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Бидхур Дхакал

# НЕСТАБИЛЬНОСТЬ ВО ВНУТРИПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ОБСТАНОВКЕ НЕПАЛА: ЕЕ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ГЕОПОЛИТИКУ

## Аннотация

Непал, не имеющий выхода к морю из-за двух азиатских гигантов Дракона и Тигра, борется со своей внутренней политической нестабильностью. С одной стороны, Китай становится лидером Глобального Юга, распространяя свое влияние на Южную Азию. С другой стороны, сама Индия также стремится стать лидером Южной Азии. При этом США наращивают свое присутствие в регионе, чтобы сдерживать Китай. Непал, расположенный в геополитически чувствительном месте, борется со своими внутренними политическими потрясениями. Отсутствие компетентности у политического руководства, внутренние конфликты между политическими партиями приводят к нестабильности правительства. Эта нестабильность вызывает недовольство общественности. На основе наблюдений за внутренней политикой и анализа доступной литературы в этой статье

автор делает вывод о том, что Непал рискует стать пешкой в геополитической конкуренции и полем битвы для крупных держав.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, внутренняя политика, Непал, политика, геополитика, политическое соперничество, режим, правительство, партия, политическая нестабильность.

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE

Bidhur Dhakal

# INSTABILITY IN NEPAL'S INTERNAL POLITICAL SETTING: ITS IMPACT ON GEO-POLITICS

## Abstract

Nepal, landlocked by Asian giants, Dragon and Tiger, is struggling with its internal political instability. On the one side, China is emerging as leader of Global South, extending its influence to the South Asia. On the other hands, India itself pursue as the leader of South Asia. The US is increasing its engagements in the region to deter China. Nepal situated in the geopolitical sensitive location striving with its internal political turmoil. Lack of the incompetency of political leadership, internal conflict between political parties, is causing unstable government. This instability has raising public dissatisfactions. With observa-

tions of the internal politics and analyzing the available literature, this article concludes, Nepal is in risk of being pawn in the geopolitical competition and the battle ground for these competitions.

**Keywords:** China, domestic policy, Nepal, politics, geopolitics, political rivalry, regime, government, party, political instability.

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## Introduction

Nepal, a land locked country bordering two giant economies of the Asia, China and India; is located in the geopolitical significant position in the global international order. With rising economy China's growing influence in the region has attract interest of the global power in the nations of the Himalayas.

Once influential in the international order, advocate of the Non-aligned moments, leaders on introducing the issue of developing world in the international forum, now has been hustled and trapped in inconsistency and hedging behavior due to the instable internal political ailments. Being a small, weak, and underdeveloped country, it is harder to resist or ignore the foreign influence.

As small states usually focus to resort to non-military means of foreign policy because the Small State Syndromes could be seen time and again in the practice, which is also a case to Nepal. Nepal always faces dilemmas due to the Small State Syndromes in conducting foreign policy in the context of great power rivalry due to the internal political instability and lack of institutionalized foreign policy.

The significant influence of the political ideology in the nations' foreign policy is undoubted. As it is there is undeniable influence of the political parties in foreign policy, since different political parties have quite varied conceptions of what constitutes the «national interest». IR Scholarship can witness the inconsistent foreign policy of Nepal, due to the instable political settings in the Nation. In addition to the fascination between political parties and changes in global geopolitics, have contributed their enhanced attention to the political environment on a worldwide scale. In this scenario, the paper tries to address the research gap on Nepal's foreign policy through the perspective of its instable internal political settings.

The entire paper is focused on addressing the following two main research questions:

- What are the factors contributing the Instability of Internal Political settings of the Nepal?
- What are the impacts of Instable political settings on its Foreign Policy?

With clear objectives – identifying the contributing factors of Nepal's instable political setting and its impacts on the foreign policy; this paper will have significant value on understanding small state foreign policy on its own political conditions. As Chinese Political Scientist Wei Ming in his book «Small States and International Relations» argues that the research on the small state international relations is lagging behind and is marginalized, this study will be one of the key aspect on small state foreign policy.

## Methodology of the Study

This study will adopt qualitative research approaches to analyze the contributing factors for Nepal's instable internal

political settings and its impacts on its foreign policy. The study is relay on the secondary data collected through the literature review, with extensive review of existing literature, including academic papers, government documents, and reports from international organizations. This study will also adopt the Historical Analysis, analyzing the historical context of Nepal's political system and its evolution. To find out the impact of instable political settings on its foreign policy, in-depth case studies of specific incidents or periods of political instability in Nepal will be conducted.

## Literature Review: Historical Context

Nepal was economically, politically sovereign from the saga at the time when most of the South Asian countries were in colonialist rule. This history of independent and longtime indigenous rule can be tracked to the history of instable internal political setting of Nepal. Once, the Country has untied under the Shah Dynasty, led by King Prithivi Narayan Shah, Nepal Modern Political history was initiated. Though Nepal was united by the Monarchy, the political instability gave room for the most autocratic military leaders, Junga Bahadur Rana [15]. From 1846 to 1950, Nepal was not ruled by the monarch but by the Rana Autocrats Prime Minister [19]. But, the downfall of Rana was started with the internal clash in the family [21].

The Ranas, the 19th and 20th century ruling class in Nepal, had split up into various groups, and there was competition among them for influence and control. The Ranas were unable to keep control of the nation as a result of this divide, which undermined the regime's central authority. According to Singh, Rana were internally fighting to protect their regime and people were frustrating with the Rana Rule and started to raise their voices against the regime (2004). Due to this internal clash, the first constitution of Nepal, known as the «Government of Nepal Act-2004 BS», promulgated by Padma Samesher Rana was not ever implemented [4].

After the Downfall of Rana, King Tribhuvan Shah announced the election of Constituency Assembly to promulgate the constitution. In order to protect his regime, contrasting with the promise, King repeatedly amended the constitution to consolidate his power [15]. After the death of the Tribhuvan, Mahendra (the son of Tribhuvan) became the King and announced the new constitution of Nepal in 1959. Election in the same year was first election in Nepal, with two thirds securing 79 out of 109 seats, Nepali Congress, President BP Koirala, formed the new elected government. The elected prime minister, Koirala was adopting the plan for democratization of policy and egalitarian reform of the economy [17], again with intentions of regime protection, the King Mahendra took

over the power in 1960 to establish the Panchayat System (Party less Systems). For three decades, Nepal ruled by the King and political party were struggling for the Change. With people's movement, Multi-Parties Democracy was restored in 1990, and new constitution was promulgated. Tough the change in the system created more instability internally. First Election after the restoration of democracy, with the Westminster Parliament System, Nepali Congress won the clear majority of the seats, but did not last for five years. Second Election in 1994, produced the hung parliament and Nepali politics involved in the runs of the crafting and breaking of the coalitions, witnessing 8 governments in five years [15]. People began to think that Nepali politics had devolved into a blatant power struggle due to the country's frequent changes of leadership [8].

Nepal experienced intra-party conflicts, splits of parties, unhealthy interparty competitions to absorb the power in post-1990s period [15, 8]. This fractionalization created political instability and provided the space for anti-democratic forces. In the same period, CPN (Maoist) had started the «People's War» lasted for 12 years, ended with Comprehensive Peace Accord 2006. CPN (Maoist) emerged as the largest political party after the Constituent Assembly election held in 2008. But the internal political instability remained as usual. There was intra-party and inter-party clash in Nepal's political clash [2].

Nepal has had protracted political instability throughout its history. Neither the parliamentary nor the monarchical governments of Nepal have been able to establish stable, progressive, and strong political and economic institutions. Nepal's politics have tried a number of different experiments, but none of them have been effective [7].

## Current Political Turmoil

Soon after the constitution of Nepal-2015 was promulgated, the political stability and progress toward the development path was hoped. But the instability still predominated the Nepalese Political Settings.

After the devastating earthquake in Nepal, major political parties came into common political understanding with 16 points agreement on agreements on the most debated issues about the federalism and electoral systems [10].

On 2015, July, CA presented the draft of the constitution to nations for consultations limiting the debate within the 15 days of short period. Soon after the release of the constitution, Madhesh start born. Violent protest spike in the Terai regions demanding Tharuhat Province, killed 7 policemen, in total 58 people were killed in the violence. CA promulgate the constitution in 20 September 2015, Madhesh movement uprisings again. Soon after the promulgation of the Constitution, Sushil Koirala step down from office of PM and. KP Oli, UML chair become the PM

with support of CPN-Maoist Center. On the shortcoming of the Constitution, Nepal face «Unofficial Blockade» from India [10].

After the Constitution to the first federal election (2015-17) Nepal experienced 3 governments. The election in 2017, generated the hope of stability and development for the country. But it didn't last long. In the election Communist Alliance (CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist Center) won around two thirds of the seats in the Parliament. Later, two major Communist parties merged to form the Single Communist party. Ultimately Nepali people were in hope for the stability. But the hope was ruined due to the internal clash between leader within the political parties. Internal clash between two Co-Chairs, KP Sharma Oli, (PM of the time), and Puspa Kamal Dahal (Current PM) lead internal fraction on the CPN. That led Nepal to enter into another political turmoil. KP Oli then PM took an action of dissolution of the Parliament in 2021 December, which was reversed by the supreme court, and again in 2022 March, he took the same way of dissolution of the Parliament. This time supreme court not only reversed the decision, KP Sharma Oli was set to out from the Prime Ministership. Opposition leader, Sher Bahadur Deuba, President of Nepali Congress was appointed as the PM. On November 2022 Nepal hold the federal election, In December 25, Puspa Kamal Dahal, the leader of the third largest Party in the Parliament was appointed as the PM. To be appointed as PM Prachanda has changed the Election Alliance and formed the new alliance with CPN-UML led by Oli. This coalition is still in fragile. After two months the coalitions was broken again. Prachanda and his party voted for the Ramchandra Paudel for president, ruling against the candidate of CPN-UML. This action led the government to a crisis. Another supporting party Rastriya Swatantra party also left the government. This time Congress supported Prachanda as the PM. With political instability and disappointments on the political leadership, the supporter of the monarch were protesting demanding the return of the monarch.

## Factors Contributing to the Internal Instability

The political conditions of the countries rely in the internal and external factors. Nepal's Political Stability relay on the Internal Regime Protection mindset and External Forces [13]. He argued that the Nepal face political chaos due to the internal political clash within the ruling elite. Next, Nepal's geopolitical importance, attract power nations on its internal politics. What is actually a political instability? Political Scholarships have their own viewpoints on it. Dragan Miljkovic and Arbindra Rimal argue that the nature of regime affects political instability (2008). They further state that the political instability is caused by irregular

or regular government changes. Due to this government changes, people's dissatisfactions level will increase and that tend to the political unrest. Along with government changes, Mark J. Gasiorowski (1998), argues that peaceful or violent unrest, cops d'etat also are the contributing factors of the political instability. Other scholars argue that Civil unrest to be the sign of the political instability [1, 5].

A survey by Share Cast initiative shows high dissatisfaction on this political unrest. The survey report claimed that around half of the population believed that Nepal's politics was going toward wrong directions. This public precepting is rapidly growing. From February 2020 to February 2021, during one-year period, this perception increased by 15.5% growing 28.8% to 44.3% [20]. This perception is high in educated youth, which accounts 61.1%. Survey reports suggest that the reasons behind «Nepal moving towards wrong direction» are conflict within politics parties, political instability, weak leadership, with top three reason.

The regime protection is one of the causes for Nepal's internal instability. From the pre-historic era, the regime there seems political instability when the ruling elite is trying to protect its regime. When there is struggle between, regime protection and regime change, the political instability seems to be raised [16].

As in Rana era, there was class between Rana families and were fighting each other for protection. In democracy era, after 1951 the clash inside the Nepali Congress, Nepal faces the instability. They fight for each other. In Panchayat Period, the Monarchy was trying to protect its regime and the governments were changing frequently. Most of the period, formations of new governments and changing in coalitions caused political instability. This was due to the intentions of regime protections. So, regime protection is contributing negatively in the internal stability of the Nepal.

Currently Nepal is witnessing mass protest in the street demanding return of the Monarchy. This is one of the consequences of distrust on the political leadership. The secularism and federalism are counter by protest in the streets. The survey report shows that only 32 % of the public are satisfied by provincial governments [20]. 51 % wants the nations to be Hindu Nations.

Nepal is a multi-party democracy. Political parties in the parliament are from different ideological background. Due to this ideological clash Nepal is trapped in the internal instability. In the parliament, the majority of the seats are gained by leftist parties. They themselves have divided into different ideologies in the name of the Leaders. Some Leftists name themselves as Leninists, some – Marxists, some – Maoists and some even – Mao's Thought, but, they are unable to define the socialism as the Nepali context. As China has defined socialism and developed as the Marxism with Chinese Characteristics, Nepali Leftist party failed to

amend the Marxism with Nepali characteristics. Due to that clash between the political ideologies is one of the cause of the internal instability.

A system turns into a hybrid regime and invites the activity of non-democratic forces if it contains inherent inconsistencies even though it contains some democratic measures. Following the pro-democracy movement in 1990, Nepal had a political reform that accepted certain democratic principles but had a number of underlying problems that left it a hybrid government that failed to bring about any significant change. As a result, two extreme groups formed and attempted to undo the political progress achieved after 1990: the ultraleftist Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) and the ultrarightist King Gyanendra [14].

Another contributing factor causing internal instability is external factors. As Nepal is situated in the geopolitically important locations, power nations, India, China as well as the US have their own interest in Nepal. That is also contributing to the internal instability of Nepal. «External Interference» in Nepali internal politics seems to be domestic «political flux» [9].

For this we can take a Case of the Indian Blockade. Indian concern in Nepal constitution was the federal province of Madheshi; the ethnic group who shares culturally similar ideology with India. Political parties based on the Madhes and leaders were trying pursue this interest on the constitution of Nepal. On the other side, the agitating voice of this concept was raising in the streets too. On September, Nepal declared the constitution. India tried to stop it. S Jaya Sankar, Current External Affairs Minister, then Secretary, visited to Nepal and lobbied for it. But Indian interest failed and imposed the Blockade, Indian Government and Establishment declined it as blockade but, scholar, and critics argued it as Blockade and Indian Interference in Internal matters of Nepal. India did the same in the time of powerful government led by Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and now by Narendra Modi.

Another case of the external factors can be US MCC, in an interview by then PM KP Sharma Oli who claimed that the Parliament failed to ratify the MCC, so he tended to dissolve the Parliament. In some extent, he used to claim that he was forced to throw by the Indian interest. As he was portrayed to be the Nationalist and Started New trade with China during the Indian Blockade, Oli claimed that the Indian interest played on his dethrone. Numerous political shifts and foreign meddling in Nepal have demonstrated how readily beginning foreign interferences could morph into more extensive foreign interferences in minor internal political settings [18]. After 1950, there have been numerous instances where treaties and agreements have been made out of political leaders' and regimes' personal interests and accounts with neighboring countries, without considering the implications for the nation and its citizens.

## Impact of Political Instability in Foreign Policy

If Statesmen are not rational on decision-making process or unable to check the threats and opportunities, foreign interventions are seen in the decision-making process on foreign policy choices [12]. Foreign interferences in Nepal can be observed under the lens of instable internal political setting and leadership incompetency on decision-making process.

At the recent moment, some increasing external interests have jeopardized Nepal's internal and external policy choices, which were seen in the constitution drafting process in Nepal. Meanwhile, after 2021, changes in government, the US engagements and ratification of the MCC from the Parliament also can be taken as cases of foreign interference during the political instability in Nepal. Nepal's foreign relations are frequently exposed to inconsistencies in the country's foreign policy decision-making process, particularly when interacting with China and India, its neighbors. Due to Nepal's advantageous location between China and India, two powerful nations, both have expressed frequent concerns about the political growth of Nepal and are acutely aware of the situation there.

Facing long economic and political turmoil, Nepal has always been constantly buffeted through the history by its neighbors, two Asian giants, China and India [23]. Despite of Nepal being on a prosperous and thriving trading route between China and India, Nepali Rulers were able to maintain total isolation from the rest of the world until the 1950s [22]. With underlining the governmental instability and locked with two Asian giants, China and India, during the Rana Regime, Nations had adopted «isolationist foreign policy» and remained reserved [3].

Its adoption of positive neutrality in the 1950s and its advocacy of an extrovert policy of non-alignment based

on opposing states' balanced dispositions with their interests and ideologies bound in conflict, collaboration, and competition were made possible by the democratic openness [3]. But now, the internal political disputes are seen in the foreign affairs.

## Conclusion

As Nepal is situated in the sensitive geopolitical region, the competition between two Asian giants, China and India, and expanding strong hold of the US is rising. In this scenario, the US and India would focus on constraining the China seeking its weak point. Those powers could increase a higher level of security interests in surrounding of China including Nepal. In such case, those power-houses will try to exploit the situation making trouble in Tibet from the ground of Nepal, by raising the issue of «Independent Tibet». The security of Tibet is sensitive concern of Beijing. In these conditions, Nepal could be the pivotal points of geopolitical game. That is the region Beijing also has advocated for stable internal political settings in Nepal. In Chinese view, politically stable, economically prosperous and militarily strong Nepal could address the security concern of Tibet via Nepal.

On the other side, Indian foreign policy towards Nepal is guided by its own national interest. India still thought, Nepal as its state of strong hold and tries to interfere in internal political domain. If the state leadership, government is not as competent to manage the internal and external affairs, then the country will pawn between the power struggle. The impact of the Nepal's internal political instability can be seen not only in national development but also in international affairs. It will be experienced as the external interferences, and risk in geopolitical tension. So, only the stable government, national compacts can avoid the external interferences in international affairs and policy choices.

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### Информация об авторе:

**Бидхур Дхакал**, кандидат философии, международные отношения, Школа политики и международных отношений Восточно-Китайского педагогического университета, Шанхай, Китай.

E-mail: dhibidhur@outlook.com

### Author:

**Bidhur Dhakal**, PhD Candidate, International Relations, School of Politics and International Relations, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China.

E-mail: dhibidhur@outlook.com