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## Foreign Policy and National Security of Small State Nepal

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### Abstract

*Any nation-state's primary responsibility is to protect its citizens, the state, and the national interest. Nepal, a small state sandwiched between China and India, must always be watchful to protect its people, the state, and the interests of the country. The objective of the article is to carry out analytical study of joint working mechanism by Nepal's Defense and Foreign Ministry on national security issues. For the aforementioned security of the state and the people, the defense and foreign ministry should go hand in glove, which is not the case as of now as only issues related to defense is dealt by the National Security Council (NSC) of Nepal. Therefore, carrying out comparative study of NSC of different countries, this article argues that as in Mongolia and the United States, National Security Council of Nepal ought to be empowered to make decisions pertaining to both foreign policy and national security; in our foreign policy, policies and strategies should be included for our neighbors, and for great powers, as in Mongolia; follow objective neutrality in issues relating to the two neighbors, as by Switzerland; the defense and foreign ministries should work in tandem, like in Mongolia and Denmark. The methodology used for research is qualitative as a thorough investigation is required to answer the question raised.*

**Keywords:** *Foreign policy, national interest, national security, national security council, national security policy, small state*

### Introduction

Ensuring the safety of the state and its people is the vital responsibility of every nation-state. Holmes (2015) states that, "The Thirty Years War in Europe and the English Civil War in the 17<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to contemporary ideas of national security. The notion that the nation-state possessed sovereign authority over both foreign security and internal matters, including religion, was established in 1648 by the Peace of Westphalia." In a similar way, Kunwar (2024) cites Uberoy's concept of national security, "the absence of physical violence and the defense of a nation's citizens, territory, government, policies, and institutions against both internal and

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external threats in order to uphold its ideals and interests are known as national security.” In that line of argument, Halvard (2019) exposes connections between an independent and foreign policy “the entirety of an independent actor's (often a state's) official external relations is known as foreign policy”. The broad definition of foreign policy as per the University of York (2024) embraces the following:

The tool used by national governments to direct their diplomatic contacts and exchanges with other nations is known as foreign policy. A state's foreign policy serves to further its political and economic objectives in the international arena while also reflecting its beliefs and objectives. Numerous foreign policies also place a high priority on both domestic and global security, which will influence how a nation engages with other nations' citizens and international organizations like the UN.

Karkar (2019) has stated that “National security and foreign policy go hand in hand for any country. Enhancing national interests is the goal of both. On the association of foreign policy and national security” .

From above definitions, it can be said that a country’s national security is the most vital entity for all nations, large, medium, or small, and that one important means to safeguard national security is through foreign policy. Nepal, a small state sandwiched between two large states, must take into account preserving its interests, and security of its people, for this, defense and foreign ministry must be closely aligned, necessitating the development of both a system within the state apparatus and a cooperative culture.

The paper argues that, in order to strengthen Nepal's national security and foreign policy, we need to fortify the current framework and organizational structure of the NSC and working culture that will motivate the foreign and defense ministries to cooperate and work jointly in close coordination for the advancement of the nation. In light of the aforementioned, the article first assess Nepal's national security, national security concerns, and the role of the NSC. In an attempt to support the joint working culture, it compares Nepal's NSC with those of a select few other states. For enhancing our foreign policy and making it more secure and established, it also evaluates Nepal's foreign policy and compare it with the foreign policies of a few other nations that are also small states by definition. The paper next examines the result of discussions and make suggestions for enhancing Nepal's security.

## **Review of Literature**

Books, journals, periodicals, and online articles about foreign policy, small states, Nepal's foreign policy, national security, the constitution, and the NSC's structure and function were among the resources that were examined. National Security and the State by K. Bhandari, Small States in the International System at Peace and at War by Jesse and Dreyer, U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic by W. Lippmann, Nepal's Instability Conundrum by P. Silwal, and Nepal Foreign Policy by M. K. Singh were among the books consulted. Apart from the Foreign Policy, NSP and, NSC and of Nepal and some relevant countries were studied. The books, articles and papers studied, discussed what is small state, what is foreign policy, national security, NSC, but did not relate the correlation between a country’s national security and foreign policy. Therefore, the paper tries to link the relation between foreign policy and national

security. In order to do this, the paper analyzes the foreign policy and national security of small states, and offer suggestions for the growth of Nepal's NSC, as well as how foreign policy and national security can work together for the nation's advancement.

### **Methodology**

The answers to the questions will necessitate a thorough investigation of the subject, which can only be achieved using a qualitative method. This article has used an exploratory approach to explain what has been observed as is typical of most social science research. A qualitative analysis using qualitative data will be the chosen method to fulfill the study objectives. The empirical information used in the article are, more specifically, be secondary in nature and derived from scholarly works like books, journal articles, articles from different countries' national domains, and websites that will aid in defining small states, explaining their foreign policy and national security, besides that, certain primary data, such as official government records, and first hand data has been referred.

### **Small State**

Since the factors determining small states keep changing, “there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes a small state” (Mushelenga and Wyk, 2017). According to Mushelenga and Wyk, (2017):

A state's small population, small territory, economic strength or weakness, view of itself as a small state, and lack of involvement in international issues are generally used to describe a small state. Indicators of small states in the 1960s included a maximum population of 10 to 15 million. This number was changed to 1.5 million by the 1990s, while the Commonwealth and Europe defined tiny states as having a maximum of 1.5 million and 17 million inhabitants, respectively. However, because these four states—Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia, and Papua New Guinea—share many other traits (size and small economy), they are included in the Commonwealth even though it has a maximum criterion of 1.5 million inhabitants.

But the same authors, Mushelenga and Wyk further state, “Nepal is another small state that borders large states. It is positioned between India and the People's Republic of China (henceforth referred to as China). Therefore, Nepal's only choice is to continue having friendly relations with her neighboring countries.” According to Jesse and Dreyer (2016):

China is the East Asian superpower; Japan is the Great State; Taiwan, North Korea, and South Korea are the Middle States; Mongolia is the Small State; and there are no microstates. Additionally, in South Asia, China is the superpower; India and Pakistan are the Great States; there is no Middle State; Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka are Small States; and Nepal, the Maldives, and Bhutan are Microstates.

### ***Nepal as a Small State***

Based on the views stated in the previous paragraph and a variety of alternative interpretations, it can be said that there is no universally accepted definition of small states and that the factors are always evolving. There is contrasting views between different scholars about definition of small state. Nepal is characterized as a small state in this article based on the various definitions of small states, and reviewing the fact that China and India, its neighbouring countries have "a

land mass that is roughly 65 and 22 times larger than Nepal, their population is roughly 45 and 44 times larger than Nepal” (Global Fire Power Index, 2024); GDP roughly 434 and 86 times bigger than that of Nepal” (World Bank National Accounts Data, 2023); military forces that rank third and fourth in the world, respectively, while Nepal ranks 128<sup>th</sup> in the world” (Global Fire Power Index, 2024).

### **National Security**

Before going on to discuss national security of Nepal, it is relevant to analyze views of different scholars and experts on national security; Lippman (1943) inscribes, “when a country can sustain its legitimate interests through war and does not have to give them up to prevent conflict, it is said to be secure.”

Bhandari (2022) in his book quotes the definition of national security by Prabhakaran Paleri as, “the quantifiable state of a country's ability to overcome multifaceted threats to the apparent well-being of its citizens and its continued existence as a nation-state at any given time by balancing all the tools of state policy through governance that can be numerically or otherwise indexed and that can be extended by the variables outside of it.”

Silwal (2021) quotes scholar Romm’s definition on military security “Although military security is still a crucial component of national security, its significance has undoubtedly decreased in comparison to concerns about environmental, energy, and economic security.”

Silwal further inscribes:

Individual security became more and more important at the start of the twenty-first century. In most continents, but especially in Africa, interstate conflict followed the end of the Cold War. Once synonymous with the defense of territory from external attack, the requirements of security today have come to embrace the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence," stated former UN secretary Kofi Annan in this regard.

A new term on security threats came into practice in the 1990s, which was called comprehensive security, this entails an overall security approach, Arifi (2011), explains comprehensive security as:

Many academics explained in the early 1990s that future threats will be "non-military in nature" and that military action will only be able to partially address them. The term "complementary security" was thus created, encompassing the following: the military sector (military doctrine, armed forces, state capacities, etc.); the political sector (state stability governance system, legitimacy and sovereignty); the economic sector (resources-e.g. energy, water, finance, market, social welfare, etc.); the social sector (includes the identity of society or collective identity, which may exist independently of the state-e.g., people, religion, such as Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, etc.); and the environmental sector (the primary goal is to preserve natural resources (e.g., energy, water, forests, etc.) and flora and fauna, a term which was coined by the UN was “Human Environment”.

Part 4, Article 49, Directive, Principles, Policies, and Obligations of the State, and Article 51, Policies of the State, Nepal’s Constitution (2015) states:

The following policies shall be pursued by the State: Policies concerning national security and unity: (1) To uphold Nepal's freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence while preserving its unity; (2) To foster cooperation among the Federal Units by preserving harmony, solidarity, and cohesion among diverse castes, tribes, religions, languages, cultures, and communities; (3) To uphold law and order by creating a national security system; and (4) To ensure an overall human security system.

In a similar way, the long-term perspective and objective of Nepal's NSP, as per NSP (2018), can be documented:

“In order to make the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal a safe, peaceful, well-run, equitable, united, and prosperous nation, "the protection of Nepal's territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty, freedom, national unity, self-esteem, and social harmony, as well as the identification and promotion of national interest based on national values, recognition, and dignity.”

Speaking about other security-related topics might be pertinent in this context. For example, the COVID-19 epidemic, has altered worldwide public perceptions on national security. The 2015 earthquake, the unofficial embargo, the Maoist insurgency, and the COVID-19 epidemic has also transformed Nepalese perspectives on national security.

In addition to the state's physical security (sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity), national security also refers to safeguarding against multifaceted threats that could endanger politics, human security, economic prosperity, society, the preservation of law and order, harmony, environmental protection, and the general well-being of the population, as can be seen from the various definitions including that of comprehensive security given above and from the sections on national unity and security found in our constitution and NSP.

### **Security Threats of Nepal**

Silwal (2021) states in his book *Nepal's Instability Conundrum* about security threats of Nepal as:

Nepal's national security, as a relatively small, landlocked, and diverse society, includes the defense of the state (independence, sovereignty, and territory), national unity, economic prosperity, political stability, upholding law and order, human security, transit rights protection, and environmental preservation. International meddling in domestic matters, border encroachment, economic blockade, international assistance to domestic armed groups, transnational threats, and external military involvement are some examples of external challenges to the Nepali state. Separatist movements, terrorism, and insurgency are the main risks to internal security.

There is no disagreeing with what Silwal says has to say on the threats to Nepal's security, in addition, outside backing for the cause can intensify internal security problems. Nepal must also be prepared to respond to security risks like the COVID-19 epidemic and take into account security of the economic sector, social sector to include human security leading to the safety of its large migrant labor force working abroad in times of need, and the security of the environment.

## **Comparative Study of NSC**

In general, the NSC's directives oversee the implementation of the nation's security policy and any other national security-related issues. Let's evaluate the structure and function of the NSC of Nepal and that of other states.

### ***NSC Nepal***

Provisions Relating to National Security as per The Constitution of Nepal 2015:

There shall be a National Security Council for making recommendation to the Government of Nepal, Council of Ministers for the formulation of a policy on overall national interest, security and defence of Nepal, and for the mobilization and control of the Nepal Army, which shall consist of the following as the Chairperson and members: The Prime Minister –Chairperson; Minister for Defence –Member; Minister for Home–Member; Minister for Foreign Affairs –Member; Minister for Finance –Member; Chief Secretary –Member; Commander-in-Chief, Nepal Army–Member; The secretary at the Ministry of Defence shall act as member secretary. The National Security Council shall submit its annual report to the President, and the President shall cause the report to be laid through the Prime Minister before the Federal Parliament. Other matters relating to the National Security Council shall be as provided by the Federal law.

### ***NSC Mongolia***

As per, The National Security Council of Mongolia, Home Page:

In 1992, Mongolia's National Security Council was founded. The prime minister, the speaker of the National Assembly, and the president of Mongolia make up the members, while the chairman is the president. The Mongolian president appoints the council's secretary. Members of the advisory group are... There are experts, presenters, and advisers on the council. To maintain national security, the Mongolian NSC oversees the creation of a single state policy, coordinates its execution, and keeps an eye on its progress. In accordance with Mongolia's foreign policy, the NSC also makes decisions on important economic matters pertaining to Mongolia's wealth, relations with other nations and international organizations, The positive aspect of the aforementioned circumstance was that the author observed Nepal's collaborative policy-making culture when writing the National Security Policy (all necessary government secretaries were on the committee) and the Defense Policy (the Foreign and Home Ministry representatives were on the team). Therefore, it can be concluded that Nepal's NSC can cooperate and perform better for Nepal's national security if required by the constitution or an NSC-related act and how to express opinions at the highest level. The council will be in charge of carrying out the department's decisions and staying within the parameters of.

### ***NSC United States***

NSC of US as per the, White House, Home Page:

The President of the United States chairs the National Security Council. The Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs are among its frequent attendees, both statutory and non-statutory. The Director of National Intelligence serves as the Council's intelligence advisor, while the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is its official military advisor. Any meeting of the NSC

is open to the President's Counsel, Chief of Staff, and Assistant to the President for Economic Policy. All matters pertaining to foreign and defense policy are handled by the council.

### ***Analysis of Nepal's NSC with that of a few other States***

We infer from the comparison of the NSCs of the small state of Mongolia and the superpower United States that their NSC makes decisions on foreign policy and national security, which is not the case in Nepal, where only decisions on national security and mobilization of Nepal Army has been taken by the NSC thus far and there is no provision of discussion on foreign policy in Nepal's NSC mandate. In the case of Mongolia, significant decisions regarding matters concerning the country's economic resources are also made by the NSC, which is not so in Nepal. Additionally, the NSC in Mongolia and the United States both have sizable staffs of advisers and subject matter specialists, which is lacking in the case of Nepal, which only has a secretariat without advisers and subject matter specialists. Despite the above situation the good part was the working together culture on policy making was observed by the author in Nepal, while writing of National Security Policy (all required secretaries of the government were members of the committee), and Defense Policy (representative of Foreign and Home Ministry was in the team). Therefore, it can be concluded that Nepal's NSC can cooperate and perform better for Nepal's national security if mandated by the constitution or an NSC-related act.

### **Foreign Policy**

In simple term. the broad goals that direct a state's contacts and activities in its dealings with other states are known as foreign policy. As foreign policy, directs how you deal with another nation, the actions or policies of those states governments too have an impact on how foreign policy is developed, including geopolitics and the domestic factors.

Now let us see how foreign policy is explained in his book 'Nepal's Foreign Policy' by Singh (2011), "This idea, which was first put forth by scholar and former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, but was later best expressed by Lord Palmerstone as British Foreign Secretary, seems fairly simple: 'In foreign policy, there are no permanent friends or enemies, there are only permanent interests'."

From the aforementioned definitions, we can conclude that foreign policy is the process by which a nation forges relationship with other nations. These relationships are shaped by domestic issues, other nations' policies towards your country and most importantly national security concerns. The point to be noted here is to always keep in mind what Lord Palmerstone said, 'permanent interest' as the vital entity of a nation's foreign policy for furthering the national security.

### ***Foreign Policy of Small States***

According to Rosenau's pre-theory of foreign policy, "size is one of the three "genotypic" factors that are thought to have a significant impact on foreign policy. Furthermore, empirical research has demonstrated that size is a significant underlying factor influencing how nation states behave internationally" (East, 1973). East further inscribes:

When matched to large states, small states are typically portrayed as displaying the following foreign policy behavior patterns based on these distinguishing traits: (a) lack of general involvement in international affairs; (b) high levels of involvement in International Governmental Organizations (IGOs); (c) strong support for international legal norms; (d) refraining from using force as a tactic of statecraft; (e) refraining from actions and policies that tend to alienate the more powerful states in the system; (f) a limited functional and geographic scope of foreign policy activities; (g) frequently using moral and normative stances on international issues.

From the preceding paragraphs, it is very clear how a small state behaves when dealing with other countries, and the most important issue for it, is its survival. Now, let us look at the foreign policies of Nepal and a few other small states, including Mongolia, Switzerland, and Denmark, and compare their foreign policy to that of Nepal's.

### ***Foreign Policy of Nepal***

The Foreign Ministry now has a new foreign policy that aligns with Nepal's National Security Policy. The standards and tenets of Nepal's foreign policy are founded on, Nepal's Foreign Policy (2020):

Sovereign equality, the Principles of Panchasheel, the spirit of the United Nations Charter, non-alignment, mutual respect and benefit, international law and values of world peace, peaceful dispute resolution, international cooperation, justice, equality, and accountability, mutual friendship, cooperation, and collaboration, democracy, human rights and rule of law, economic progress and prosperity, ecological balance, human security, and protection of the planet, Nepal's freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and protection of national interest, as well as the enhancement of national dignity and prestige, (Directive Principles of the State, Article 50 (4) of the Constitution of Nepal). (Translated into English). The foreign policy objectives mentioned above have policies and strategies for each objective, and there is also a mechanism for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the foreign policy.

Continuation of Nepal's Foreign Policy (2020):

Building a strong, prosperous, peaceful, and dignified nation while keeping intact Nepal's freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, national security, and unity" is the stated goal of Nepal's foreign policy." Additionally, "To protect and promote overall national interest by strengthening external relations based on sovereign equality, mutual benefit, and respect through the conduct of independent and balanced foreign policy" is the stated objective of foreign policy. Bilateral relations, multilateral cooperation, rule-based order, regional cooperation, economic diplomacy, protection of the rights and benefits of natural and legal persons, public diplomacy, track two diplomacies, and institutional strengthening are the nine (9) goals of Nepal's foreign policy. (Translated into English).

The foreign policy objectives mentioned above has policies and strategies for each objective, and there is also a mechanism for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the foreign policy.



***Foreign Policy of Mongolia***

As per The National Security Council of Mongolia, Home Page:

Centered on the internal and external factors, the conception of Mongolia's foreign policy is defined as: General Provisions (foundation of the foreign policy is written here like NAM and UN Charter etc. ...); Mongolia's foreign policy encompasses the following areas: political, economic, scientific, and technological, as well as cultural and humanitarian. Regarding how foreign policy is being implemented in the political sphere, it explains: what kind of relationship it will have with its two neighbors, China and Russia; what kind of relationship it will have with highly developed nations like the United States, Japan, and Germany; what kind of relationship it hopes to have with nations like India, South Korea, and Turkey; what role it wants to play in Asia; what role it wants to play in the United Nations; and so forth.

***Foreign Policy of Switzerland***

Switzerland's Foreign Policy, as per The Federal Council:

The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation states that the goal of Swiss foreign policy is to protect Switzerland's independence and well-being... Additionally, the Confederation will protect Swiss economic interests overseas. Peace and security (security is a part of foreign policy), prosperity, sustainability, and digitization are the pillars of Switzerland's foreign policy. Additionally, Switzerland's actions in particular priority regions, such as China, the EU, and the Americas, are guided by thematic and geographical follow-up policies that have been endorsed by the Federal Council.

***Danish Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2***

Denmark's Foreign and Security Policy Strategy (2020) states:

Six priorities served as the foundation for Danish foreign engagement in the second Danish Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2019-2020, which was released in November 2018: international system based on rules; cyber security and terrorism; Europe—a powerful, efficient, and successful EU; refugees, migration, and development; economic diplomacy, strategic alliances, and the new digital world order; and the Arctic. In addition to Defense and Foreign Affairs, other ministries that contributed to the creation of the foreign and security strategy were Climate and Energy, Health, Trade, Justice, Education, and Science.

**Examination of Nepal's Foreign Policy in Relation to those of a few other Small States**

Size and national capacities are important, and small states' foreign policy behaves differently from that of large nations, based to the study on the foreign policy of small states, and the foreign policy of the small states. Singh (2011) quotes Fox A. B. on his book "Foreign Policy of Nepal": "Fox A. B. wrote in her seminal work, *The Power of Small States, Diplomacy in World War II*: 'Great states' unique power stems from their military might. For small states, diplomacy is the tool of statecraft."

Although Nepal's new foreign policy covers a lot on dealing with other nations and on various foreign policy issues, still let us compare it to the foreign policies of the other small states mentioned above so as to borrow new and better notions for the improvement of our foreign

policy. The landlocked nation of Nepal, which is sandwiched between the rapidly developing economies and military powers China and India, can learn from Mongolia's foreign policy on having well-defined policies and strategies for dealing with neighbors (Russia and China in Mongolia's case, and India and China in our case), as well as distinct policies and strategies for dealing with other developed nations (in our case those countries that have assisted in our developments in the past and are assisting on our development efforts at present, such as Russia, the European Union, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom), as well as how to deal with IGOS like the UN. Denmark's foreign and security policy can teach us about the cooperative nature of military, foreign, and home ministry tasks, while Switzerland's foreign policy can show us how to remain impartial while handling issues involving the two neighbors.

Even though there was association with defense ministry while drafting the foreign policy, in line with that a collaborative culture on matters relating to national security and UN peacekeeping has to be developed by the Defense and Foreign Ministry. Furthermore, meticulous attention to detail in foreign policy is required to ensure the safety of our big migrant labor force. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research institutions and systems for employing specialists, which are crucial for formulating foreign policy in light of the persistent problems that emerge in an anarchic world.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal, a small state with the longest history of independence in South Asia, has managed to maintain its sovereignty, and territorial integrity through challenging periods in its history. As such, it must constantly be on lookout to safeguard its national interests, national security, and its population including the large migrant workers abroad.

Making decisions at the highest level and fostering a cooperative culture between the foreign and defense ministries is essential in achieving the security and foreign and security policy vision, goals, and objectives of the nation.

First and foremost, for this, the NSC's mandate should be expanded to include decision-making authority over foreign policy, as the Foreign Minister is already a member of the NSC, the only person that is needed to be included in the present NSC is the Foreign Secretary. But as we know, changing the mandate of the NSC can be done only by changing the constitution, which is not easy in Nepal as present due to the fluid nature of politics. So let us see what can be done for the time till there is a constitutional amendment: developing a mechanism, where important national security and foreign policy decision is done by Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, Defense Minister, the chief secretary and the Chief of Army Staff (COAS). In addition to that for decision not requiring the PM, ministers, and the COAS, the Foreign Secretary, the Defense Secretary and the Chief of General Staff team can deal with such issues including that on UN Peacekeeping. Also the possibility of having an army liaison officer at the foreign ministry for UN Peacekeeping and coordination of the military attaches' can be thought of.

For the Foreign Ministry to perform better, the foreign policy could include separate policies and strategies for neighbors, and great powers as in Mongolia, should follow objective

neutrality on issues between neighbors as brought into practice by Switzerland, and develop working together culture among defense and foreign ministries as in Mongolia and Denmark. The NSC and the foreign ministry should also hire more specialists and subject matter experts when needed, create think tanks, and improve their employment level. A Chinese proverb states, “when people work together, they can win; when they put their heads together, they can succeed.”

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