal’s capacity to welcome tourists.

In 2019, Nepal and China signed a transit protocol, which gives Nepal access to seven China’s sea ports. It is important to add that “The protocol had been pending since Nepal and China

---

<sup>24</sup> Source: <https://www.stimson.org/2020/economics-and-influence-chinese-investment-in-nepal/>

<sup>25</sup> Source: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1570977.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1570977.shtml)

<sup>26</sup> Source: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1570977.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1570977.shtml)

<sup>27</sup> Source: <https://risingnepaldaily.com/business/rashuwagadhi-dry-port-construction-in-limbo>

<sup>28</sup> Source: [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/6.7.Nepal\\_.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/6.7.Nepal_.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2021/07/09/covid-pushes-back-completion-of-pokhara-international-airport>

*signed the Transit and Transportation Agreement in March 2016 during Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visit to the northern neighbour. The Transit and Transportation Agreement was signed just months after an undeclared Indian border blockade was lifted, with a view to diversifying Nepal's trade and paving the way for landlocked Nepal to carry out third country trade through ports in the northern neighbour*<sup>30</sup>.

With investments also come Chinese businessman and tourists. Many hotels and restaurants in Thamel and Boudha, both main touristic spots in Kathmandu and the latter one of the main areas for the Tibetan refugees, are owned by Chinese businessman. In 2015, when the author of this paper moved to Nepal, there were not many hotels and restaurants owned by Chinese. The number of Chinese tourists in Nepal is also increasing annually.

China also uses soft power to project its influence and attractiveness in Nepal. The Ambassador of China to Nepal and actress Xu Qing held a campaign to promote Nepal tourism among Nepali and Chinese people<sup>31</sup>.

China's increased presence is beneficial for Nepal, especially in economic and commercial terms. However, Nepal must deal with the Chinese aggressive behaviour as well. Reports on China's land encroachment are vehemently dismissed by both, Nepali<sup>32</sup> and Chinese<sup>33</sup> authorities. However, the 2017 report issued by the Survey Department of the Ministry of Agriculture disclosed that China had encroached<sup>34</sup> 36 hectares of Nepal's territory at ten places along the northern border.

In addition, while blunt interference into the Nepali internal affairs was earlier "reserved" for India, China also started openly influencing the Nepali politics<sup>35</sup>. The Nepali Communist Party (NCP) until very recently governed Nepal. The ex-Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was seen as very close to China. Reportedly, while India wanted Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) as a Prime Minister, who could address India's concerns regarding the new Constitution, China championed for Oli who also stayed the Prime Minister. However, since coming to power in 2017 the NCP had several internal crises. Already at the beginning of his term, Oli

---

<sup>30</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/04/30/nepal-signs-deal-with-china-to-access-seven-chinese-sea-and-land-ports>

<sup>31</sup> Source: <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/chinese-tourist-influx-to-nepal-in-2020/>

<sup>32</sup> Source: <https://mofa.gov.np/press-statement-on-news-reports-about-nepal-china-boundary/>

<sup>33</sup> Source: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/china-denies-encroaching-nepali-territory-in-humla-asks-nepal-to-verify-the-border-points/>

<sup>34</sup> Source: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/survey-document-shows-chinese-encroachment-in-seven-districts>

<sup>35</sup> Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/china-wades-into-nepals-political-crisis/>

and Prachanda, his Vice-Prime Minister, could not hide their differences. The fight for control of the party and the government resulted in Oli dissolving the parliament twice since last December. China again intervened but the Supreme Court ruled that Sher Bahadur Deuba form Nepali Congress be appointed as a new Prime Minister. However, Deuba is traditionally seen as close to India.

## Nepal and India

According to Constantino Xavier, China's increased engagement with Nepal was a wake-up call for India: *"Thank you China! By coming into Nepal and developing that connectivity, China made India wake up to the importance of regional integration"*<sup>36</sup>. He believes that India ignored the importance of connectivity in South Asia and did not do enough to help Nepal. He continues: *"India can no longer afford to focus on its past Cold War policies of right of first refusal. No longer an Indian satellite or exclusive sphere of influence, as it is often depreciatively described in Delhi, Nepal has been embracing a policy of strategic diversification to reduce its dependence on India and enhance its non-aligned autonomy"*<sup>37</sup>. While taking advantage of China's willingness to engage more, Nepal must guide the relations with India carefully. India is too important for Nepal, and vice-versa.

Nepal and India are deeply connected through geography, history and tradition. There is no natural frontier between India and Nepal, such as a mountain chain or a river. In his book *The Return of Geography*, Kaplan described the border between the states (called the Terai) as *"dank and humid lowlands"*, and *"barely policed"* (Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (Kindle Version), 2012). Even though Nepal was never colonised, it was influenced by the British and later by the Indian regional policy. India, like the British, employ the Nepali Gurkha's in their army. *"Decorating the chiefs of each other's armies with the highest rank is a tradition that's been followed by Nepal and India since 1950 when former Indian army chief General KM Cariappa visited Nepal"*<sup>38</sup>. Millions of Nepalese work and study in India. Hinduism and Buddhism are the most followed religions in both, India and Nepal, where prince Siddhartha Gautama, later to become Buddha, was born in the southern town of Lumbini.

---

<sup>36</sup> Source: <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/no-illusion-that-nepal-will-pick-sides-on-indo-pak-dispute-1257>

<sup>37</sup> Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>

<sup>38</sup> Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/army-chief-made-honorary-general-of-nepal-army/story-KC2V94SmdtKR9WJ0vUC2L.html>

Regardless from this, the relations between India and Nepal are often difficult. Indian regional policy is focused on security. It sees Nepal as a logical geographical continuation of the sub-continent and as a buffer state and its sphere of influence. It does not tolerate China's attempts to spread its encouragement over the Himalayas. India uses trade, economy, humanitarian aid, diplomacy etc. to protect its interests and keep Nepal under its umbrella. But this has changed.

After the earthquakes of 2015, India was the first to come help Nepal. The Indian Government and Armed Forces launched the Operation Maitri, the rescue and relief operation<sup>39</sup>. *“Less than six hours after Nepal was rattled by a tragic earthquake taking almost 9,000 lives, the Indian Air Force flew in National Disaster Response Force rescue team. Over the next days, India led on the ground, landing 32 flights with 520 tons of relief and more than 50 medical, army engineering and other rescue operation teams”*<sup>40</sup>. India pledged a fund of USD 1 billion in grants and loans for Nepal's reconstruction during the International Conference held in Kathmandu in June 2015. Agreements have already been signed for both grants and loans<sup>41</sup>.

However, less than half a year later, after Nepal adopted a new Constitution in September 2015, India blocked the borders until March 2016. Many pundits observed that this was the moment when Nepal turned to China or better when China changed its approach to Nepal. This was not the first time that India did that. In 1989, India imposed a trade embargo on Nepal because the latter signed an agreement for the purchase of arms from the Chinese Government. The 2015/2016 blockade had different reasons, but still security related. According to India, the new Nepali Constitution does not ensure the Madhesi and Tharu ethnic groups living in the southern Terai region, with close demographic and cultural ties to India, their representation in the Nepali parliament. In the statement after the promulgation of the Constitution the Indian Foreign Ministry expressed its concern over the violence in Nepal's southern Terai region. India was afraid that it will lose influence in the Nepali Parliament. In addition, Professor SD Muni, an analyst who closely followed events in Nepal, said that *“India's concern is genuine because whatever happens in the Terai will spill over into India”*<sup>42</sup>. Rajiv Gandhi *“reportedly admitted that “in imposing trade and transit restrictions,*

---

<sup>39</sup> Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/operation-maitriindias-earthquake-relief-and-rescue-mission-in-nepal-250702-2015-04-29>

<sup>40</sup> Source: <https://carnegieindia.org/2017/08/15/responding-first-as-leading-power-pub-72823>

<sup>41</sup> Source: <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-india-relations/>

<sup>42</sup> Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34313280>

*India had been looking to encourage Nepal's democracy movement*"<sup>43</sup>. Nepal in general is a very unstable state. Kaplan writes that *"the Nepalese government barely controls the countryside where 85 percent of its people live"*. He concludes that *"if the Nepalese government cannot increase state capacity, the state itself could gradually dissolve"* (Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (Kindle Version), 2012).

The Indian border blockade was in a way a turning point for all three, China, India and Nepal. As concerns China, a lot has been written above. As concerns India and Nepal, Constantino Xavier wrote: *"As China rises formidably across the Himalayas, and is for the first time able to match its supportive statements with actual resources to reduce Nepal's reliance on India, Kathmandu will naturally be tempted to play off Delhi against Beijing. This changes the fundamental nature of India-Nepal relations and requires both sides to recalibrate their "special" relationship"*<sup>44</sup>. India lost its privileged position in Nepal and now must count on China. It also cannot afford anymore the bullyish behaviour towards Nepal. The latter on the other hand must carefully guide the relationships with both powers. *"History shows us that Nepal's attempts at deception or decision to cut off communication channels with New Delhi, as King Birendra did after 1988 and King Gyanendra in 2005, will tend to unleash Indian hostility with lethal consequences for any regime in Kathmandu"*<sup>45</sup>. During and after the 2015/2016 border blockade, Nepal tried not to repeat those mistakes from the past. After China's clear increased engagement with Nepal, the latter did not forget to engage with India as well. To mention only a few high-level visits between India and Nepal after 2015:

- In September 2016 the Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal met with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, India<sup>46</sup>.
- In October 2016, the heads of the three states, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and China's President Xi Jinping, met and exchanged on the sides of the BRICS meeting in Goa, India<sup>47</sup>.
- In August 2017, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba<sup>48</sup>.

---

<sup>43</sup> Source: <file:///C:/Users/oster/AppData/Local/Temp/Nepal-USRelationsPost1950.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Source: <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/nepal-india-relations-china>

<sup>45</sup> Source: <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/nepal-india-relations-china>

<sup>46</sup> Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/modi-prachanda-nepal-prachanda-dahal-nepali-constitution-341561-2016-09-17>

<sup>47</sup> Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/brics-summit-modi-jinping-prachanda-meet-346806-2016-10-16>

<sup>48</sup> Source: <https://zeenews.india.com/india/prime-minister-narendra-modi-meets-nepal-pm-sher-bahadur-deuba-signs-8-pacts-including-deals-on-counterering-drug-trafficking-2035801.html>

- Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, and KP Sharma Oli, the Nepali Prime Minister, met three times in 2018; first in April 2018<sup>49</sup> when Oli went to New Delhi; the second time Modi came to Kathmandu in May 2018<sup>50</sup>; and again, in August 2018<sup>51</sup> in Kathmandu, on the side-lines of the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu.

All the above meetings lead towards renewed relations between India and Nepal. *“Most importantly, driven by a new logic of interdependence and connectivity, India invested in upgrading its cross-border infrastructure and economic assistance”*<sup>52</sup>.

The first high-level visit mentioned above resulted in a creation of Nepal-India Joint Oversight Mechanism *“to review the progress made and resolve issues in the implementation of the projects under India’s economic and development cooperation”*<sup>53</sup>.

In September 2019 India and Nepal opened South Asia’s first cross-border oil product pipeline. At the opening, the Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli *“noted the pipeline was completed 15 months ahead of schedule, which counters the perception in Nepal about the lethargic pace of India-funded projects”*<sup>54</sup>.

India financed the so-called Postal Highway in the Terai region, which connects almost all the districts in this southern region. The construction of the 1792 kilometres long highway, which started more than two decades ago, was completed in 2020.

India is also financing the 68.72-kilometre-long railway Jaynagar (India) – Bardibas (Nepal). The railway will improve the connectivity between the states and boost the trade relations and development of the surrounding regions.

India is still Nepal’s biggest investor (see Footnote 23) and trade partner. Two-thirds of Nepal’s trade happens through India. Now there are four operational dry ports on Nepal/India border, and many other are planned<sup>55</sup>. These ports have an important

---

<sup>49</sup> Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nepal-pm-oli-arrives-in-india-meets-modi-ahead-of-delegation-level-talks/articleshow/63648722.cms>

<sup>50</sup> Source: <https://mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?29894/IndiaNepal+Joint+Statement+during+the+State+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+India+to+Nepal+May+11+2018>

<sup>51</sup> Source: <http://ddnews.gov.in/national/pm-modi-meets-nepalese-counterpart-k-p-sharma-oli>

<sup>52</sup> Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>

<sup>53</sup> Source: <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-india-relations/>

<sup>54</sup> Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-nepal-open-first-cross-border-pipeline-in-south-asia/articleshow/71072041.cms>

<sup>55</sup> Source: <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/6.%20Nepal.pdf>

advantage over those on Nepal/China border. The roads leading from Nepal/India border to Nepal's inland are in better condition in comparison to those from the Nepal/China border. The reason is obvious – geography, Nepal's southern Terai region is flat.

Not to forget the importance of Nepal's water resources, which are of big interest to India. Nepal is one of the richest countries in the world in this respect. Nepal's rivers are an important potential for hydro-power generation and irrigation in the downstream. *“Nepal has some 83,000 megawatts (MW) of hydroelectric potential – more than 40,000 MW of which is commercially viable – but only about 3 percent (less than 1200 MW) of this capacity has been developed”*<sup>56</sup>. India and Nepal are jointly constructing the Arun-III hydropower project in Nepal. The power plant will generate 900 MW of power. While an agreement was signed in 2014, the construction started in 2018: *“The foundation of Arun-III project was jointly inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepali counterpart KP Sharma Oli in May 2018”*<sup>57</sup>. The second project supported by India is the 679 MW Lower Arun Hydropower project in eastern Nepal, for which the Memorandum of Understanding was signed just recently, in July 2021<sup>58</sup>.

Regardless from many positive developments in relations between India and Nepal in the recent years, the countries still have not fully adapted to the new structural changes in South Asia caused by China. On 8 May 2020 the India's defence minister inaugurated a road in the Himalayas connecting to the border with China, at the Lipulekh pass (western Nepal). Nepali side considered this as India's encroachment of its (long-disputed) territories of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. In protest, Nepal replied by publishing its new political map on 18 May 2020<sup>59</sup>. The Indian side considered the move as a dictate from China. Constantino Xavier writes that India *“has controlled this territory and built other infrastructure here before, besides conducting its administration and deploying military forces up to the border pass with China”*. The road is of strategic importance to India and a road leading pilgrims to the sacred Mount Kailash. He believes that this dispute could be avoided. However, C. Raja

---

<sup>56</sup> Source: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/nepal-water-resources-equipment-and-services>

<sup>57</sup> Source: [https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/construction-of-india-assisted-hydropower-project-in-nepal-on-fast-track-120081600513\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/construction-of-india-assisted-hydropower-project-in-nepal-on-fast-track-120081600513_1.html)

<sup>58</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/07/11/nepal-india-sign-deal-for-1-3-billion-lower-arun-hydropower-project>

<sup>59</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/05/18/cabinet-endorses-new-political-map-that-includes-all-territories-that-nepal-claims>

Mohan identified *“the territorial dispute as “merely a symptom of the structural changes unfolding in the external and internal context of the bilateral relationship”*.

Another and very recent event could also show how Nepal and India still did not manage to fully adapt to the new dynamics. It relates to Nepal’s procurement of Covid19 vaccines. While trying *“to cozy up to India for immediate political gains”*, Nepal decided not to diversify the procurement of Covid19 vaccines and refused to accept China’s and Russia’s vaccines. While the procurement was a clear corruption case, the Indian political establishment reportedly wanted to keep KP Sharma Oli in power, because of the fears of *“the Chinese bogey”*. *“All this has played out against a background of Nepal’s uncertain political position between Nepal and China”*<sup>60</sup>.

## Nepal and the USA

The USA is in a different position than China and India. The USA and Nepal do not share a border. It is the offshore balancer and its involvement with Nepal is not at the same level as China’s and India’s.

In 2011 the USA pivoted towards Asia, because of the growing China. *“In the absence of greater integration and collective political vision [in South Asia], the region is likely to be torn by the influence of big power politics between the United States and China, its future contingent on how these two countries deal with each other”*<sup>61</sup>. China sees this pivot as an effort to contain its rise. Their competition will define the international relations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, meaning also the relations with Nepal.

Since the creation of the diplomatic relations, the USA wanted *“to prevent Nepal from becoming a “hot spot” of rivalry between India and China, and the people from turning towards radical ideology as a way of addressing the fundamental problems”*<sup>62</sup>. The USA wants to maintain the balance of the buffer system and preserve Nepal’s independence. One of the former Nepali foreign secretaries thanked the USA by saying: *“Nepal’s relations with the United States have helped to maintain a balance in its friendly relations with India and*

---

<sup>60</sup> Source: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/14/nepal-vaccines-coronavirus-disaster/>

<sup>61</sup> Source: <https://asiafoundation.org/2016/11/02/future-south-asia-role-united-states/>

<sup>62</sup> Source: <file:///C:/Users/oster/AppData/Local/Temp/Nepal-USRelationsPost1950.pdf>

*China*<sup>63</sup>. In addition, the USA does not want Nepal's internal instability to spill over and undermine the regional stability.

Against this background, the USA helps Nepal with development aid, economic help, military exchange (especially training Nepali soldiers in anti-terrorist techniques) and cultural exchange (many Nepalese study in the USA). In addition, they engage with the Tibetan diaspora in Nepal to counter China.

In September 2017, Nepal and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an independent USA foreign assistance agency, signed a USA 500 million compact to stimulate economic growth and reduce poverty<sup>64</sup>. Specifically, *"the funds will be spent on setting up a 400KV transmission line running 400 kilometres on the Lapsipedi-Galchhi-Damauli-Sunawal power corridor. The funds will also be used to set up three substations en-route to infrastructure that will connect to the cross-border transmission line with India in Rupandehi. Some USD 130 million under the MCC compact will go towards the maintenance of around 300 kilometres of roads on the East-West Highway"*<sup>65</sup>.

In January 2019, the USA adopted the new Tibetan Policy and Support Act. The Act targets and assign funds also to Tibetans in Nepal. The USA *"encourage Nepal to provide legal documentation to certain Tibetan residents in Nepal"*<sup>66</sup>. Nepal and Tibetans in Nepal thus *"find themselves caught in the global contest between Washington and Beijing"*<sup>67</sup>.

In November 2020, the Tibetan leader in exile visited the White House for the first time in sixty years<sup>68</sup>. This event is only indirectly related to Nepal. The event angered China. We can expect that the latter will only underpin its One-China policy, which Nepal faithfully respects.

However, the USA must manage the relations carefully. India is one of the USA's most important partners and allies in South Asia. It belongs to the "arc of democracies" to contain China (more about this in the continuation). Considering that India sees Nepal through the eyes of traditional security, the USA sometimes disregards Nepal and its interests in order to

---

<sup>63</sup> Source: <file:///C:/Users/oster/AppData/Local/Temp/Nepal-USRelationsPost1950.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Source: <https://www.mcc.gov/news-and-events/slideshow/slideshow-091417-nepal-compact-signing>

<sup>65</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/01/09/why-the-mcc-compact-court-controversy-in-nepal>

<sup>66</sup> Source: <https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/chairs-welcome-passage-of-the-tibetan-policy-and-support-act>

<sup>67</sup> Source: <https://csep.org/blog/nepals-turn-to-china-opportunities-and-challenges/>

<sup>68</sup> Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/tibet-usa/tibetan-political-leader-visits-white-house-for-first-time-in-six-decades-idUSKBN28107Z?edition-redirect=uk>

preserve its strategic relationship with India. The USA helps India also because it is weaker than China, which could destabilize the buffer system. Against the backdrop of the raising China and its increased engagement with Nepal, this logic applies also today. For example, when India blocked the border with Nepal, the USA was “shy” in condemning India’s behaviour at the expense of Nepal which suffered economic loss and humiliation.

Nepal on the other hand always ran an independent foreign policy, a diversification policy, a policy of non-alignment. It does not want “*to choose sides or be arm-twisted into an exclusive relationship*”<sup>69</sup>. It wants to break free from the “exclusive relationship” with India, and looks for more regional connectivity, economic and social development. China’s increased engagement is welcome in Nepal and the latter needs to balance well between all three powers to keep its sovereignty. Two recent events could refer to this.

While signing the Compact with the MCC in 2017 and before being ratified by the parliament, the agreement was a source of a dispute in the Nepali parliament. Many politicians did not support the ratification of the agreement, because of the fears that the agreement is a part of the USA Indo-Pacific Strategy, which has for a goal a containment of China<sup>70</sup>.

Second, in June 2019 the Nepali Immigration Authorities refused the entry into Nepal of one Tibetan-American. “*According to the official, the Chinese Embassy had written to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to restrict a person named ‘Penpa Tsering’ from entering Nepal labelling him a campaigner of the free Tibet movement, as well as a strong advocate of Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader. China also feared that a person with the name of ‘Penpa Tsering’ could accelerate Tibetans’ movement against China in Nepal, he added*”<sup>71</sup>. Despite the new USA Tibetan Policy and Support Act, Nepal has not issued personal identification documents to Tibetan refugees for more than twenty.

## Climate Change and Security Risks for Nepal

Climate change is another challenge facing Nepal, which can influence its security. Two recent crises, namely the 2015 earthquakes and the Covid19 pandemics uncovered the weak administration and state incapacity to manage such events. “*Climate change can act as a stressor on these elements, adding an additional layer of risk that exacerbates the challenges*

---

<sup>69</sup> Source: <https://asiafoundation.org/2016/11/02/future-south-asia-role-united-states/>

<sup>70</sup> Source: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/01/09/why-the-mcc-compact-courted-controversy-in-nepal>

<sup>71</sup> Source: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/man-labelled-dalai-lamas-agent-deported-to-us>

*of livelihood insecurity, resource and identity conflicts and institutional reform”* (Nisha Pandey, 2020). The same can be said for the current Covid19 pandemics.

In 2015, Nepal depended on foreign support: search and rescue, shelter, humanitarian aid, reconstruction and even organisation of efforts. The same can be said for the current Covid19 pandemics. Nepal lacks equipment, organisational structure, administrative capacity, etc. to manage events of such scale.

The USA intelligence community placed climate change and environmental degradation on top of the list of transnational threats to the USA<sup>72</sup>. But climate change is a global threat and Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in this respect.

In Nepal, natural hazards connected to climate change include:

- higher temperatures,
- floods,
- drought,
- earthquakes (“While not directly linked to climate change, earthquake exposure remains relevant in the context of a changing climate. More precipitation and higher temperatures affect the stability of terrain and hence susceptibility to hazards from mudflows, avalanches, GLOFs and landslides that could be triggered by an earthquake. Additionally, the risk of simultaneous, multi-hazard, exposure is significant, for instance hydro-climatic hazards following an earthquake have been shown to compound damages”),
- lack of coping capacity.

Historical data for Nepal show *“higher rates of warming, with average temperatures increasing by 1.5°C between 1982–2006”*<sup>73</sup>. This trend will likely continue in the future. Rise in temperature can result in higher probability of heatwaves, drought, melting snow and ice, glacial lake outbursts and floods, and landslides. While no modelling has been done specifically for Nepal, global research suggests that rising temperatures can also result in

---

<sup>72</sup> Source: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Source: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/677231/climate-risk-country-profile-nepal.pdf>

extreme rainfall events. This can as a result amplify *“the pressure on human health, livelihoods, and ecosystems”*<sup>74</sup>.

While some regions of Nepal are becoming drier, others are becoming wetter. *“Modelling has suggested that the number of people annually affected by river flooding could more than double by 2030 as a result of climate change. At the same time, the economic impact of river flooding could triple”*<sup>75</sup>.

Climate change might have an important impact on Nepal’ natural, especially water resources. The glacial mass might decrease and cause increased runoffs and extreme flows of water, which in turn can affect population’s access to water supply. Consequently, this can affect agriculture.

Climate change can also result in the increase of maximum altitude of the tree-line, which in return can impact Nepal’s tourism sector and species.

As concerns earthquakes and landslides, interconnection between climate issues and natural disasters is [well documented in Nepal](#).

Nepal’s weak national administration and lack of coping can only aggravate the effects of climate change. The USA assessed that *“the effects of a changing climate and environmental degradation will create a mix of direct and indirect threats, including risks to the economy, heightened political volatility, human displacement, and new venues for geopolitical competition that will play out during the next decade and beyond”*<sup>76</sup>.

Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif listed *“four interrelated pathways between climate change and conflict: (a) livelihoods, (b) migration and mobility, (c) armed group tactics, and (d) elite exploitation”* (Malin Mobjörk, 2020).

- a. Climate change can have adverse effects on agriculture and livestock. This can in return cause economic hardship on people, especially in rural societies, accentuate gender inequalities, heighten competition among groups and increase the risk of people joining the armed groups.

---

<sup>74</sup> Source: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/677231/climate-risk-country-profile-nepal.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Source: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/677231/climate-risk-country-profile-nepal.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> Source: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

- b. Economic hardship may increase migration towards areas with better opportunities. As a result, this can cause conflicts among opposing groups due to resource competition, diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.
- c. Climate change can affect the strategic decisions and tactics of armed group: *“(a) when they use coping strategies to reinforce group food security, (b) when they use the strain of climate-related impacts to boost recruitment and (c) when they adapt behaviour to opportunistically capitalize on climate pressures”*, for example when they compete with the governments or relief providers (Malin Mobjörk, 2020).
- d. Lastly, groups with wealth, power and influence can take over control of aid distribution, they can occupy lands of displaced groups, they can exploit displaced groups for political aims.

At least three out of four pathways mentioned above can be reflected to Nepal: livelihoods, migration and mobility, and elite exploitation.

Firstly, Nepal is heavily depending on agriculture and tourism. Especially agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, providing livelihood for more than two-thirds of the population but accounting for only a quarter of GDP (data for 2019). *“Increasing weather variability combined with floods, landslides and drought is threatening the livelihoods of many of the two thirds of the population directly dependent on agriculture (FAO, 2020), as well as increasing food insecurity. The loss of livelihoods in turn can feed a number of dynamics that can increase fragility”*. Less arable lands means more competition, which can lead to conflict.

Secondly, those depending on agriculture and tourism might be displaced. [Hodder says](#): *“when the displaced communities meet the indigenous ones, they compete over natural resources that can exacerbate the conflicts between casts”*.

Thirdly, the minority groups often depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, which makes them the most vulnerable to climate change. They are disadvantaged economically, socially and politically. *“These dynamics can further deepen ethnic grievances and feelings of exclusion, thus exacerbating one of the main conflict drivers in Nepal... Natural resources and their ownership are often at the heart of exclusion as well as tensions and conflicts between different social and ethnic groups. They mirror and feed into the larger conflict dynamics between those groups that dominate Nepalese politics, the economy, administration,*

*judiciary and security forces and those that feel excluded. Resource conflicts have a long history in Nepal and indigenous groups are especially affected” (Nisha Pandey, 2020).*

## Conclusions

In 2012 Shantanu Chakrabarti wrote that *“Analysts have become critical of Nepal’s over-dependence on foreign powers on the question of economic assistance over a period of time, and her foreign as well as domestic policies being largely influenced by external considerations”*<sup>77</sup>. Things haven’t changed much today. Nepal’s internal and external relations are rocked by foreign elements.

Nepal’s geographical location is the curse guiding its foreign relations to a certain extent. It is a buffer state and a Rimland state. In addition, it is influenced by the rivalry of three great powers, China and India, and the USA, the offshore balancer. *“Nepal’s geographical position between the two potentially rival big powers has proved to be the greatest constraint to its independent foreign and economic policy”*<sup>78</sup>. Naturally, Nepal wants to escape its buffer state status. It wants to be a bridge between the worlds.

China’s recent increased engagement, even thou welcomed by Nepal, resulted in new dynamics among the four. While the big powers try to bring Nepal closer into their spheres of influence, each one due its own strategic interests, Nepal struggles to keep its independence and its diversification strategy. This reflects on its relations with the three powers.

China aspires to become a world leader by 2049, which marks its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is patient in its endeavours. Swielande writes that the *“Chinese power has succeeded in implementing what could be called an octopus strategy. Similar to the octopus’ behaviour, China disturbs and seduces, advances in an intelligent, cunning and subtle way”*. He continues that *“the Chinese agenda is in fact more obscure and based on Realpolitik”*. It *“uses [OBOR] to reshape the world order in its image”* (Swielande T. S., Commentary paper no. 59, China and the Octopus Strategy, 2019).

China used the momentum of the India/Nepal conflict coming from the 2015/2016 border blockade. It entered the India’s sphere of influence carefully, but confidently. It sees Nepal

---

<sup>77</sup> Source: [https://intranet.mruni.eu/upload/iblock/c65/002\\_Shantanu.pdf](https://intranet.mruni.eu/upload/iblock/c65/002_Shantanu.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Source: <https://ifa.org.np/uploads/media/pages/1614504212.pdf>

as a bridge to India and further to the Indian Ocean. Nepal, traditionally dependent on India, needed this diversification opportunity and welcomed China's new approach. China became a new player in Nepal. It brought much needed connectivity projects, investments, increased trade prospects, cultural exchanges, etc.

China's increased engagement resulted in India's new approach to Nepal. India had to change its old and often bullyish attitude to Nepal. Long promised and late projects got a new boost. India is trying to prevent China from becoming regional hegemon. Nepal again profited from the new dynamics.

The USA, the off-shore balancer, is trying to protect its currently dominant position in Indo-Pacific and prevent one power to become a regional hegemon in the Asian part of the Rimland. Its issues are different than those of China and India and plays a different role in Nepal. In fact, the USA's Nepal strategy goes beyond its borders. It considers its important alliance with India, which is necessary for the USA's overall Indo-Pacific strategy. Swielande writes that the USA wants to create an alliance, made up of an arc of democracies to contain China: India in the west, Australia in the south (also with other, smaller countries, such as Singapore and the Philippines) and Japan in the east (Swielande T. S., *La Chine a la conquete de l'Indo-Pacifique?*, 2019). The USA sees its Nepal relations through the eyes of India.

Through the eyes of the Rimland theory, where Nepal is located, China wants to encircle the Heartland. Swielande writes that *"the key objective of these policies [China's policies such as OBOR] is to reinforce the connectivity between the main actors of the Rimland leading to the encirclement of the whole area – a crucial step in a Go game – in order to integrate it to China' sphere of influence... the Chinese endgame seems to follow closely the words of MacKinder, "who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, who rules the World-Island commands the world". Thus the aim for Beijing is to control – or at least have in its sphere of influence – the two centres of the World-Island: the Eurasian and African Heartlands"* (Swielande T. S., *China's Objective 2049: From Rimland to "World-Island"?*, 2015). The USA's perspective and strategy is of course different. As history showed, the USA wants to prevent the Eurasian landmass to harbour *"an overwhelmingly dominant power in Europe and the Far East"* (Spykman, 1944, pp. 59-60). The USA wants to prevent China to control the world island through Rimland.

The great power play is evident. *"Few today would dispute that the triangular relationship between China, India, and the United States will profoundly shape the geopolitics of the*

*twenty-first century*” (Kanti Bajpai, 2020). Now, the USA is the only regional hegemon. However, China also has a plan to become a leading power by 2049. The USA will go to great lengths to prevent this from happening, said Mearsheimer. He also believes that the USA and India will grow closer together in the future to counter China, which *“is a threat to the interests of both, India and the United States”*<sup>79</sup>. Kaplan concluded that *“India will emerge as the key Eurasian pivot state because of its effect on relations between the United States and China”* (Kaplan, Center for a new American Security , 2010). But there are no friends in the anarchic world, warns Mearsheimer, there are only national interests.

Nepal’s unfortunate geographical location defines its relations with the three powers. Influenced by all, the nationalism in Nepal is growing. Mearsheimer wrote that *“nationalism tends to foster close ties between political leaders and their populations, especially in wartime, when all concerned face a powerful external threat”* (Mearsheimer, 2014). Nepal is not in war. However, it faces many external pressures from all sides. Nepal naturally wants to protect its independence. Back-off-India, back-off-China, new political map and obstruction of the ratification of the agreement with the USA reflect these struggles.

But Nepal will come into situation when it will have to choose sides. As Constantino Xavier, while talking about a possible India Pakistan conflict: *“In case of a conflict, while there will be pressure from Delhi to take sides, no one is under any illusion that Nepal will give in. Sometimes, India also faces pressure from China and America to choose sides. It’s the same with Nepal. As an immediate neighbour, Nepal will have special consideration for India’s position, but it also has good relations with Pakistan, which it doesn’t want to spoil. Frankly, no one will really care. Smaller countries have learned to hedge their bets”*<sup>80</sup>. Or as Mearsheimer wrote: *“Almost every state will have to choose sides, not just because Beijing and Washington will put enormous pressure on them to choose their side, but also because most of those states – which are much weaker than either China or the United States – will reasonably want to have powerful protector in the event their security is threatened”* (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Finally, the climate change could be another threat to Nepal’s security. [Hodder](#) explains that *“climate change leads to lack of alternative economic options, change of livelihood and displacement of population. Displaced communities join militant groups; also, when the*

---

<sup>79</sup> Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7577\\_QXknY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7577_QXknY)

<sup>80</sup> Source: <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/no-illusion-that-nepal-will-pick-sides-on-indo-pak-dispute-1257>

*displaced communities meet the indigenous ones, they compete over natural resources that can exacerbate the conflicts between casts. It can also lead to climate migration that leads to international migration to other countries”.*

Nepal's efforts to shape its own destiny is minimized by China's, India's and the USA's influences and their grand strategies. While on the short-term Nepal will profit from them, especially in terms of connectivity and trade, which will result in development, on the long-term Nepal might continue experiencing instability and insecurity. Poverty, inequality and corruption could only aggravate this.

## Annex 1: Comparison of Principal Actors

Country	Surface in square kilometres <sup>81</sup>	Rating
China	9,600,013	2
India	3,287,259	3
Nepal	147,180	4
USA	9,831,510	1

Country	Population <sup>82</sup>	Rating
China	1,397,715,000	1
India	1,366,417,750	2
Nepal	28,608,710	4
USA	328,239,520	3

Country	GDP nominal, current, millions USD <sup>83</sup>	Rating
China	14,279,937.47	2
India	2,868,929.42	3
Nepal	30,641.38	4
USA	21,433,226.00	1

<sup>81</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.SRF.TOTL.K2>

<sup>82</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

<sup>83</sup> Source: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true)

Country	GDP per capita, current, USD <sup>84</sup>	Rating
China	10,216.6	2
India	2,099.6	3
Nepal	1,071.1	4
USA	65,297.5	1

Country	Military expenditure, current, USD <sup>85</sup>	Rating
China	261,081,940,426.7	2
India	71,124,980,462.9	3
Nepal	428,701,839.2	4
USA	731,751,400,000.0	1

Country	High-technology exports, current, USD <sup>86</sup>	Rating
China	715,843,469,850	1
India	23,643,556,630	3
Nepal	5,993,530	4
USA	156,074,126,640	2

<sup>84</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

<sup>85</sup> Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD>

<sup>86</sup> Source: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.CD?most recent value desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.CD?most%20recent%20value%20desc=true)

Country	Natural resources <sup>87</sup>
China	coal, iron ore, helium, petroleum, natural gas, arsenic, bismuth, cobalt, cadmium, ferrosilicon, gallium, germanium, hafnium, indium, lithium, mercury, tantalum, tellurium, tin, titanium, tungsten, antimony, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, selenium, strontium, vanadium, magnetite, aluminum, lead, zinc, rare earth elements, uranium, hydropower potential (world's largest), arable land
India	coal (fourth-largest reserves in the world), antimony, iron ore, lead, manganese, mica, bauxite, rare earth elements, titanium ore, chromite, natural gas, diamonds, petroleum, limestone, arable land
Nepal	quartz, water, timber, hydropower, scenic beauty, small deposits of lignite, copper, cobalt, iron ore
United States of America	coal (world's largest coal reserves), copper, lead, molybdenum, phosphates, rare earth elements, uranium, bauxite, gold, iron, mercury, nickel, potash, silver, tungsten, zinc, petroleum, natural gas, timber, arable land

<sup>87</sup> Source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/natural-resources/>

## Annex 2: Interview<sup>88</sup> – Changing Tibet

Q: When was the first time you travelled to Tibet?

A: I believe the first time I guided a tourist group to Tibet was in 2006, fifteen years ago; the last time was in 2019. As a tour guide, I travelled to Tibet more than twenty times.

Q: Comparing the first travel with your last one, do you see any developments in Tibet, especially in terms of infrastructure (roads, railways, airports, etc.)?

A: Indeed, Tibet has changed over the years and the development of the infrastructure is the most visible change.

I still remember my first road trip from Nepal to Tibet in 2006. After having crossed the border traversing the Friendship Bridge in Kodari, the road lead uphill towards Zhangmu and further to Nyalam.



89

---

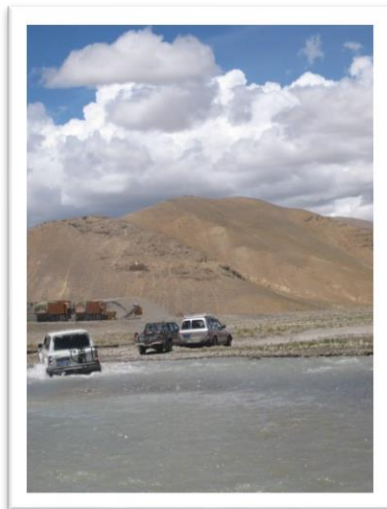
<sup>88</sup> The interview between the author of this paper and the travel agent living and working in Kathmandu, Nepal, was conducted on several occasions in the months of June/July 2021. The interviewee expressed a wish not to disclose his identity.

<sup>89</sup> Photo: Sino-Nepal Friendship Bridge in Kodari; Nepal is on the left; China is on the right; 24/8/2009 Source: interviewee's private collection.



90

Once you had crossed the border, a long waiting period started in the border town Zhangmu. Due to construction works, they would open the road only for a few hours in the middle of the night and allow to continue the trip uphill towards Nyalam. The road was under construction for a long time and always scary to cross; waterfalls on one side and steep gorges on the other. Four-wheel drives were needed for the trip towards Lhasa (three four-wheel cars for twelve people).



91

Climbing towards the Tibetan plateau, one could see the climate type and vegetation change almost every few hundred meters from subtropical towards eventually alpine. The road conditions improved on the Tibetan plateau, mostly above 3000 meters. The road works on the Friendship Highway continued all the way to Lhasa. The same road trip was possible with a bus only after 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Map: from Kodari, Nepal, to Lhasa, Tibet, China; Source: Google Maps.

<sup>91</sup> Left photo: Friendship Highway, Tibet, 16/7/2009; Right photo: Friendship Highway, 9/9/2011; Source: interviewee's private collection.



92

During the years, I saw many infrastructure projects in progress, namely the construction of the Friendship Highway, the new airport of Gongkar, about an hour from Lhasa, the airport in Shigatse, and off course the railway connection from Beijing to Lhasa. Today, the airport and the train station in Shigatse serve little purpose. However, once the neighbouring Nepal is connected, everything will fall into a bigger picture which we can only predict. I believe one day this railway will run all the way to Kathmandu.

The roads in Tibet are nowadays in very good condition. Once it took six hours to reach the Everest Base Camp (5100 meters) from Shegar. Today, it takes only two and a half hours.

---

<sup>92</sup> Left photo: Road to Mt. Everest, Tibet, 16/9/2011; Right photo: Road to Mt. Everest, Tibet, 5/10/2016; Source: interviewee's private collection.



93

The Chinese even replanted Tibet with indigenous trees, such as pine, cypress and willows. Quite impressive to see the scale of change the Chinese were able to realise in very difficult geographical and climate circumstances.

Another development I have noticed was the change of the face of Tibet. New infrastructure in previously hard to reach places lead to influx of people and urbanization. Previously small and authentic Tibetan villages grew and developed into tourist places with restaurants, hotels, shops, etc. Especially Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, has changed dramatically with high-rise buildings waiting to be inhabited at the outskirts of Lhasa of what was once a farmland.



94

---

<sup>93</sup> Left photo: view on the Himalaya range, 80 km from Mt. Everest, Tibet, 16/10/2004; Right photo: “You have entered Qomolangma National Park” (Qomolangma is Mt. Everest in Tibetan), Tibet, 29/9/2019; Source: interviewee’s private collection.

<sup>94</sup> Left photo: Old Tingri, Tibet, 3/2/2007; Right photo: Potala Square, Lhasa, Tibet, 7/2/2007 now; Source: interviewee’s private collection.



95

Q: This brings us to the next question. Has the presence of non-Tibetan population in Tibet increased?

A: It is obvious in many towns that the number of non-Tibetan population is at least the same, but most probably higher than Tibetan. Official numbers are not realistic as to my opinion China presents migration flows into Tibet lower than they really are. Every day, the highest railway in the world brings hundreds of non-Tibetan population into Tibet looking for greener pastures and investment opportunities. There are incentives in place to draw non-Tibetans to immigrate, such as reduction of taxes, higher wages, etc. The migration of non-Tibetan population into Tibet will not stop any time soon.

Lhasa, Shigatse, Tsetang are the biggest towns in Tibet and only a few parts of these towns are still authentic Tibetan. If life in Tibet would be easier, the numbers would be even higher. But the altitude makes it difficult to adjust for many non-Tibetan ethnic groups. In my opinion, the higher and more remote the place is located, the more authentic and Tibetan the region is.

Finally, Tibet is a major tourist spot for domestic tourists. More than thirty million tourists visit Tibet every year. These are numbers many countries can only dream of.

---

<sup>95</sup> Left photo: view over Lhasa city seen from backside of Potala Palace, Tibet, 01/10/2011; Right photo: view over Lhasa city seen from backside of Potala Palace, Tibet, 10/3/2015; Source: interviewee's private collection.



96

Q: Do you see other reasons for such a quick and daring development of infrastructure in Tibet?

A: Of course, Tibet is rich in natural resources, water, gold, copper, iron and more; enough "fuel" to keep the economy of China going for many years to come. A lot of infrastructure serves for transporting resources from the mines.

Q: Do you see any difference in treatment of tourists; for example, is there more or less red tape before coming to Tibet?

A: China has always been very strict in handling of foreign tourists coming to Tibet. Tourists can only visit places that were confirmed on the permit and that the Tibetan travel agent had gotten from the Tibet Travel Authority. The permits are checked every few hundred kilometres. The checks are not only for tourists, but also to keep an eye on the locals.

From 2015, cameras in the cars and busses are mandatory, officially because of road accidents. Also, a "police agent" joins the trip to "keep an eye on the driver".

---

<sup>96</sup> Photo: Potala square, Lhasa, Tibet, 3/6/2006; Source: interviewee's private collection.

The CCTV has been installed and security personnel employed at “risk areas” like Barkhor and Potala squares.

The overall impression is that Chinese see foreign tourists in Tibet as a burden. There is enough domestic tourism and foreigners are not really needed.



97

Interviewee: The infrastructure in Tibet is nowadays often better than in some developed Western countries.

---

<sup>97</sup> Photo: Barkhor Square, Lhasa, Tibet; 1/10/2011; Source: interviewee’s private collection.



98



99

---

<sup>98</sup> Photo: Road to Lhasa, Tibet, 11/1/2019; Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1143740.shtml>

<sup>99</sup> Photo: Highway Lhasa-Nagqu and the Qinghai-Tibet railway, Tibet, 28/1/2021; Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215097.shtml>

## Annex 3: Conversation with Mr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa<sup>100</sup> on China

China is not a distant power anymore. It is very confident these days and the Chinese behavior very subtle yet pronounced. The reasons are geographical and “natural”, in a sense that it is a result of regional and global movements/changes.

Nepal is playing “the China card”, especially to extend its possibilities in political and economic terms; however, its increasing presence in Nepal is also a natural extension of China’s rising power and interests of both. China’s emergent power and Nepal’s determination to stay sovereign, especially in the face of India, are bringing them together.

There is no evidence that India and China are competing in Nepal to keep it under their respective spheres of influence. That said, Nepal is determined to keep and protect its sovereignty as that was the case in the past.

The future will bring a new level of relations (more balanced) between all three, Nepal, India and China.

---

<sup>100</sup> Mr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa is a former Nepalese politician and diplomat. He served as a Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank and Minister of Finance. He also served as a Nepalese Ambassador to the USA and Nepalese Ambassador to India. The conversation was conducted in 2018, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

## Annex 4: Interview with Mr Christophe Hodder<sup>101</sup> – Effects of Climate Change on Nepal's Security

Q: You have lived and worked in Nepal for several years. How could climate change effect Nepal?

A: Considering that Nepal is a disaster-prone country, climate change could cause more frequent natural disasters. In fact, an increase in earthquakes and landslides due to climate issues is well documented in Nepal. I saw land degradation and desertification that led to landslides and higher rainfall patterns. I also saw glaciers melting and higher river levels that led to flooding, bank erosion and destruction of villages. I also saw monocrops such as rice that led to slope destabilization where the right trees and vegetation with roots are needed to stabilize slopes.

Q: How could this affect Nepal's security?

A: Consequently, climate change leads to lack of alternative economic options, change of livelihood and displacement of population. Displaced communities join militant groups; also, when the displaced communities meet the indigenous ones, they compete over natural resources that can exacerbate the conflicts between casts. It can also lead to climate migration that leads to international migration to other countries.

Q: While climate change is a global threat, what can Nepal do alone to minimize to a certain extent the climate change effects and consequently decrease the threat to its security?

A: I think Nepal can focus its attention on standard mitigation and adaptation methods such as nature-based solutions to disaster management. However, it can go further by trying to integrate climate sensitive approaches to its reconstruction and national plans. It can also lead the way in terms of green agenda economics focusing on renewable energy approaches and build a real green growth plan. It can also reforest, protect and build-up its natural resources and ensure there is a clear plan of protection of its natural resources. This, coupled with family planning and proper population management approaches can help look at the

---

<sup>101</sup> The interview between the author of this paper and Mr Hodder was conducted in July 2021. Mr Hodder is the first United Nations climate and security expert within the framework of a UN peace mission. Source: <https://unsom.unmissions.org/interview-un-environmental-advisor-somalia-christophe-hodder>

long-term impacts and projections of climate change and then plan around building up the natural capital to protect against those projected changes.

Q: I suppose Nepal's bad infrastructure, weak administration and lack of coping capacity could play an important role in how Nepal addresses or does not address these threats?

A: Yes, however there is a lot the community bottom-up approach can do. I think building community ownership and driving the green growth agenda would be a great way forward. However, to ensure government ownership is equally as important.

## Bibliography

- Bordonaro, F. (n.d.). *Exploring Geopolitics*. Retrieved from Rediscovering Spykman – the Rimland, Geography of Peace and Foreign Policy:  
[https://exploringgeopolitics.org/publication\\_bordonaro\\_federico\\_rediscovering\\_spykman\\_rimland\\_geography\\_peace\\_foreign\\_policy/](https://exploringgeopolitics.org/publication_bordonaro_federico_rediscovering_spykman_rimland_geography_peace_foreign_policy/).
- Facts Research and Analytics. (2020). *Facts of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Facts Research and Analytics.
- Giri, A. (2020, November 29). *As Kathmandu plays host to guests from south and north, concerns grow over geopolitical games*. Retrieved from The Kathmandu Post:  
<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/11/29/as-kathmandu-plays-host-to-guests-from-south-and-north-concerns-grow-over-geopolitical-games>.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Nepal – US Relations*. Retrieved from Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-us-relations/>.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Nepal-China Relations*. Retrieved from Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-china-relations/>.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Nepal-India Relations*. Retrieved from Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-india-relations/>.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Nepal's Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs:  
<https://mofa.gov.np/foreign-policy/>.
- Holmila, A. (2019, September 16). *Re-thinking Nicholas J. Spykman: from historical sociology to balance of power*. Retrieved from Taylor and Francis Online:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07075332.2019.1655469>.
- ICIMOD, G. o. (2010). *Mountains of the World - Ecosystem Services in a Time of Global and Climate Change; Seizing Opportunities - Meeting Challenges*. Retrieved from International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development:  
<https://lib.icimod.org/record/26882>.
- ICIMOD, I. C. (2011). *Climate Change in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, The State of Current Knowledge*. Retrieved from ICIMOD: <https://lib.icimod.org/record/9417>.
- John Chay, T. E. (Ed.). (2018). *Buffer States in World Politics*. New York: Kindle eBook: Routledge.
- Kanti Bajpai, S. H. (Ed.). (2020). *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations*. New York.

- Kaplan, R. D. (2010, August ). *Center for a new American Security*. Retrieved from South Asia's Geography and Conflict : <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/south-asias-geography-of-conflict>.
- Kaplan, R. D. (2012). *The Revenge of Geography (Kindle Version)*. New York: Random House.
- Kaplan, R. D. (2015). *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* . New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- Khanna, P. (2019). *The Future is Asian*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks .
- Kisinger, H. (2014). *World Order*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Malin Mobjörk, F. K. (2020, November ). *Pathways of climate insecurity: guidance for policymakers*. Retrieved from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/pb\\_2011\\_pathways\\_2.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/pb_2011_pathways_2.pdf).
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Millennium Challenge Corporation. (2017, September 14). *Nepal Compact*. Retrieved from Millennium Challenge Corporation: <https://assets.mcc.gov/content/uploads/compact-nepal.pdf>.
- Myers, S. L. (2020, November 28). *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from Beijing Takes its South China Sea Strategy to the Himalayas: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/beijing-takes-its-south-china-sea-strategy-to-the-himalayas/articleshow/79460089.cms>.
- Nau, H. R. (2015). *Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas* (4th ed.). CQ Press.
- Nisha Pandey, L. R. (2020, September ). *Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: Nepal*. Retrieved from Climate Security Expert Network.
- Pierre Grosser, D. A.-D. (Octobre-Novembre 2019). *Geopolitique de L'Indo-Pacifique. Diplomatie, Les Grands Dossiers N-53*.
- Rishi Adhikari, Y. P. (2013, December ). *From a buffer towards a bridge: Nepal's new foreign policy agenda*. Retrieved from Institute Of Foreign Affairs: <https://ifa.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/From-a-Buffer-for-Mail.pdf>.
- Scroll India. (2020, August 22). *Interview with Constantino Xavier: India cannot afford to think of permanent friends anymore in its neighbourhood*. Retrieved from Scroll India: <https://scroll.in/article/971091/india-cannot-afford-to-think-of-permanent-friends-anymore-in-its-neighbourhood-constantino-xavier>.

- Sempa, F. P. (2015, January 9). *Nicholas Spykman and the Struggle for the Asiatic Mediterranean*. Retrieved from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/nicholas-spykman-and-the-struggle-for-the-asiatic-mediterranean/>.
- Spykman, N. J. (1944). *The Geography of the Peace*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Swielande, T. S. (2012, June). *Note d'analyse 21, China - India: Expected tensions in the bufferzone*. Retrieved from CECRI: [http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/21note\\_danalyse-\\_china\\_india.pdf](http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/21note_danalyse-_china_india.pdf).
- Swielande, T. S. (2015, September 18). *China's Objective 2049: From Rimland to "World-Island"?* Retrieved from CECRI: <http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/26-struye.pdf>.
- Swielande, T. S. (2018, Octobre 16). *Commentary paper no. 58, Retour de la géopolitique et du power politics*. Retrieved from CECRI: <http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/commentary-58.pdf>.
- Swielande, T. S. (2019, January 28). *Commentary paper no. 59, China and the Octopus Strategy*. Retrieved from CECRI: <http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/commentary-59.pdf>.
- Swielande, T. S. (2019, October-November). *La Chine a la conquete de l'Indo-Pacifique? Diplomatie*, pp. 55-57.
- The Times . (2014). *The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World* (14th ed.). London: Times Books.
- The Times. (2015). *The Times Complete History of the World* (9th ed.). (R. Overy, Ed.) London: Times Books.
- U. S. Government. (2017, December). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Retrieved from The White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of State. (2019, November 4). *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Advancing a Shared Vision*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.
- University of Oxford. (2008). *The New Oxford Companion to Law*. (J. C. Peter Cane, Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woessner, R. (Ed.). (2020). *Frontières*. Neuilly: Atlante.
- Xavier, C. (2020, June 21). *Countering China in Nepal and the Neighbourhood*. Retrieved from India Today: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20200629-countering-china-in-nepal-and-the-neighbourhood-1691184-2020-06-21>.

Xavier, C. (2020, June 11). *Interpreting the India-Nepal border dispute*. Retrieved from Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>.





Place Montesquieu, 1 bte L2.08.05, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique [www.uclouvain.be/psad](http://www.uclouvain.be/psad)