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Original Research

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ITS EFFECT ON FOREIGN POLICY IN NEPAL

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Abstract
Nepal is situated between India and China, so that the foreign policy of Nepal is significantly shaped by the political dynamics of these neighboring countries. In this context, the study analyzed how political instability inside the nation and neighboring nations affects on the foreign policy of Nepal what had the perception of stakeholders about the role of political instability and the current practice of foreign policy in Nepal. Main objective of this study focused on the effect of political instability on in the implementation of foreign policy in Nepal. The study followed the qualitative research method and interpretative paradigm of research paradigm and analyzed the interpretations and arguments of the stakeholders how political instabilities affected in the implementation of foreign policy. Participants were selected from Kathmandu valley. Secondary data were gathered from library and internet study. The political ideology of the ruling parties, personal benefit of the bureaucratic staffs and leaders of political parties played significant role to implement the foreign policy in Nepal. The political instability and lack of strong commitment and coordination with neighboring nations played role of activating foreign policy in Nepal, however, UN charter, the principle of Panchsheel and SARRC charter are the main guideline of foreign policy of Nepal.

Keywords: Foreign policy, Politics, Diplomacy, Relationship.

Introduction
n modern times, foreign policy is used as an umbrella term that is related to the overall strategies of a nation to establish relationships with other nations. Redd & Mintz (2013) note, " Foreign policy covers the diverse issues related to state affairs, including both soft and hard tools of foreign policy, such as military power and economic activities. Developing nations like Nepal have neither strong military power nor economic power. Thapa 2021) noted that a strong foreign policy requires political stability, as a nation cannot develop a balanced foreign policy amid a transitional political situation of the nation. In the context of Nepal, the same incident happened because Nepal cannot establish a sound foreign policy with its neighbors and is also unable to maintain political stability within the nation. Kafle (2079BS) noted that prosperity requires a sound relationship with neighbors. It showed that prosperity is needed to make sound relationships among the nations. Political instability affects foreign policy and prosperity in

Nepal. In this context, the study highlights how political instability creates problems in the practice of foreign policy in Nepal, and what the relationship is between political instability and the formulation of foreign policy, and why political stability is needed for the proper practice of foreign policy.

Geographically, Nepal is located between Indian and China. In the past, the foreign policy of Nepal had been limited to India and China. After unification, Nepal tried to establish relationships with other nations; however, its geographical location could not support extending the relationship with other countries. In this context, King Prithivi Narayan Shaha noted that 'Nepal is yam between two boulders" (Jaiswal, 2016, p.18). At the time, the foreign policy of Nepal was guided by the relationship with Tibet because Tibet used Nepali currency in its territory. Paudel (2022) highlighted that the relationship between Nepal and the East India Company did not run properly, resulting in the Anglo-Nepal War from November 1814 to March 1816. With the signed Sugauli treaty on March 4, 1816, a new course of foreign policy began in Nepal. After the Sugauli treaty, the British ruler captured the foreign policy of Nepal. In the grand design, British ruler Junga Bahadur came to power and institutionalized the British influence in the foreign policy of Nepal. (Sharma, 2006, pp.10-12). Till 1951, the foreign policy of Nepal was guided by the advice of the British ruler. After the end of the Rana regime in 1950, a new era began in Nepal in the field of foreign policy. Nepal has established friendly relations with other nations like France, China, the United States of America, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Nepal became a member of the United Nations in 1955, and Nepal followed the guidelines and principles of the UN in its foreign policy.

During the time of 1950 to 1960, Nepal followed the democratic system of government, and Nepal's foreign policy was also guided by democratic norms; however, political instability compelled Nepal to sign the peace and friendship treaty of 1950 that was held between Nepal and Indian. The treaty created doubt in neutral friendship, and another neighboring country, China, tried to influence Nepal through diplomatic and economic relationships. Upadhya (2008) highlighted that in 1959, BP Koirala became the Prime Minister of Nepal and tried to continue the mutual relationship with all neighbors of Nepal; however, his government was dissolved after a short time, and the Panchayat system of government was introduced in 1962. During the time of the Panchayat, Nepal's foreign policy was guided by the UN charter and the principles of Panchashil. Nepal established its reputation in the UN and was elected as a non-permanent member in 1988. After the end of the people's movement in 1990, a democratic system of government was formed, and the foreign policy of the nation was also guided by a democratic model. Although Nepal struggled to maintain a balanced relationship with its neighbors, India retained certain border disputes and political disagreements to serve its own interests. In 2006, Nepal became a republic, and the foreign policy of Nepal was also influenced by the contemporary political moment of the nation. In 2015, the constitution of Nepal was promulgated with new guidelines of foreign policy as, "The State shall conduct its international relations in a way that upholds Nepal’s dignity in the global community, based on the principle of sovereign equality, while protecting the country’s freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and national interest. (Article, 50 sub article 4). Except for constitutional provisions, other laws and policies related to foreign policies of Nepal, such as the Nepal Treaty Act, 1990, Foreign Policy Guidelines (2020), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) rules and directives, also play a role to practice foreign policy in Nepal, however, the situation of the implementation of foreign policy is weak in Nepal. In this context, the study analyzed the views

of politicians, experts, and researchers about the case of weak implementation of foreign policy in day-to-day practice and its relationship with the ongoing political instability of the nation.

Literature Reviews

The foreign policy of Nepal is guided by the political situation of the nation. After the establishment of democracy in Nepal, the country's foreign policy adapted to align with democratic principles. In this regard, Dahal (2018) notes, "Foreign policy of Nepal developed based on democratic norms and values by addressing the maximum interest of the nation. Nepal has strengthened its relationship with the neighboring country based on mutual understanding. (p.45). In the guidelines of democratic norms and values, Nepal signed the peace and friendship treaty in 1950 with India, which made the long course of foreign policy of Nepal; however, the treaty is still debatable at the public level. In this regard, Shukla (2006) noted that the treaty is the main cause of debate at the political level because the treaty clearly hits the sovereignty of the nation and tries to hold the overall foreign policy of Nepal. Based on that treaty, the Indian side held power in the internal politics of Nepal, as Rana (2013) highlights, " Each of the political movements India played a significant role; however, the role of other neighbors is less influential". It showed that Indian tried to run Nepal's foreign policy in its interest because political instability and weak political commitment of the national leaders play a role behind it. Rana has presented the situation of people movement II and justified his claim; however, the constitution and other laws and polices clearly mention the guidelines of the foreign policy of Nepal that is based on the maxim welfare of the people rather than being influenced by any neighboring nation.

Economic power and geographical location play an important role in the foreign policy of a nation. In the context of Nepal, that issue plays an important role because Indian covers the three sides of the border and China covers only one side, and India and China, both nations are many times larger than Nepal, so the foreign policy as well as the relationship of Nepal with its two neighbors is significant. In this regard, Bhattarai (2017) notes, "Nepal faces difficulties in implementing the foreign policy due to its geographical location and the powerful position of the neighbor"(p.34). For a long time, Nepal has tried to maintain an equal relationship with its two neighbors. Joshi & Rose (1966) mentioned that after being elected and becoming the prime minister of Nepal, Bisheshwor Prasad Koirala visited China in 1960 and tried to establish a relationship between the two nations based on mutual understanding and co-existence. Like that, in 1975, the late King Birendra tried to establish Nepal as a peace zone, which enhanced the foreign policy of Nepal on the guidelines of the alignment movement and principle of the UN charter; however, the Indian side sought to verify the resolution proposed by the king in an international forum. Since that time, the public and rulers of Nepal have felt humiliated as inferior to India. After that, the Indian side plays a role in implementing the foreign policy of Nepal. Subedi (2005) noted that after the establishment of democracy in 1990, the foreign policy of Nepal was more influenced by India; however, Nepal tried to balance on it by involving China in SAARC. He notes, "Nepalese foreign policy and diplomatic dealings in modern times"(45). Nepal has been facing political instability for a long time; however, a new constitution was promulgated in 2015 and continued the provision of foreign policy like previous constitutions. The Constitution of Nepal 2072 specifies that Nepal's international relations policies should be executed independently, in accordance with the United Nations charter, nonalignment, the principles of Panchasheel, international law, and global peace norms, aiming to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and national interests. (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The guideline of foreign policy adopted by Nepal faces problems in implementation due

to a lack of political stability and being overly influenced by the neighboring nations. The diplomatic power of Nepal cannot create space for open discussion, as Cornago (2022) highlighted that the lack of diplomatic discussion and negotiation creates problems in establishing relationships and friendship among the nations. In the context of Nepal, leading political parties neglect the guidelines of foreign policy and only think about personal benefit. Kharel (2024) noted that the lack of transparent activities of the leading political parties of Nepal creates problems in implementing the foreign policy of Nepal.

Overall reviews noted that political instability and the activities of political leaders create problems in implementing the foreign policy of Nepal. More than that, the over-influence of adjoining neighbors also creates a problem in foreign policy accomplishment in Nepal.

Theoretical Reviews

The foreign policy of a nation is determined by various theories like realism, liberalism, constructivism, and the government bargaining model. In the context of Nepal, foreign policy is based on realism that focuses on the national interest; however, sometimes it is associated with the organizational process model and government bargaining model**.** Devetak (2012) noted that realism of foreign policy emphasized national interest and established the relationship on the guidelines of national interest. It also emphasized the political situation of the nation and the perception of the neighboring nation. Since the time of Prithi Narayan Shaha, the foreign policy of Nepal has been based on realism. Goodin (2010) highlighted the major types of realism, such as classical realism, neo, and neoclassical realism. All types of realists think about the nature of human beings and the contemporary situation of the nation and formulate the foreign policy. In the same line, Jack (2008) highlighted the ethic of realism in foreign policy formulation as noted, "Theory of realism concentrates on ethics that are based on human nature and well-being of the people"(p.2). The theory of realism puts foreign policy at the centre of national interest; however, it also follows the organizational model and government bargaining model. Economic and military power equality functions on realism because foreign policy focuses on both military and non-military power. In the guideline of realism, foreign policy is implemented in contemporary geopolitics and the ongoing situation of the globe. In the context of Nepal, foreign policy is shaped based on realism because national interest is shaped by the geopolitical situation of the nation. Wright (1930) noted that both internal and external factors are equally responsible for implementing the foreign policy of a nation. The foreign policy of Nepal is based on internal forces that are influenced by the intentions of neighboring nations. Wright (1930) further highlighted that the foreign policy of a nation passes through the National interest and the interest of neighboring nations. The concept is related to the realism that Jaiswal (2016) noted that the foreign policy of Nepal passes through the trajectory of national interest and the geopolitical situation of the globe. It showed that the foreign policy of Nepal is based on realism; however, it is developing with the connection of other theories like political bargaining and liberalism, but the peace and friendship treaty of 1950 holds foreign policy on the guidelines of realism.

Research Methodology

The study followed the qualitative method and used an interpretive research paradigm to fulfill the objectives of this study. Qualitative research method and interpretive research paradigm help to explore the issue related to other issues. In this study, the relationship between political instability and its effects on the foreign policy of Nepal is examined. Both secondary and

primary sources of data were used in this study. Secondary data were collected through library and internet research. Books, articles, journals, reports, government policies, and theses and dissertations were the main sources of secondary data. Primary data were collected through open survey questions. Questions were related to the objectives and research questions of this study. The questions were asked to the policy makers and experts of foreign policy related to Nepal. Due to the nature of the study, a convenience sampling method was employed to select five individuals as participants for this research. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews and categorized according to the theme of the study and analyzed through paragraph description. Due to maintaining ethical issues, pseudonyms have been given to the participants, such as p1 is used to address the first participant, p2 is used to address the second participant, p3 is used to address the third participant, p4 is used to address the fourth participant, and p5 is used to address the fifth participant. The economic status of the respondents is as follows.

P1: 45-year-old male with a master's degree in international relations and involved in a government job. He has more than fifteen years of experience on the job. He has published books and articles on foreign policy related to Nepal.

P2: 50-year-old female with a PhD in political science and involved in the teaching profession. She has published books and articles about international law and foreign policy in Nepal.

P3: 40-year-old female who holds a master's degree in international relations and is involved in national politics.

P4: 65-year-old male involved in political party. He passed his bachelor's and was involved in the foreign department of a political party.

P5: 53 53-year-old male passed PhD in international law, involved in research. He also participated as an expert for the Nepalese government.

Relationship Between Politics and Foreign Policies

International and national politics play a significant role in determining the foreign policy of any nation. In the context of Nepal's international political environment, national polices and activities of leading political parties play an important role in determining the foreign policy of Nepal. In this regard, p1 notes, "In the context of Nepal, political instabilities create hurdles to implement the foreign policy. The government has changed in a short period. With the change of government, the foreign policy implementation process also changed." (*Personal Interview, 2025*). He focused on the role of political party leaders in the implementation of foreign policy in Nepal. In this regard, it is relevant to quote Fearon (1998). He focused on how the foreign policy of a nation is influenced by domestic activities related to the political functions of the political parties, economic upheaval. In the same line, p2 highlights, "Politics plays an important role in determining the foreign policy in Nepal because after the change of government, a new dimension of foreign policy can be seen. Sometimes Nepal followed China, and sometimes followed India. The scenario showed that the foreign policy of Nepal is guided by a political system"(*Personal Interview,2025*). p3 argued differently about the role of politics in the determination and implementation of foreign policy and highlighted that " Foreign policy of a nation cannot be led only by politics because it is related to global or regional issues such as poverty, economic empowerment, and environmental protection, so that I think domestic politics is only a supporting factor to determine the foreign policy. (*Personal Interview, 2025)*. The argument of p3 is different from p1 and p2 because p3 is more focused on international factors. In the same line, p4 noted that, "Political parties are the main actors to make policy and program

related to foreign policy. The foreign policy of Nepal is also based on the politics of the nation. Political instability is the main cause of creating confusion on the foreign policy of Nepal" *(Personal Interview, 2025*). He focused on domestic factors and the role of the determination and implementation of foreign policy in Nepal. In this regard, Kaarbo (2015) highlights, "Internal factors of the nation play a role in implementing the foreign policy of Nepal" (p.56). Programs of government and non-government organizations, major political parties' functions, economic and tourism are the main internal activities that play a role in foreign policies. In the same line, p5 highlighted that, "For a long time, the foreign policy of Nepal has been guided by the national politics. After establishing the democracy in Nepal, political disputes create problems of foreign policy" (Personal Interview, 2025). He emphasized that the internal issues of the nation create challenges in the execution of foreign policy.

Foreign Polices and Political Instability

In Nepal, political instabilities create problems in foreign policy. In this context, p1 highlights, "The Contemporary political situation of Nepal is guided by political instability. The current constitutional provision of Nepal focuses on inclusive democracy, which creates instability in Nepal. The current election system is the main cause of political instability" (*Personal Interview, 2025*). Political instability affected foreign policy, as P2 expressed, "Political instability is created in Nepal due to long-term political disputes. Since 2006, political disputes began in Nepal that affected foreign policy" (Personal Interview, 2025). P3 also highlighted that political instability creates problems in the implementation of foreign policy and noted that, " Nepal loses its' dignity in the international arena because unstable political situation and personal interest of political leaders create disputes on foreign policy. After the people's movement in 2006, Nepal began a new diplomatic relationship with other nations; however, the politics and economic development of China and India directly affect the foreign policy of Nepal" (Personal Interview, 2025). In the Same line, p4 noted that, "In the context of Nepal, foreign policy changed with the transformation of government. If a democratic government is formed in Nepal, its foreign policy will be implemented for the welfare of the South. Like that, the government of the left shows softness toward the north and brings a program in support of the north. Foreign policy of Nepal developed by triangular relationship among south, north, and west" (*Personal Interview, 2025*). Both political and economic factors equally play a role in implementing foreign policy in Nepal, as Bhattarai (2017) notes, "Small and economically deprived nations like Nepal depend on foreign aid, so that foreign aid and bilateral support play a role in implementing the foreign policy" (p.1). In the same line, p4 notes, "Political instability is one of the causes that creates problems for economic development, a weak economic situation, and personal interest of political leaders huddle to implement foreign policy in Nepal. The geopolitical situation and geographical positioning of Nepal are also constrained by its two powerful neighboring countries. *(Personal Interview, 2025*). In the context of Nepal, the interest of two powerful neighbors also plays a role in implementing the fearing policy. Partem (1983) highlighted that Nepal is a landlocked nation surrounded by Indian and China, so the foreign policy of Nepal is bound by the interests of these two nations. It shows the difficult situation of Nepal in the direction of the implementation of foreign policy. In this regard, p3 argued, " in Nepal, instability is created by the weak and fragile foreign policy because international influence or the influence of neighbors is responsible for creating an unstable political situation in Nepal" (personal interview, 2025). In some cases, Indian influence creates problems in maintaining peace and stability in Nepal. In this regard, Baral (2012) mentioned that India claimed that Nepal is located in the security umbrella

of India and also wants to control and run the foreign policy of Nepal in the interest of India. In the same line, p1 notes that, "In some cases, India tried to directly influence Nepali politics that occurred during the time of promulgating the constitution of Nepal 2015. India blocked the border during the time of launching the new constitution in Nepal. India has historically perceived Nepal as a subordinate state, which has occasionally contributed to political instability " *(personal interview, 2025*). Due to economic backwardness, foreign policy, and the political situation of Nepal, development is based on the thought of small states. Spykman (1944) noted that small states have no power to preserve their interests, so that these states talked about peace and used soft power to extend the diplomatic relationship among nations. Nepal also wants to recognize the nation by using cultural and social power rather than military force and economic power. Rothstein (1968) highlighted that" Small states are involved in multilateral forums and implement foreign policy on the principles and guidelines of multilateral organizations. In this regard, p2 explained, "Nepal actively participated in UN, SAARC, BIMSTEC, and tries to implement the foreign policy to fulfill the national interest; however, political instability and regional political tussle created the problems in the implementation of foreign policy" (Personal Interview 2025). Alesina and Perotti (1996) mentioned that unrest, political violence, and frequent changes of administration create problems in the implementation of foreign policy in Nepal.

The political situation of a nation plays a significant role in implementing the foreign policy. For a long time, Nepal has been facing political disputes that affect the diplomatic relationship among the neighboring nations. Nepal could not maintain neutrality in its relationship with neighboring nations. The influence of the south was strong in the foreign policy of Nepal, but now the north and west are also increasing their influence in the foreign policy of Nepal. The foreign policy of Nepal neither respects the UN charter nor the Non-Aligned Movement.

Conclusion

Multiple factors like culture, religion, economic strength, bilateral business, political ideology, and relationships at the public level play important roles in implementing the foreign policy of a nation; however, the political stability of a nation plays a significant role in implementing foreign policy and diplomatic relationships among the nations. Political instability creates problems for economic enhancement and infrastructure development, which directly influences the economic diplomacy and foreign policy of Nepal. Borderless nationality and public-level relationship bring certain problems in foreign policy because these soft factors emotionally affect the neutrality of the diplomatic relationship. Participants claimed that political instability and emotional ideological attachment of political parties create the problem in the implementation of foreign policy. Democratic parties focused on making friends with the south and west, and the communist party emphasized enhancing the relationship with the north and socialist nations. Indian influence is high in Nepal, which is also responsible for political instability and violence. The unstable political situation creates hurdles to implementing the foreign policy in a dignified way. Due to a lack of proper implementation of foreign policy, Nepal is continuously losing self-dignity on the international level. Nepal should be conscious about the appropriate use of foreign policy, which is needed to maintain its dignity on the international level, so that the government should be conscious of the matter of foreign policy.

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