

GEOPOLITICS OF SOUTH ASIA: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

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Abstract

South Asian geopolitics has experienced a new development. In light of the 21st century being known as the Asian century, geopolitical dynamics has become a pressing issue. Since the presence of the key global actors in South Asia has been rising, analyzing the new trends in the region's geopolitics is becoming more important. An essential question for the study of South Asian geopolitics is how many dimensions of interactions between China and Pakistan, India and Russia, and the United States and China have an impact on the region's geopolitics. It is crucial to examine from a variety of perspectives how the complex interactions between these super and global powers have complicated South Asian geopolitics. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the geopolitical trends in South Asia and the problems that have affected them. These difficulties are essentially the core issues of this paper. The theoretical aspects of geopolitics for the study of South Asian geopolitics are assessed in the paper. The development and the pragmatic advancement of its geopolitics have also been extensively examined. To examine the current pragmatic geopolitics of the South Asian region, the paper has also discussed the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform (CRSDP), and the Global Security Initiatives (GSI) of China. This paper has also evaluated the potential effects of the US State Partnership Program (SPP) on Nepal's geopolitics and the geopolitics of the Himalayas in South Asia. It has adapted the qualitative method using descriptive and critical analytical approach. The paper concludes that the South Asian nations should work together to resolve the multilateral regional concerns with external actors without compromising any state's national interests to make geopolitics in the region conducive to peace, harmony, development, cooperation, and prosperity. They have to resolve their difficulties in accordance with their respective diplomatic traditions and foreign policy tenets when it is impossible to reach a consensus. Because each state has distinct political, economic, and social dynamics, any country should avoid interfering with how other nations perceive



South Asian geopolitics because doing so could lead to crisis and additional unrest in the region's geopolitics.

Keywords

Global Security Initiatives, Himalayan Geopolitics, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Pragmatic Geopolitics of South Asia, Theory of Geopolitics.

Resumo

A geopolítica do Sul da Ásia registou um novo desenvolvimento. Tendo em conta que o século XXI é conhecido como o século asiático, a dinâmica geopolítica tornou-se uma questão premente. Uma vez que a presença dos principais atores globais no Sul da Ásia tem vindo a aumentar, a análise das novas tendências na geopolítica da região está a tornar-se mais importante. Uma questão essencial para o estudo da geopolítica do Sul da Ásia é saber quantas dimensões das interações entre a China e o Paquistão, a Índia e a Rússia, e os Estados Unidos e a China têm impacto na geopolítica da região. É fundamental analisar, a partir de uma variedade de perspetivas, a forma como as complexas interações entre estas superpotências e potências globais complicaram a geopolítica do Sul da Ásia. Além disso, é fundamental investigar as tendências geopolíticas no Sul da Ásia e os problemas que as afetaram. Estas dificuldades são essencialmente as questões centrais do presente documento. Os aspetos teóricos da geopolítica para o estudo da geopolítica do Sul da Ásia são avaliados no documento. O desenvolvimento e o avanço pragmático da sua geopolítica também foram amplamente examinados. A fim de examinar a atual geopolítica pragmática da região da Ásia do Sul, o documento discute igualmente a Estratégia do Indo-Pacífico, a Plataforma de Diálogo sobre Segurança China-Rússia (CRSDP) e as Iniciativas de Segurança Global (GSI) da China. Este artigo também avalia os efeitos potenciais do Programa de Parceria Estatal dos EUA (SPP) na geopolítica do Nepal e na geopolítica dos Himalaias no Sul da Ásia. Adotou-se o método qualitativo utilizando uma abordagem analítica descritiva e crítica. O documento conclui que as nações do Sul da Ásia devem trabalhar em conjunto para resolver as preocupações regionais multilaterais com atores externos, sem comprometer os interesses nacionais de qualquer Estado, a fim de tornar a geopolítica da região propícia à paz, à harmonia, ao desenvolvimento, à cooperação e à prosperidade. Quando é impossível chegar a um consenso, os Estados têm de resolver as suas dificuldades de acordo com as respetivas tradições diplomáticas e princípios de política externa. Uma vez que cada Estado tem uma dinâmica política, económica e social distinta, qualquer país deve evitar interferir na forma como as outras nações percecionam a geopolítica do Sul da Ásia, porque isso pode conduzir a uma crise e a mais agitação na geopolítica da região.

Palavras-chave

Iniciativas de segurança global, Geopolítica dos Himalaias, Estratégia do Indo-Pacífico, Geopolítica pragmática do Sul da Ásia, Teoria da Geopolítica.

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HARI PRAKASH CHAND¹

Introduction

Major geopolitical actors affecting South Asian geopolitics are the USA, China, India, and Russia. The USA is a crucial factor in the changing global geopolitical context. Global and regional politics changes based on the changing interests of political actors involved in a particular geography. External political actors engage in certain geography through their various activities to expand and defend their global interests. When multiple actors with multiple interests focus at a time in the same geography, a political game is introduced that creates confrontation and competition among them. In the meantime, cooperation is the only way for bilateral and multilateral affairs in International Relations to maintain peace and prosperity. This study has mainly focused on assessing South Asian geopolitics and Himalayan geopolitics. In doing so, major political and strategic cooperation and confrontation held in the South Asian region are analyzed from the perspective of geopolitics.

Studying South Asian geopolitics and current Himalayan geopolitics separately, placing Nepal at the core of Himalayan geopolitics is difficult because the geo-strategic importance of Nepal is equally important to South Asian geopolitics for global powers. Because of rising China and emerging India, the Himalayan geopolitics in South Asia is another emerging issue of South Asian peace and stability. As the importance of Himalayan geopolitics is increasing, global powers are concentrating in the region, along with their 21st century global interests. Halford Mackinder termed such a situation as Heartland. The Heartland is the geopolitical theory proposed by Sir Halford Mackinder. Iseri (2009) writes, "I have considered the US grand strategy as a combination of wartime and peacetime strategies and argued that the Caspian region and its hinterland, where I call the Eurasian Heartland, to use the term of Sir Halford Mackinder"(p. 26). Ismailov and Papava define the Heartland as the area where the continental masses of

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Eurasia were concentrated and served as the pivot of all the geopolitical transformations of historical dimensions within the World Island. Europe's development was driven by the need to respond to pressure created by the outside world, especially from Central Asia. A similar situation in South Asian and the Himalayan region, where Nepal is located in the central part, has developed recently. Against this backdrop, this paper mainly focuses on debating South Asian geopolitics, including instability created due to the US involvement in the Himalayan geopolitical region.

Methods and materials

Philosophically, the research focuses on investigating the features of the reality of geopolitics. Recent South Asian geopolitics, Himalayan geopolitics, and the Nepali trilateral geopolitical model are analyzed based on the theoretical reality of geopolitics. Geopolitical and theoretical ontology is dealt with in this research, which is what kind of knowledge exists. The paper adopts the qualitative method using an analytical and critical approach, and this paper focuses on secondary data. Reviewing historical documents is a tool for data collection. This study tries to collect qualitative data as secondary sources. Scholarly Journals, textbooks, policy reports, governmental publications, and some authentic websites are used as sources of qualitative secondary data. Textual analysis is the tool for data analysis to conclude via critical observation and analysis.

Debates, results, and analysis

Geopolitical debates

Tuathail and Agnew define geopolitics as a controversial power exercise by political actors by which intellectuals of the states localize international politics and represent it as a world specialized by unique types of places, people, and dramas (1992, p. 190). They categorize geopolitics into formal geopolitics and practical geopolitics. As per the definition of Tuathail and Agnew, formal and practical geopolitics seems valid as states or political actors represent the formal geopolitics, whereas the localization of international politics by intellectuals is more related to pragmatic or practical geopolitics. Linking with the geopolitical concept of Tuathail and Agnew, they further argue that the confrontation and massive struggle between the powerful and expansionist East against the democratic West is the most dominant geopolitical discourse of this period. This discourse seems influenced by ideological clashes. Expansionist East and powerful West is guided by the Western notion of democracy and their perspective toward the Eastern world. Integrating ideological ground in geopolitics makes it quite controversial in its traditional definition. The traditional definitions of geopolitics are guided by the concept of geographical settings and political processes (Gokmen, 2010, p. 16). The term 'political processes' does not care about ideological political actors but focuses on all kinds of political actors who concentrate on a certain geography to achieve their targeted goals or interests. Therefore, Tuathail and Agnew have defined geopolitics from the Western perspective.



Along with inventing the term 'geopolitics' by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899, it was more popularized in the academic field (Gokmen, 2010, p.13). Academics have also known geopolitics as the analysis between geographic influence and power relationships in world affairs (Chand, 2021, p. 62). The countries with huge geography have a greater influence on domestic political actors in small states. Nepal is an example of such a situation. Nepal's total updated area is 147,516 Sq. Km (The Kathmandu Post, 2020, para. 5). India's total area is 3,287,263 Sq. Km. Similarly, China's total approximate area is 9,600,000 Sq. Km. Thus, Nepal is almost 22.284 times and 65.077 times smaller than India and China, respectively. These two immediate neighbours have greater influence on Nepal and Nepali political parties than other friendly neighbours, except the superpower. Therefore, the definition of geopolitics is valid in the case of Nepal.

Granieri defines geopolitics as an approach to studying recent world affairs in history, culture, tradition, political practices, and geography, or... it is a study of the "realities and mentality of localities (2015, p.492). While studying geopolitics; history, culture, tradition, political practices, geography, etc., are integral to the research for precise results and conclusions on geopolitics. As per Granieri, there are serious reasons behind regional and global conflict or confrontation between and among the nations. For example, there is no single reason behind the competition and confrontation in the recent Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Korean Peninsula issues, the Israel-Palestine conflict, Iran-Saudi Arabia affairs, Turkey-Syria relations, and even the US-China trade war. Reasons from various perspectives are responsible for such kinds of inter-state conflicts. These bilateral and multilateral issues are linked with the concept of realities and mentalities of localities.

Scholars believe that geopolitical research, study, and analysis start with a map of certain geography or states, but it does not end there. The geographical map itself is nothing unless the psychological construct of statesmanship is considered a research unit while researching geopolitics because leaders' actions and reactions guided by their psychological construct play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping geopolitics. For example, there are maps of Nepal and India. But, the state leaders' role is vital for harmonious Nepal-India relations. Their psychology and decision-making capacity lead bilateral relations and its possible consequences. As the map comes first while talking about geopolitics, it has its roots between 1880 and 1910 (Granieri, 2015, p. 492). Though the term 'geopolitics' was coined in 1899, its debate is even old than 1899. Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote a book entitled "The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783" in 1890, which mainly deals with the supreme importance of sea power in national historical dominance. This notion argues that controlling the seas was a major source of Britain's rise as a world power in the early phase of the modern world (Kennedy, 1983). As geopolitics is significantly controlled by the action of great powers to become a superpower, controlling the seas by Britain is also a way of becoming the superpower in that era. Hence, an informal debate on geopolitics links with this event in Britain.

Mahan's book focuses on the general history of the United States and Europe in a specific context to examine the influence of naval power in the course of that history (Mahan, 1898, p. iii). This book was published in 1890 as the first edition. It has focused on how the great powers try to develop their naval power to control the seas to become a superpower. The book has debated a lot about geopolitics, even though it does not focus



on the term. Later, Rudolf Kjellen invented the term, and it became the formal discourse in world academia. As Mahan geopolitically focuses on the politics of the sea, Mackinder (1943) focuses on the Heartland, whose foundation is the physical basis for strategic thinking (p.598). Strategy in political science deals with power politics, which concentrates on definite geography. The concept of Heartland was developed based on the geographical significance of the pivot position (Chand, 2021, p. 141). As written by Chand, quoted from Mackinder (1943), three key geographical aspects are integrated in the Heartland. First is the lowland plain on the face of the globe, second is some great plain navigable rivers, and the third is the grassland zone of the Heartland. Thus, the Heartland deals with the sea powers to the land powers and geopolitics, in this way, developed in a different form by the 1950s decade.

Klieman writes:

In brief, geopolitics can be defined as what great and superpowers are involved in, what they do exercise in the geography, and what they are best at for establishing themselves as powerful players. The variables that arise in physical geography, including geography, climate, and demography, still translate either into property or liabilities, openness or constraints, as in the age of empires for growing, inhabiting, or declining superpowers. The major point is that geopolitics provides the context—the landscape, the backdrop, the arena—in which great powers concentrate (2015, p.4).

The final discussion of geopolitics can be traced from Klieman's above argument that geopolitics is the process, actions, reactions, strategy, counter-strategy, and balancing of enemies' power by powerful political actors to establish themselves as dominant player in certain geography. In doing so, some existing powers weaken, and some new powers rise. This process is never-ending, either on the seas or on the land. Thus, nineteenth-century geopolitics seems concentrated on the seas' politics, whereas twenty-first-century geopolitics equally imposed on the seas and land politics.

Historical geopolitics of South Asia

As 21st-century geopolitics focuses on both seas and land power play, South Asian geopolitics seems comparatively dominated by land power politics, and thus it represents land geopolitics. This section focuses on South Asian land geopolitics only escaping sea politics like sea politics in the Indian Ocean, which is its limitation. In addition, this paper focuses on Nepal and India, where the other South Asian states' issues come as cross-cutting themes.

South Asian states have undergone significant changes since independence (Shastri, 2001, p. 1). The modern geopolitics of South Asia started from the independent movement in South Asia. The geography and history of the South Asian states are different. Therefore, their potentiality, characteristics, and execution cannot be directly compared. The enormous Indian state was the center of British power in South Asia. Pakistan was formally founded on 14 August 1947, whereas India was on 15 August 1947, just a day ahead of Pakistan. Similarly, Bangladesh came into existence on 26 March 1971, almost two and a half decades later than Pakistan and India. Sri Lanka and



Nepal's status were separate states, where Sri Lanka was controlled as a colony and Nepal had faced the military invasion of the British Empire (Shastri, 2001, p.2). Like Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan in South Asia is the least well-known of all the independent countries of Asia (Arts, 1978, p. 1). The Maldives became independent from Britain in 1966. Thus, only two nations (Nepal and Bhutan) in South Asia were never colonized by the British Empire, and the rest of the South Asian countries were directly controlled and colonized.

The modern geopolitics in South Asia traced back to the establishment of the United Nations Organization and the decolonization movement in the world. Therefore, because of different geopolitical characteristics, South Asian countries have their unique geopolitical circumstances and political potentiality, which cope with global geopolitical actors time and again because South Asian geopolitics is important for global actors to increase their influence in the region.

South Asia has a great cultural heritage and is one of the heartlands in the world, with almost one-fourth of the earth's population (Chapman, 2009). South Asia is the center of Hinduism and Buddhism. As per the various scholars, Hinduism evolved around 2300 B.C. and 1500 B.C. in the Indus Valley. It is also known as the Indus Valley civilization, which is one of the key civilizations in the world. The latest Buddhist civilization evolved from Nepal (UNESCO, n.d., para. 1). The Lord Buddha was born in 623 B.C. in the famous place of Lumbini, which became a Buddhist pilgrimage station in the world. The Lord Buddha is the founder of Buddhism who was born and grew up in the current Nepali territory. Similarly, Christianity and Islam are other major religious belief systems in South Asia which were evolved out of the region. There is a competition for religious influence among the major religions in South Asia. Many Churches are increasing day by day, and people have been changing their religious beliefs from other religions to Christian values. Such kinds of religious cultures are also crucial aspects of geopolitics. Based on the authors' observation, the same political actors sometimes become cultural and religious actors, and sometimes they mobilize the cultural and religious actors to achieve the political goal. Hence, the South Asian cultural heritages are important for westerners who are religiously guided by Christianity and politically are founders of neoliberal values.

The political activities of intra-regional and inter-regional actors are another crucial factor in geopolitics. As the largest country in South Asia, first, India's behavior towards other outer geopolitical actors from the region (like the USA, Russia, the EU, China, etc.) and vice versa is a key aspect of the study of South Asian geopolitics. Second, India's behavior towards other South Asian countries and vice versa is also equally important. Mackinder's geopolitical vision and its revival cannot be escaped while analyzing South Asian geopolitics. The geopolitical vision of Mackinder is revived by various authors in different forms (Chapman, 2009, p.285). Cohen is one out of many who revived Mackinder's geopolitical approach. He proposed two concepts in the geopolitical domain. The first is the higher-level concept of the geostrategic region, and the second is the lower-level concept of the geopolitical region (Cohen, 1963). Geo-strategic areas are multi-specific in economic and cultural terms, but trade orientations are single-specific, and there are also various arenas where power can be projected (Chapman, 2009, p.285). Such kind of power is relevant in analyzing India-global power relations and India-other South Asian



Countries relations. The first is related to Cohen's higher-level concept of the geostrategic region, and later seems more linked to his lower-level concept of the geopolitical region. Cohen's two levels are quite relevant to analyze not only South Asian geopolitics but also Nepali geopolitics equally.

From the above description, it seems that South Asian geopolitics is distinctive and unique. Cohen perceives South Asia as an independent geopolitical region. Chapman writes:

Cohen categorizes it as an independent geopolitical region, the only such on earth that does not include any geostrategic regions. It is sufficient to be a subcontinent in its own right; It is protected from Eurasian geopolitical powers by the Great Wall of the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, and other mountains on the northwestern border from the West Asia, and from the lower, but heavier forests of Myanmar and Indo-China. All the stages, controlled by imperial powers before the British had created land empires, which at one time or another had embraced the entire geopolitical realm, and this was acknowledged by the British when they moved their capital to Delhi in 1911. If the whole South Asian subcontinent was united, the region clearly would have defense lines, and it has options for access to a self-sufficient or trade-dependent maritime world. But if the region is divided, the landscape changes (2009, p.287).

Hence, from Cohen's above analysis, the South Asian region and its geopolitics had not relied on other global geopolitical actors and the geopolitics of other continents. Therefore, as per Cohen's perception, the South Asian geopolitics was independent of pressure or influence of the global actors in that period. But, in the 21st century, the scenarios have massively changed, and we cannot claim that the recent South Asian geopolitics is still independent and out of pressure and influence of other global powers.

Contemporary geopolitics

To investigate the recent pragmatic geopolitics of South Asia, the role and influence of global and regional actors are predominant. There are several regional and global actors; however, to review and analyze the role of all regional and global actors is very difficult in this section. This section is focused on the role of the USA and China in South Asia, especially their relations with India, linking with only some highlighted events or cooperation. There are so many issues and sectors like technology, cyber security, space programming, maritime and naval exercises, counter-terrorism, etc (Khan, 2017) on which the USA and India have been cooperating however, this section is focused only on US-India civil nuclear cooperation-2008, Indo-Pacific Strategy-2017, and newly started Global Security Initiatives (GSI) by China and their implications in South Asian geopolitics.

Since 9/11, US-relations with India has become friendly, cooperative, cordial, and friendly (Khan, 2013, p. 241). Especially due to India's partnership with the former USSR, the relations between them was not harmonious during the Cold War era. Along with



declining and dissolution of the former USSR, half of the bloc of the world ended in the 1990s, and that space was eventually taken over by Western liberal values and capitalist ideology. This situation influenced the Indian government led by P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991. The finance minister under his government Manamohan Singh, an economist by profession who studied at the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford, played a crucial role in reforming India's economic policy and adopted a neoliberal economic model². After reforming the economic policy of India after the end of the Cold War, India ideologically became close to the USA and started the harmonious relations between both countries. Then, cooperation between the countries began.

One of the most important agreements between India and the USA is civil nuclear cooperation. The agreement of this cooperation was drafted and agreed upon in July 2007. Jacob writes that after more than two years of dialogue and negotiations, the civilian nuclear agreement between India and the United States is in the stage of full implementation (2007, para. 1). It was signed on 1 October 2008 (Hosur, 2010, p. 435). Turning to a decade-long partnership on civilian nuclear issues, both sides have begun preparations at the site in India for the AP 1000 reactors to be built by Westinghouse. It is assumed to be one of the critical issues for China. Not only the Chinese but also Indian left political parties had perceived it as the US strategic tool to draw "India in as a tool" for achieving its global strategic goal (Jacob, 2007, para. 2). Because of ideological similarity, the Indian left political parties were close to the Chinese perception on this issue. The People's Daily writes, "...The Indo-US nuclear deal has strong symbolic meaning and significance for India to achieve her dream of a powerful nation in the world" (People's Daily, 2007, para. 2). This indicates Chinese suspicion towards India that India may move ahead to becoming nuclear power by producing nuclear weapons based on civil nuclear cooperation with the USA. But in the meantime, China perceives it differently as well. The same newspaper writes that India is in dire need of energy. Lack of electricity has hampered the normal life and sustainable economic development of the people. Civil nuclear energy development will help India reduce energy shortages and guarantee sustainable economic growth (para. 1). Thus, Indo-US relations is under the Chinese observation quite suspiciously, which influences the South Asian geopolitics seriously.

Mohan and Agrawal perceive the civil-nuclear deal between India and the USA as a new dimension of Indian military diplomacy in the 21st century (2019, p. 1). As nuclear issues are increasing in the region and throughout the globe, India also has become one of the key stakeholders of these issues in the world, though India has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Along with the USA, India has agreements on civil nuclear cooperation with 14 countries (Mohan & Agrawal, 2019, p.2) quoted from "Important Agreements", Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India. Such kind of cooperation has established India as one of the key actors in the field of 21st-century global nuclear diplomacy though India had already tested 'Operation Smiling Buddha'- or Pokharan-I as India's first nuclear test³. Many Indian scholars believe that India's growing status in the geopolitical arena has been partly driven by a wider range of its

² <https://www.indiaonline.com/prime-ministers-of-india/manmohan-singh>

³ "India's Nuclear Weapons Program, Smiling Buddha 1974", Nuclear Weapons Archive.



involvement in the nuclear energy sector and facilitated its presence in the global nuclear club. Though it is peaceful civil-nuclear energy cooperation to fulfill the energy crisis in India, other South Asian scholars perceive the cooperation as the entry point of Indo-US strategic nuclear cooperation in the long run. Hussain claims that it was the massive desire of the USA to involve India through various means to contain China's growing influence in the region through meaningful strategic partnerships. The Indo-US civil nuclear deal is the result of such a strategic goal of the USA in South Asia (2017, p. 13).

Russia, China, and Pakistan are the other three key nuclear actors in South Asian geopolitics. China and Russia are suspicious of India due to Indo-US nuclear cooperation. Etzioni writes that The United States of America had long regarded India as the leader of the non-aligned movement but tilted later on toward the Soviet Union and later Russia (2015, para. 2). During the Cold War era, India was close to the former USSR. India imported most of the weapons from the former USSR and later from Russia on the one hand and it reformed her economic policy and adopted a neoliberal economic model on the other hand and tried thus to maintain strategic equidistance between two great actors. Meanwhile, the George W. Bush administration decided to include India in the Western bloc and help keep China in check.

During the 1962 border war with China, the USA did not openly support India but the USA tried to balance between them. The USA did not become ready to bear the cost of its relations with China and Pakistan. These two nations were strategic partners of the USA during the Cold War era because the USA had a grand strategy to split the communist bloc and create confrontation between the former USSR and China which was achieved in the 1970s. To achieve such a strategic goal, the USA tried to maintain balanced relations with India and China during the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. To counterbalance China and the USA, pragmatically, India tilted towards the former USSR during the Cold War period. Its effect was elongated even after the end of the Cold War and still, India has been facing some geopolitical dilemmas to cooperate with prominent national, regional, and global issues with those sorts of global actors. In this way, South Asian geopolitics has become critical.

The next crucial geopolitical trend developed in the second decade of the 21st century is the formation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) which has made the South Asian geopolitics further turmoil. Pompeo writes, "In Vietnam, in November 2017, US President Donald J. Trump framed a vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific in which all countries achieve prosperity side by side as sovereign, and independent states" (2019, p. 4). The goal of the IPS is free, fair, and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, good governance, and freedom of the seas (Pompeo, 2019, p. 4). According to the report published by the Department of Defense of the USA, the IPS is focused to:

Respect for sovereignty and independence of all nations;

Ensure peaceful resolution of disputes;

Maintain free, fair, and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent agreements, and connectivity; and

Adhere to international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight. (Department of Defense, 2019, p. 6)



But, Chinese scholars understand that the Indo-Pacific strategy is to connect the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, to prevent the rise of China from a geopolitical point of view, and to protect the leadership and interests of US allied countries in the region (Chen, 2018, para. 2). A researcher from Fudan University Lin Minwang believes that the IPS is still a concept that requires to be constructed and the quadrilateral security dialogue formed of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia – is only the beginning of the construction of the Indo-Pacific security region. Similarly, Chen writes that many Chinese scholars understand that the IPS is an expansion and extension of the Obama administration's 'rebalancing' strategy (2018, para. 4). Wang Xiaowen, a scholar at Beijing Language and Culture University, perceives that the Indo-Pacific strategy is essentially to expand and deepen the "rebalancing" to strategically connect the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Zhao describes, "Obama's rebalancing strategy is the center of US worldwide policy adjustment since Obama came into power in the USA... It has strengthened the US strategic influence and presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which has created some pressure on China's rise (2018, p. 87). Analyzing the strategic goal of IPS and Obama's rebalancing Asia strategy, these two initiatives have the same strategic goal. Hence, it can be said that the US global policy continued differently after Trump's rise in the USA in 2017, which has similar implications in pragmatic geopolitics in South Asia.

The realist approach mainly guides the US global policy (Byers & Schweller, 2024, para. 1). Trump's second comeback to the White House on 20 January 2025 and his new declaration on his foreign policy matters has further proven the US absolute realist approach in its global policy. In addition, US-allied countries have also incorporated themselves into the similar framework. Therefore, the USA cooperates with its allied countries on economic, political, and strategic fronts throughout the globe whereas strategic competition and confrontation are always there among its allied countries as well. Wars conducted during the Cold War era, the Iraq and Afghan wars, intervention in Libya, US involvement in the Syrian civil war, confrontation with Iran, Russia, and North Korea, the trade war with China, the South China Sea disputes, etc. are some examples of US realist approach towards her global affairs with anti-US-states. The same approach the USA has been applying in the Indo-Pacific region through the Indo-Pacific strategy especially targeting China's rise. Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova, and Safranchuk write that the new concept of the "Indo-Pacific Region" (IPR) is generally observed as a response by the USA and allied countries to China's growing influence in important strategic areas of the Pacific and Indian Oceans (2021, p.72). Though the IPS is initiated by the USA including her like-minded friendly countries based on her global strategic goal, other allied countries have their own approaches towards China. India does not want to directly confront China because of her complex interdependence. Bilateral trade is one of the important factors of such interdependence for India which does not encourage to go into direct confrontation or war with China. Moreover, still, India believes in the nonalignment principle at least where her interests do not confront the situation. Japan believes in rules that deny unilateral actions to be taken by any global powers. Australian trade is quite cautious regarding frictions in trade relations with China. Because of such diverse pragmatic approaches of allied countries of IPS, there is a slim chance to comprehensively afford to implement the US realist approach towards the Indo-Pacific region as well as in South Asian geopolitics not only because of allied



countries' diverse practices but also due to China's multilateral relations with them. Despite having different approaches of allied countries of IPS, the USA is trying to pull all members into her same framework of global policy which has further worsened the South Asian geopolitics.

Not only the US realist approach but also China's and Russian approaches towards IPS have made South Asian geopolitics more complex. China has perceived the IPS as a US containment policy toward China. The Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said, "the IPS is 'bound to fail' as it is promoted by Washington to 'contain' China"(Outlook, 2022, para. 1). The same report says, "IPS is raising more vigilance, concern, and critical issues in the international community in general and in the Asia-Pacific region in particular", the Chinese foreign minister said. Similarly, he said, "the Asia-Pacific geopolitical region better replaced by a plateau of peaceful development. 'Efforts to turn Asia-Pacific into a bloc, NATO or the Cold War will never succeed' (Press Trust of India, 2022, para.7). The same statement was published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (MoFA of China, 2022). Nepali media has the same opinion. The Annapurna Express quoted the Chinese foreign minister as saying that the United States was redoubling its efforts to peddle the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at controlling China. The report further states that Wang Yi stressed that the conflicts and confrontations dominated by hegemonic power remain fresh in the memory of the citizens of the Asia-Pacific region, who are now entertaining national stability and happy life. (2022, para. 1&3). From the aforementioned statement of the Chinese Foreign Minister, we can assume that all Chinese people and scholars have a similar opinion toward the IPS because, in China, rare common people do have a different understanding than the government. Such Chinese viewpoints and attempts have triggered South Asian geopolitics to be more dangerous from the perspective of confrontation among big powers in South Asia.

One of the major global actors, Russia, has even critical observation on Indo-Pacific Strategy. Russia sees the Indo-Pacific and Quad initiatives as part of its friction with China and has been widely criticized. According to Sharma, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has repeatedly spoken out against such initiatives. He said in December 2020 that the West was pressuring India to play a bigger role in "anti-China" policies such as the Indo-Pacific and the Quad (Sharma, 2021, para.3). Similarly, according to Ashok Sharma, Lavrov said, "Why is Asia-Pacific called Indo-Pacific? The answer is clear - to boycott China. Glossary should be unified, not divisive" (2020, para. 4). Lavrov's this statement indicates the value of Russian friendship with China. China and Russia are important partners to shape and reshape world geopolitics which impacts South Asian geopolitics too. Since being a crucial strategic partner, Russia wants to include China in a broader framework of the Asia-Pacific concept. On the other side, India is one of the founding members of the QUAD group and hence it wants to make QUAD wider, and broader for its success excluding China. Despite having very good relations between Russia and India, they have a different perspective on Indo-Pacific Strategy. Russia wants equally maintain the relations with India like China since being an old friend. The statement, delivered by the Russian foreign minister, was not expected by India. India wants to be appreciated its security concerns vis-à-vis China. Lavrov soothed Indian concern by stating that Russia did not want any misunderstanding with India and the people of India on this issue (Sharma, 2021, para.3). Such kinds of diverse relations



among regional and global actors have created more challenges in South Asian geopolitics. Pakistani scholars have also a similar understanding of the Indo-Pacific Strategy as the Chinese and Russian have. Akram writes that the United States, reluctant to accept China as an equal partner in the world in the wake of self-inflicted wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan, has promoted the Quad alliance to control and counter rising China (2018, para.3). He further explains that the US presence in the Indo-Pacific is not justified because the US has historically been a Pacific power, but now more than ever to "defend the interests of its allies" against "aggression and expansionism," China (para.4). This statement also indicates that the Indo-Pacific Strategy is centered on American global goals and interests rather than preserving the way of the emerging Asian century. Yamin writes, "it is worth noting that Pakistan is vitally important to US global interests in the Indo-Pacific region because of its all-whether strategic partnership with China, which considers it an "element of strategic competition with the United States and India" (2020, p. 1). With such types of complex but multilateral relations of Pakistan, it has been facing difficulties to deal with all global powers because of their strategic and economic competition. Neither Pakistan can undermine the relations with the USA nor wants to break up with China. In such a situation, South Asian geopolitics has become more problematic due to also having complex geopolitical relations of Pakistan with the global powers.

It is proven that the IPS is focused on containing China and incorporating her allied countries under the framework of her security policy. Western powers perceive China's Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) as her global strategic project launched to change the current world order led by the USA but China denies that claim. As the USA has been moving aggressively in the strategic front in South Asia through the Indo-Pacific Strategy, China and Russia announced the China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform (CRSDP) on the one hand and China announced Global Security Initiatives (GSI) on the other hand. Many scholars believe that these two new developments have come up as the Chinese policy of counter-containment in the region and the globe.

Krishnan reports, "China and Russia proposed new "regional security dialogue platforms" to address security issues and agendas in the region" (2021, para.1). This proposal was shared just after the meeting of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in the southern Chinese city of Guilin and the US-China summit in Alaska on March 19 and the Quad summit on March 12, 2021. The Quad group of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States has been closely watched by both Beijing and Moscow. It is analyzed that this new security dialogue platform was proposed by both countries to exclude India since being involved in IPS. China, Russia, and India are together in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Analysts say that China and Russia could strengthen SCO if they want to include India. This platform has rejected the US calls for 'a rule-based order'- a call endorsed by the IPS (Quad) summit- and instead said 'all countries should follow the purpose and principles of the charter of the United Nations' and 'uphold true multilateralism, make international relations more democratic, and accept and promote peaceful coexistence and common development of countries with different social systems and development paths'. Similarly, the Journals of India reports that the summit has decided to reject the US calls for "a rule-based order"-ratified by the Quad summit. The Journals further clarifies that the two countries agreed to appeal to all countries to follow the goals and principles of the Charter of the United



Nations and maintain true multilateralism to make international relations more democratic and focus on peaceful coexistence among all countries (2021, para. 1). From the nature of Indo-Pacific Strategy and China-Russia Security Dialogue platform, it is analyzed that China and Russia have strongly rejected the goal of the Quad and established a separate platform to cooperate to cope up with the threats posed by the Quad group in the region. The new platform is the result of IPS-geopolitics which will also create challenges in South Asian geopolitics. Because the largest South Asian country India has a good strategic partnership with one member of CRSDP and rivalry relations with the next member of the same platform. In addition, Nepal is geographically linked with the largest country in South Asia and one member of the CRSDP. Therefore, such geopolitical relations and geographical proximity will face the critical challenges raised by the IPS and CRSDP, and thus South Asian geopolitics will be further problematic.

Another counter-containment policy of China seems Global Security Initiative (GSI) in the Indo-Pacific region which is targeted at IPS and Quad group activities in this region. Rajagopalan writes that Chinese President Xi Jinping has proposed a new global security proposal, questioning the logic of the Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad members' argument (2022, para.1). The proposal was put forward on 21 April 2022 during the Boao Forum for Asia's annual conference, China. Rajagopalan further writes that Calling the Cold War mentality, hegemony, and power politics "issues that threaten world peace" and "increasing security challenges in the 21st century," Xi proposed a new "global security initiative" (2022, 1). But Helsinki Times writes that Global Security Initiatives is China's solution to safeguarding global security and peace. The paper writes, "At the opening ceremony of the 2022 annual conference of the Boao Forum for Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a keynote address entitled "Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation". Clear answers to the questions of our time such as what kind of security concept the world needs and how countries can achieve shared security, Xi spoke. GSI is focused on building a community of shared destinations for mankind, which is the vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping. It represents China's wisdom in resolving the problem of peace deficit and China's solution to tackling global challenges related to national and human security issues (Helsinki Times, 2022, para. 4). The concept of GSI believes that while all countries share a common destination and are increasingly interdependent, the security of any country cannot be secured without the security of another country or the rest of the world. GSI believes in working together to maintain a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security vision and to keep the world safer and secured. But Mehta and Chadha write, "Many reacted to the declaration, calling it an immediate rebuke to the West's coordinated sanctions on Russia for invading Ukraine" (2022, para. 1). It means these authors' belief on GSI is far away than China believes and claims. They further write that Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister, remarked that many security risks and threats have created a peace deficit in the Asia-Pacific region and that China has consistently opposed specific "small factions" such as the AUKUS and Quad that could lead to confrontation and jeopardize China's interests (para.2). Thus, there is the different opinion of Chinese scholars and other scholars from the world about the GSI. But, these authors believe that the BRI of China is China's global economic front and later GSI emerged as her strategic and security front which does not accept the unilateral actions of Quad or any other regional and global big or small security mechanism excluding China in Asia and Indo Pacific region. This is the



core idea of GSI of China and also can be understood as a counter-containment policy of Beijing towards Quad groups in this region which will make South Asian geopolitics quite strategically unsolved. In this way, the South Asian recent pragmatic geopolitics can be assessed and analyzed. Numerous issues, events, and incidents influence South Asian geopolitics pragmatically however, other issues and developments are escaped in this section.

US's State Partnership Program (SPP): Critical Development in Himalayan Geopolitics

Nepal's recent geopolitical situation is one of the most important issues and parts of South Asian geopolitics too. Most dominant actors of South Asian geopolitics are also the actors of Nepali geopolitics and hence they are highly engaged in Nepal. The USA, China, and India are the central geopolitical actors of Nepali geopolitics as the state actors. They are engaged in Nepal through various political, diplomatic, and strategic means, methods, and projects. India's major concern in Nepal is the security issues and hence it has been implementing her Nehruvian doctrine of India's foreign policy. India considers the Himalayan range as its strategic borders and India considers Nepal as one of the states in its sphere of influence. The next topmost way India is involved in Nepal is her micromanagement of politics. Similarly, China is highly engaged in Nepal, especially after the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and Nepal's involvement in the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The USA is also massively focused through the MCC project from 2017 to the end of 2024. But, along with the second rise of Trump at the White House, the Trump administration stopped all the aid under USAID and MCC (Giri, 2025, para. 1) in Nepal and the new scenario has become more unpredictable about Nepal and Himalayan geopolitics.

Though there are a number of issues in Nepali geopolitics, this section mainly focused on the US State Partnership Program (SPP) which has massively contributed to making Nepali geopolitics turmoil recently. The SPP is a security cooperation program of the Department of Defense (DoD) of the USA run by the National Guard. It works as a training mechanism as well for National Guard personnel (Kapp & Serafino, 2011, p.1). SPP aims:

- a) Build partnership capacity to deter, prevent, and prepare;
- b) Build partnership capacity to respond and recover;
- c) Support partners' defense reform and professional development;
- d) Enable and facilitate enduring broad-spectrum security relationships.

The SPP evolved in 1992 from an effort launched to establish military relations between the USA and the newly independent nations of the former Soviet Union to help improve and reform the defense establishments of those nations (Kapp & Serafino, 2011, p.1). The US embassy in Kathmandu writes that the SPP has existed for the last twenty-five years. The USA has bilateral relations with more than ninety countries all over the world (2022, para.1). As per the US Embassy's website, the SPP is only an exchange program between an American state's National Guard and a partner foreign country. On the



contrary, The State Partnership Program website makes it clear that the United States National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of defense security goals but it also covers broader inter-agency and allied engagements across broader military, governmental, economic, and social sectors as well (National Guard, n.d., para.4). Therefore, it is clear that State Partnership Program is military cooperation between the USA and her allied country where the American interest and prominence is at the top.

There was a great debate on SPP in Nepal along with publishing its draft of an agreement with Nepal in June 2022 which has massively affected Nepali geopolitics. As per the US Embassy website, Nepal had requested to be involved in the program in 2015 and 2017. The USA accepted the Nepali proposal in 2019 (2022, para. 1). On 14 June 2022, a draft of the US proposal of SPP with Nepal was published in Kantipur National Daily. There are ten articles in the draft. Pandey writes, "Recognizing the fact that the SPP cooperation contributes to the strengthening of the institutional and technical capabilities of the Nepal Army, the proposed MoU stipulates the need to enhance cooperation to contribute to international peace and stability, and to strengthen partnerships on issues such as defense and security" (2022, para.5). But the SPP deal became quite complicated among leaders of the ruling coalition and the opposition who raised questions inside and outside the House. There are some serious and sensitive provisions in the draft. Some of the sensitive points are as below:

Related vehicles or light aircraft operated by or for the United States may be used for training, transfer, assistance, and related activities to refuel vehicles or aircraft and use agreed facilities and areas (Article: 2.1). Nepal cannot provide its sky and land for and to any foreign powers as per the Nepali constitution and principle of foreign policy. Therefore, this article cannot be accepted by the Nepal government.

While providing facilities and areas, the Government of Nepal will pay due attention to the operational and security interests of the United States National Guard (Article: 2.3). The security interest of the US National Guard is linked to US global security goals under the Department of Defense which is not as per the constitution of Nepal. Hence, this article also deserves to be denied by the Nepal government.

To conduct joint military exercises in the highland areas of Nepal (Article: 3.1.1). The serious question raised is why the USA wants to conduct such military exercises in the highland areas rather than lowland and plain terrain. Nepal cannot afford such exercises in the Himalayan areas because of the sensitive security issues of northern neighbour and Nepal's One China policy.

To conduct activities following this Agreement, the Government of Nepal shall make the utmost efforts to provide the necessary assistance to the United States National Guard in Nepal as required and following the written request (Article: 4.1). It means Nepal has to support US National Guard in Nepal in every activity including US's anti-China movement in the Highland areas of Nepal.

The United States will pay a reasonable amount for the requested and received settlement assistance. In this regard, the Government of Nepal will not treat the United States National Guard any less positively than the Nepal Army and will not impose a less positive rate on such assistance than the fee paid by the Nepal Army (Article: 4.2). Any



foreign military personnel cannot be at equal status with the national army. Any government cannot provide the same facilities to foreign military persons while they are working for their country.

For this Agreement, the Government of Nepal will provide tax exemptions on all equipment, materials, transferable structures, and other movable property they import or obtain within Nepal (Article: 5.2). This article seems against Article 4.2. Nepali Army has to pay the tax to the Nepal government for the same purpose but in this provision, the Nepal government cannot receive the tax from US National Guard.

The United States National Guard will be empowered by mutual consent of the parties or their designated bodies to provide security for their movement outside the agreed facility or territory (Article: 6.2). Any sovereign state never can handover the authority, power, and responsibility to any foreign military power to maintain law, order, and security within the state's territory.

Any disputes concerning the interpretation or implementation of this Agreement shall be resolved through consultation between the parties and shall not be communicated and involved to any other nation or international tribunal or a third party (Article:9). While conducting the joint military exercise in highland areas of Nepal (Nepal-China border areas), automatically, China will involve and the third-party involvement will be inevitable.

Its initial period will be five years. Thereafter, the agreement will continue to be implemented unless one of the parties rejects the agreement by giving six months' written notice to the other party through diplomatic channels (Article: 10.1). This article is provisioned to extend the agreement for an infinite period (Pandey, 2022).

The above nine points violate Nepal's national interest, diplomatic practices, foreign policy principles, Nepal's one-China policy, and eventually Nepal's sovereignty and independence. Therefore, the Nepal government finally decided not to be involved in the SPP program (Balachandran, 2022). Many analysts have analyzed that due to Nepal's clear position on SPP not to be its part, the USA under the administration of the 47th President Trump decided to stop the MCC in Nepal for three months. This may be the bargaining approach to create pressure on Nepal to be involved in SPP.

When the draft of the agreement of SPP included such controversial provisions, not only external actors but also domestic political parties began massive debates on this issue. The USA said, "Nepal's application to participate in the SPP has already been approved three years ago" (Shahi, 2022). But the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal Narayan Khadka opposed the US statement. Kantipur writes, "In a meeting of the House of Representatives, Minister Khadka called on U.S. Army Pacific Chief of Staff Charles A. Flynn who was in Nepal-visit during that time and Minister Khadka claimed that the signing of the SPP by Nepal government is just a rumor (2022, para. 2). Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" blamed the immediate past Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli in that time for the initiation to involve in SPP. Nepalpress published news and wrote that Prachanda accused the KP Oli government of implementing the SPP in 2019 (2022, para.4). But Oli challenged them to show his involvement in the US-SPP (Khabarhub, 2022, para. 1). Former Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Kumar Gyawali also strongly denied the involvement of Oli government to put forward the SPP agreement in Nepal



(Gyawali, 2022, Conference Speech). He further claimed that the agreement initiated by former governments in 2015 and 2017 led by Shushil Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", was stopped by the Oli government. As per Gyawali, Oli formed a Study Task Force in 2019, and based on its report, the SPP was stopped, he said during the conference organized by the Madan Bhandari Foundation. A leader of CPN (Maoist Center) Barshaman Pun has also a similar expression. He also claimed that the SPP process was unknown to then Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and his government. Both the then Ministers of the Oli government Gyawali and Pun claimed that the SPP proposal was sent by the Nepali Army directly to the Embassy of the United States of America and the then government was unaware of it (Gyawali & Pun, 2022, Conference Speech). But, the authenticity of the SPP document is still under suspicion. The US embassy claims that they have not shared any draft with the Nepal government. Nepal Army and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) have also a similar opinion. Giri writes, "...however, the Ministry of Defense and the Nepal Army have stated that they are not aware of the proposal" (2022, para.8).

Some controversial opinions of the Nepal Army have been published in Nepali newspapers in June 2022. Regarding the same issue, the US Embassy in Kathmandu said, "At the request of Nepal, membership of the SPP was granted in 2019 and as this process has been completed, no further agreement should be reached (Pandey, 2022, para.1). Nepali Army countered this claim and said that no agreement has been reached regarding SPP, no such process and no future military partnership with anyone will be materialized (Pandey, 2022, para.2). Despite this counter-argument, it seems that Nepal Army had begun the correspondence on SPP with the US Embassy in 2015. Nepal Army spokesperson Narayan Silwal said the Nepal Army had written a letter to the US not to enter into a military partnership but to cooperate in disaster management after the 2015 earthquake (Setopati, 2022, para. 2). Setopati further writes indicating Narayan Silwal that:

This letter was written in the context of 2015. At that time, the massive earthquake had caused great loss of lives and property in Nepal. Public life was chaotic. Nepal had called on international organizations and agencies for rescue, 'he told Setopati.' Dozens of allies had come to the rescue. Troops from China, India, Pakistan, the USA, and the UK also came. All coordination is done by the Nepal Army (Setopati, 2022, para.3).

Thus the controversial opinion of the Nepal Army on the same issue was published which proves that the SPP has made the geopolitics of the Himalayan Kingdom more complicated and risky for Nepal and the Himalayan range of South Asia and hence Nepal government has decided not to involve in US State Partnership Program to maintain its neutrality and non-aligned foreign policy for the sake of making the Himalayan geopolitics much secured and safer for South Asian countries. China also welcomed Nepal's decision not to be part of SPP. Speaking at a regular press briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin praised the decision of the Nepal government, as a friendly and close neighbour for its decision not to move forward with the SPP. He further said that China always stands ready to work with Nepal to jointly safeguard regional security, stability, and shared prosperity (The Kathmandu Post, 2022, para. 2&12). This statement



further proves how the SPP is threatening the Himalayan geopolitics in South Asia and China.

Discussions

The fundamental cause of South Asia's complicated geopolitics, according to the discussion and analysis in this paper, is the conflict and confrontation between the superpower's global interests and the Great Power's counter-strategy. The United States appears to be pursuing a strategy to undermine the changing Asian region as much as possible as the center of global politics and the economy. The study concludes that the United States is expanding its Indo-Pacific strategy as an Asian NATO, incorporating Asian nations that are outside of NATO because the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) finds it difficult to operate in Asia. In this instance, it appears that the Indo-Pacific strategy only advances while the national interests of the IPS nations align with those of the US. The global objectives of the United States and the national interests of the countries participating in the Indo-Pacific Strategy may conflict in the future, creating a unique situation. The IPS's security cooperation appears to be waning right now. Asian nations may eventually opt for the GSI over the IPS as China's Global Security Initiatives (GSI) become more comprehensive, broader, and stronger, but China must stop any unilateral initiatives and include all major powers—including Japan, India, and other South/Asia countries—as her partners from the very beginning of her regional and global initiatives. It will significantly support the geopolitics of South Asia which is peaceful, secure, tolerant, and integrative.

The nations of South Asia should work together to resolve the multilateral regional concerns with external actors without compromising any state's national interests to make geopolitics in the region conducive to peace, development, and prosperity. South Asian nations have to resolve their difficulties following their respective diplomatic traditions and foreign policy tenets when it is impossible to reach a consensus. Any nation should refrain from influencing how other nations view South Asian geopolitics in this process. Because every country has its own political, economic, and social dynamics, if those dynamics change, countries will experience a crisis. Due to US interests in global security, Nepal, the oldest and most strategically significant country in South Asia, has recently emerged as the region's geopolitical center. Nepal should continue to develop positive relations with China, India, and other Asian nations. But in the interim, Nepal should protect its interests while improving relations with regional and international powers.

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