

# Foreign Policy and Geo-politics

Shreedhar Gautam\*

## Abstract

The collective desire of people, national interest, and economic prosperity are the basic factors behind defining the foreign policy of most countries. Nepal's foreign policy, too, in principle, gives emphasis on meeting the aspirations of people and preserving the national independence and territorial integrity. In the light of emerging geopolitical realities, Nepal needs to develop a dignified relationship with the two immediate neighbouring countries, India and China, on a win-win basis. However, in the present globalized world, it is not sufficient to confine our priorities to maintaining balanced relations with our nearest partners only at a time when global powers are expanding their interest overtly or covertly to expand their sphere of influence. It is necessary to ensure that their assertive behaviour does not upend our basic principles that guide our national interest. So, framing a unanimous policy among the major parties is vital to safeguard the sovereignty of the country. This article mainly focuses on the need for drastic change in our foreign policy approach and perspective to resist the unfriendly pressure and provocation that go against our national interest.

*Keywords:* foreign policy, geopolitics, power, national interest, and mutual understanding.

## Introduction

The present-day world is marked by a series of turmoil because of the conflicting interests of the powerful countries, evoking the fear of a Third World War that will, most likely, be a nuclear war culminating in havoc not experienced in the First and Second World Wars. Apart from the armed conflict in the Middle East, Africa, and the war between Russia and Ukraine, the hardening positions of the powerful countries on trade tariffs could also ignite a major war anytime if the concerned parties do not apply wisdom and prudence, taking lessons from the previous wars. This is just not a speculation if we analyze how the great wars in the past were triggered due to the arrogant and narrow blind nationalist outlook of certain leaders, to satisfy their egos by thrusting the world into a catastrophic quagmire. We have seen that the end of the Cold War could not eliminate the possibility of a hot war because yesterday's ideological rivalry has been replaced by economic hostile competition. Though idealism is arguably the founding tradition of international relations theory (Walker, 1993), in reality, idealism is no longer pursued by the relevant centres of power. In this regard, Waltz (1959) writes:

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\* Prof. Dr. Gautam is an Executive Member of Nepal Council of World Affairs.

“The locus of the important causes of war is found in the nature and behaviour of man. War results from selfishness, from misdirected impulses, from stupidity. If these are the primary causes of war, then elimination of war must come through uplifting and enlightening men or securing their psychic social adjustments”.

Waltz reminds us that we have to raise our awareness and then eschew the narrow selfish nationalism to create a civilized world free from war. The high level of awakening is also required in the framing of foreign policy, as Jones (1970) suggests, “Foreign policy assumes that foreign relations constitute an area requiring practical knowledge and experience, just as a blacksmith’s shop is an area requiring practical knowledge and experience”.

Jones is trying to imply that foreign policy is a specific area of political activity. In Nepal’s case, we should not lose sight of our historical background, particularly the era of then King Prithivi Narayan Shah, who foresaw the rationality of being cautious while dealing with overseas countries and adopting a win-win policy in dealing with the two immediate neighbours. Without realizing our historical background, we cannot assess whether our present policy is appropriate to meet the challenges in the light of the domestic and international events.

Iskander (1980) quotes the then Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as saying, “To abandon the past is expressive of a formal adherence and superficial affiliation to contemporaneity, whilst to relinquish the forward-moving present with its requirements and laws is to formally adhere to the past in a manner which is neither human nor revolutionary”.

Saddam Hussein’s views imply that countries’ pasts should not be overlooked while confronting grave situations in the present. Similar views are expressed by former Indian diplomat J. N. Dixit, who said, “Whether or not our response to the challenge that we faced in the arena of international relations met our national interest. Were they adequate, or could we have chosen something more appropriate for our requirements and aspirations? Did we go wrong and, if so, why? (Dixit, 1998).

Dixit’s views reinforce the idea that we should turn to the past to assess the present and act accordingly. History should be a school of life experience and struggle too. Late Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru echoed a similar opinion by stating, “My fascination for history was not in reading about old events that happened in the past but rather in its relation to the things that led up to the present. Only then did it become alive to me, otherwise it could have been an old thing unconnected with life or the world” (Nehru, 1982, p. 383).

Nehru’s perspective on history highlights a profound shift from viewing the past as a static archive of dead events to seeing it as a vibrant map of human evolution. For Nehru, the value of history lies strictly in its “relation to the things that led up to the present,” suggesting that disconnected facts are secondary to the underlying narrative

of cause and effect. This philosophy transforms the historian from a mere record-keeper into a bridge-builder who connects ancestral struggles to modern realities. By making history “alive,” Nehru argues that we can better navigate our current world, treating the past as a repository of lessons rather than a collection of dusty relics (Nehru, 1982).

### **Analysis/Discussion**

If the former Soviet Union had not embarked on rapid industrialization and agricultural revolution after the end of the Tsars’ rule, it would have been impossible to defeat Adolf Hitler’s army in the Second World War and become a superpower by 1949 (Cheremukhin, 2013). No country can survive unless it becomes politically independent, free from the influence of the outer forces in its internal affairs, and economically self-dependent in a relative sense on the strength of revolution in agriculture along with industrialization. Similarly, China’s rise as a superpower is the consequence of its political and economic independence after 1949, which enabled the country to pursue the goals of all-around development (Lin et al., 2003). Nepal should take a lesson from the example and accelerate economic development.

In light of the importance of historical perspective, the principle of non-alignment is still relevant in the case of Nepal’s diplomacy and foreign relations. This does not mean that non-alignment policy should be defined as something as passive or unjust neutrality; it is just to make an introspection whether our past international behaviours were in accordance with the basic spirit of non-alignment principles. For example, our policy on the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has come under criticism because Nepal tilted to Ukraine in the voting in the United Nations. The crux of the criticism lies behind the notion that Nepal perceived the war as just between two countries, ignoring the fact that it was a proxy war between two blocs represented by the United States-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries and Russia (Shrestha, 2023). It was a war triggered by the geopolitical factors between two power centres for expanding their sphere of influence. The US tried to mediate between the two countries to end the war, even by pressurizing Ukraine to concede the demand of Russia, even at the cost of territorial sacrifices, by reversing the earlier stance of isolating Russia to prevent it from achieving its war objectives (Wierzba, 2026).

Nepal should have been cautious enough to foresee the future development that now validates the argument why Nepal should have remained neutral over the war between the two dominating power centres. The case of Ukraine has given a clarion call that no country can preserve its territorial integrity and national independence by blindly relying on other countries. It is a historically proven fact that superpowers do not lend support to any country without their own long-term geopolitical interest. The US has not hidden its agenda of fulfilling its economic interests by playing the role of a mediator between the two countries after having seen that the war did not go as desired by it and its European allies, even after having given massive economic and military support to Ukraine (Adhikari, 2024).

Geopolitics involving great powers was further exemplified by the recent American action against the Venezuelan government led by Nicholas Maduro, who is now in the custody of the US government. The Venezuelan episode is a continuation of America's overt policy of taking unilateral action to serve its economic interest, with no disguise or pretence, ever since the first Gulf War in 1991 (House of Commons Library, 2026). It shows how vital it is to understand world politics with full caution and care, as it is not as easy as we think. The following remark is quite relevant in this context: "If we seek to understand changing global conditions, it is important to be humble in recognizing the limitations of our understanding of world politics, and at the same time, inquisitive about its character. The task of interpretation is complicated because the world is complex (Blanton & Kegley, 2017)

The example should serve as a reminder for countries like Nepal that if we do not pursue our policy of international relations prudently, we may have to confront the fate of Ukraine and Venezuela, as Nepal is located strategically from a geopolitical point of view. The aftermath of the Gen Z movement and the successive chaotic politics in the country leave no doubt that alignment with any power will invite further ruin and destabilization of the country. If we fail to assert our independent policy and continue the policy of appeasing big powers, our very survival will be in jeopardy. We cannot simply absorb everyday relations without giving them theoretical meaning. The following lines are apt in this regard:

"Rarely are the questions of contemporary international relations as clear-cut as this. Nor is it generally a simple case of either or when it comes to the machinations of actors on the international scene. More often than not, we are concerned with multiple shades of grey when making judgments about complex foreign policy and security issues. Political realism demands that policymakers consider the specific historical and political factors in making judgments about the working of their objective laws (Devetak & Percy, 2017)

Devetak and Percy mean to say that realism has been the dominant theory of international relations. Accordingly, efforts should be made to maintain a working balance among the great powers. The rise of nonstate actors has become a reality of the present world, and it has changed the nature of diplomacy and the system of international relations. In such a context, Nepal's diplomacy should incorporate a clear conception of national purpose, prudence, and skill in the use of tools of statecraft. In the given background, Nepal cannot remain aloof and indifferent to the emerging trend of geopolitics. The lesson Nepal must draw is that change is the only constant element in politics. So, prudence demands to act according to the changed situation as suggested below:

"The new geopolitics has also made a considerable impact outside Europe and North America, and since the 1980s, much interest has been shown in it in the two most populous countries in the world, India and China. The most significant

development in India has been the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Geopolitics at the University of Chandigarh” (Groom, 1994).

The Gen Z episode in Nepal is a signal of how geopolitics can impact the internal state of politics (Source) if not handled properly before it takes its devastating roots. Had the political leaders taken a unanimous stand on issues of far-reaching consequences, such developments could have either been checkmated or foiled beforehand. Our past is a testimony to how political parties have shown a lack of farsightedness and a sense of accountability. Whether regarding treaties with neighbouring countries or the agreement with an overseas country, we have abandoned the common understanding of not entering into any alliance that may impact our national security and sovereignty (Simkhada, 2024). Past record amplifies that our ‘mainstream’ political party leaders are more scared of foreign power than the wrath of the people of our country. Now, the emerging development in the world and current events in the country should awaken the political party leaders to change their political behaviour if they want to prevent Nepal from becoming another Ukraine. It is time to realize that the country cannot move forward by being more concerned about other countries’ interests than our own.

### **Conclusion**

In the context of the emerging geopolitical trend, the only safe way out for the country is to embark on the path of relative self-reliance in this era of interdependence. Former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin has said:

“No one denies that there exists a dependence of our national economy on world capitalist politics. No one denies this or has denied it, just as no one denies that there exists a dependence of every country and every national economy, not excluding the American national economy, on the international capitalist economy. But this dependence is mutual. Not only does our economy depend upon the capitalist country, but the capitalist country, too, depends upon our economy, upon our oil, our grain, our timber, and, lastly, our boundless market. We receive credits, say, from Standard Oil. We receive credits from German capitalists. But we receive them not because of our bright eyes, but because the capitalist countries need our oil, our grain, and our market for the disposal of their machinery. (Stalin, 1975)

What Stalin means to say is not absolute independence of countries; he means that our country depends upon other countries just as other countries depend on our national economy. It is possible to accomplish the goal of relative economic independence by changing our policy and perspective, particularly in the field of international relations. More focus should be given on the industrial and agrarian revolution to generate job opportunities for our youth who have been compelled to go abroad in thousands of numbers in a day because of the government’s insensitivity to their needs. Given the country’s abundant natural resources, it is an urgent task to utilize them in favour of absorbing youth in our own country and then developing. History is a testimony to the

fact that economically weak and politically semi-colonial countries are the victims of suppression and oppression. Dominant powers of the world exploit the vulnerability of the weaker countries unless they become strong enough to resist such powers on their own strength. Recent conflicts in the Middle East are an eye-opener to self-respecting countries, whether big or small in size. If we do not correct our policy even after such consequences and repercussions the country has faced, the only alternative left is annihilation of the country itself.

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