



Article history

Received: 08 Nov 2024

Accepted: 23 Jan 2025

Prospects of Security Agencies' Cooperation in Nepal

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Abstract

In this ever-changing and dynamic global security environment, the need for security agency cooperation has been an integral part of national security. Security agency cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts among various national and international agencies aimed at achieving mutual security objectives through resource sharing, coordinated actions, and information exchange. In the context of Nepal, different internal and external factors have necessitated security agency cooperation to concentrate on profound national security. Currently, four security agencies are mandated in an umbrella framework of national security to promote national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. Notably, research conducted on national security has suggested enhancing security agency cooperation to counter the persistent threats to the nation. This paper aims to assess the effectiveness of security agencies cooperation in Nepal along with its benefits and challenges. The methodology engaged to meet the objective of research is a qualitative approach with descriptive and analytical research design. The research tool used by the researcher is an in-depth interview with ten key informants for accurate and authentic data. The acquired data are codified, and themes are analyzed through non-numeric unstructured data indexing, searching, and theorizing (NVIVO) software. The findings show that security agency cooperation is progressive in nature, and it would benefit from prompt service delivery, crisis responses, the formation of strong intelligence mechanisms, national and international recognition, and improved border security. Challenges such as legal jurisdiction, citizen distrust, lack of technical knowledge, and leadership apathy exist as major hindrances. The research suggests revising the role of the National Security Council, constructing an integrated command post, establishing a joint intelligence mechanism, and implementing a leadership familiarization program to enhance security agency cooperation.

Keywords: Security, cooperation, prospects, intelligence, command

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Introduction

In recent days, inter-agency cooperation has been stressed by the United Nations, the European Union, global institutes, and many countries. This cooperation is considered the most important tool for good governance, which guides planning and implementation, which guides the entire program cycle, planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of achieving the overall goal (United Nations, 2024). With the growth of the interagency cooperation framework, security agencies cooperation mechanism has also been developed by many countries in order to strengthen national security and foreign policy. The practical workings of security agencies cooperation incorporate coordination, cooperation, and collaboration (Isa et al., 2019: p.186).

Security agency cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts among various national and international agencies aimed at achieving mutual security objectives through resource sharing, coordinated actions, and information exchange (National Defense University, 2015). According to The Joint Guide for Interagency Doctrine (2019), security agency cooperation is crucial for effective threat management, resource optimization, enhanced preparedness, and global stability. It consists of information sharing, joint training, aligned strategic goals, resource sharing, clear legal frameworks, and cultural integration (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2024). The purpose of security agency cooperation is to enable allied and partner capabilities, build capacity, and build developing mechanisms to share risk and responsibility to counter global complex challenges (Dyekman, 2007, p. 4).

Security agency cooperation is highly significant for national security, leading to the concept of security governance in the current world. It links in security synergy, collective network, forum of conflict indicator analysis, and channels for dissemination (Oladele, 2020, p. 25). The term security governance is closely associated with security agency cooperation, which refers to the frameworks, policies, and oversight mechanisms that guide the actions of security agencies to operate transparently and in line with national interests and public accountability (Bayley & Shearing, 2001). Effective security governance establishes rules and norms that guide how different security entities, such as police, intelligence agencies, and military organizations, interact and share responsibilities (Mihalka, 2005, p. 14).

Despite the benefits of security agency cooperation, there are multiple factors that lead to limited cooperation among security agencies (Oladele, 2020, p. 23). Factors such as bureaucratic structures, distinct protocols, organizational cultures, mistrust, rivalry, political interference, limited budget, reluctance to collaborate, and operational insecurity hinder security agency cooperation, which fails in intelligence capability and directly impacts national security (Segall, 2010, pp. 68-70; Isa et al., 2019; Oladele, 2020, p. 27). Due to this context, advanced research on security agency cooperation connecting its effectiveness and challenges is an adamant requirement for any nation. This research is an attempt to study the current status of Nepal's security agency cooperation and its challenges.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars and security experts have mentioned the continued cooperation of Nepali security forces due to its unique geopolitical position, diverse security challenges, and evolving internal dynamics. The national security of Nepal is in a state of flux due to changing dynamics of

internal and external politics (Acharya, 2022, p. 122). Security agency cooperation is essential for Nepal to manage cross-border risks, human security, natural disasters, and cybersecurity capabilities and promote internal stability. Modern security challenges of Nepal, especially targeting the factors of both comprehensive and human security, have existed. (Dhakal 2020; Upreti, 2023; Jha 2023).

The open border problems and their eminent threats, such as cross-border crimes and smuggling, require cooperation with both domestic and foreign security to respond to cross-border security threats in real time (K.C., 2019). The essence of security agency cooperation is to strengthen information sharing and enhance intelligence networks, joint training, clear legal frameworks, and capacity enhancement.

Despite the critical role of maintaining national security and performing their mandated tasks, there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on how effectively these agencies perform in key areas such as threat assessment, risk analysis, joint operations, and information sharing. The importance of these functions cannot be overstated, as they are essential for the accurate identification and management of potential factors affecting security agencies cooperation. Similarly, existing literature offers only limited insight into the details about existing security agency cooperation and challenges faced in these domains. There is little detailed information on how well these agencies can assess and analyze threats, coordinate with each other, and develop effective policies to mitigate risks in the quest of strengthening national security.

Due to this reason, different authors and researchers have focused on the need for security agency cooperation in Nepal. Researcher and security experts Upreti (2018) and Acharya (2020) emphasize the need for Nepal to adopt a comprehensive national security policy that coordinates security agencies along with governmental departments. In order to fill the gap of research related to security agency cooperation, this article sheds light on the prospects of security agency cooperation with its effectiveness and benefits and also highlights major challenges. Thus, this research seeks to fill this significant gap by thoroughly examining the existing security cooperation system of Nepal.

Objective

Different nations have established multiple security forces to address diverse security needs and challenges. In the current world, a single security agency might not be able to handle effectively all the security domains. In the context of Nepal, different security threats, such as political instability, cybercrime, internal unrest, and border security, are prevalent. Hence, in order to understand the cooperative behavior of these agencies, researchers have stated the following core objective of this research paper.

- a) To assess the effectiveness of cooperation practiced by security agencies of Nepal
- b) To find out the benefits of security agency cooperation in enhancing national security
- c) To understand the challenges of security agencies cooperation.

Review of Literature

There are several theories, frameworks, and models supporting security agencies' cooperation on the basis of motives, strategies, and structural complexities. This integration area aims to

have mutual benefits and long-term stability to enhance mutual security rather than solely advancing their interests. Different theories, such as collective security theory, interagency cooperation theory, systematic integration theory, game theory, and cooperative security theory, help us understand security agency cooperation from domestic to international perspectives. Jones (1998) defines cooperative security as a shared norm and a commitment to peaceful changes that guide interactions among states or agencies. This theory stresses that states or agencies work together to address security threats based on mutual benefit, building trust and shared goals rather than rivalry or unilateral advantage.

Mihalka (2005) explores the growing significance of cooperative security in an interconnected world facing complex, transnational threats and emphasizes that security challenges cannot be managed by individual states alone and focuses on collaborative international efforts supported by institutions like the United Nations and NATO. The (RAND) Research and Development Corporation (2022) has extensively studied security cooperation as a strategic tool in competitive global dynamics and highlighted security cooperation as a vital mechanism not only for defense and military partnerships but also as a means of sustaining geopolitical influence through training, shared intelligence, and combined resources.

Previous empirical studies on security agency cooperation highlight various frameworks and practical applications aimed at fostering collaboration across different jurisdictions and countries (Cohen 2001; Mihalka, 2005). Another significant perspective on cooperative security comes from the George C. Marshall Center, which discusses cooperative security models like the security community theory by Karl Deutsch based on shared norms and a commitment to non-violence, thus reducing tensions and building trust among states (Mihalka, 2005). This model of cooperation was particularly relevant during the Cold War and has since been adapted for modern transnational security concerns, such as counterterrorism and nuclear disarmament (Deutsch, 1961).

In the context of Nepal, previous studies on security agency cooperation reveal various approaches, particularly in areas like national security, strategic affairs, diplomacy, border management, internal security, community policing, and crime control to address security challenges.

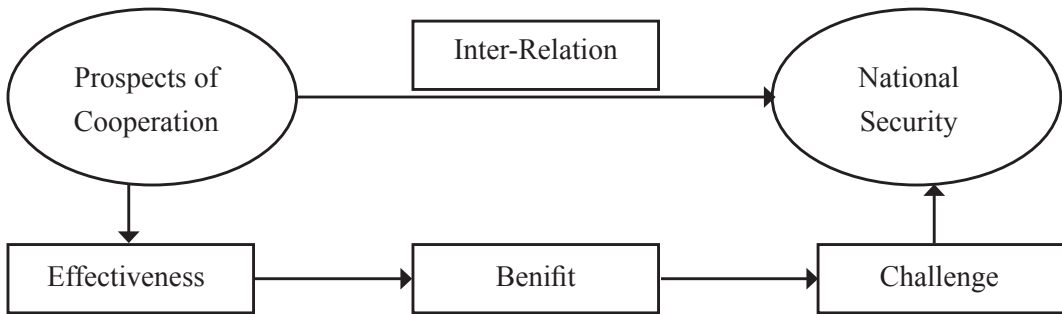
Upreti (2022) emphasizes coordinated border management as a framework for enhancing interagency cooperation across Nepal's numerous border posts. This approach involves federal and local agencies working together on issues such as information exchange, joint training, and synchronized inspections. Sharma (2022) & Acharya (2020) highlighted the National Security Council's (NSC) coordinated efforts to navigate a complex security landscape, balancing national sovereignty with regional influences by engaging multiple stakeholders, such as military and police leaders, to address security threats while upholding Nepal's neutrality in South Asia. Paudel (2023) & Dhakal (2020) show the current state of security agency cooperation in Nepal reflects both progress and ongoing challenges across different domains, such as border security, disaster management, and international collaboration. Karki (2023) and Jha (2023) mention that cybersecurity has become a major threat, so systematic integration by enhancing cybersecurity capabilities to protect national infrastructure and addressing cyber-related crimes in collaboration with other government bodies is necessary.

Research Gap

The above-mentioned reviews of different studies collectively show that successful security cooperation relies on structured partnerships, both internationally and within national boundaries, that will address complex and evolving security threats. The cooperative security theory highlights the importance of strategic alignment, shared values, and trust among cooperating agencies and nations to create a stable security environment. In Nepal, cooperation among security agencies covers several critical areas. Border security is a primary focus, especially along the open border with India, which poses challenges like cross-border crime, human trafficking, and smuggling. The geo-strategy importance analysis, terrain and air safety plan are conducted by the Nepali Army, and collaborative efforts between four security forces aim to enhance intelligence capabilities, information sharing, and joint operations in order to maintain national security. Assessment of this security agency's cooperation has not been conducted, so this study aims to find the effectiveness of current cooperation with its benefits and challenges.

Conceptual Framework

In order to structure the findings, the researcher has constructed the following conceptual framework of three dimensions of cooperation among security agencies. Different literature shows that prospects of security cooperation have direct relationships with national security; the unshaded part of effectiveness, benefits, and challenges will be highlighted from findings.



*Figure 1. Researcher conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher Illustration, (2024)*

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative approach with an explorative research design to examine the prospects of security agencies cooperation in Nepal. From the broad understanding about the subject matter in the world scenario, the current literature on cooperative security is analyzed, and philosophical development on the subject is followed by the inductive style. This study is dependent on the primary sources of data by analyzing the theme from key informant statements. Secondary sources of data are extracted in the construction of research. The secondary sources are books, journals, reports, publications, bulletins, newspapers, websites, and the internet. The tools for collecting primary data were key informant interviews (KII), and open-ended questions were asked. After the collection of data, analysis is done in five steps by

categorizing, keyword selecting, coding, and theme analysis, interpreting, and conceptualizing with literature by using NVIVO software. The research is limited on the effectiveness, benefits, and challenges of security agencies’ cooperation in Nepal. The research flow diagram and KII details are as shown.

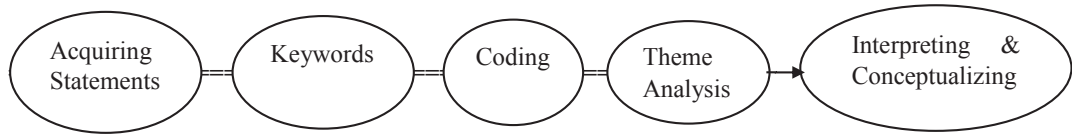


Figure 2. Research Flow

Source: Researcher Inductive thematic analysis process, Adopted from Naeem & Ozuem (2022)

Table 1 Key Informant Details

S.N.	Code	Agency	Number	Method	Remarks
1	KII A	Nepali Army	2	Telephone Interview	All participants have an experience of working as a member of NSC and district security committee.
2	KII B	APF, Nepal	2	Personal Interview	
3	KII C	NID	2	Personal Interview	
4	KII D	Nepal Police	2	Telephone Interview	
5	KII E	Civil Service	2	Telephone Interview	

Source: Researcher ethical consideration, (2024)

The following were the questions asked of the participants.

- (a) Elaborate on the effectiveness of security agency cooperation in Nepal.
- (b) What benefit can be extracted from security agency cooperation?
- (c) What are the major challenges of security agency cooperation?

Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis section of this paper interprets the theme of the data gathered during the research process and explores their significance in relation to the research objectives. This section explores key informants views and insights that were asked during the interview. It connects these results to existing literature, providing a broader understanding of the research objective. Through careful comparison and evaluation of the interview, this part seeks to explain the theme by addressing the research questions, considering limitations and expected outcomes. This section covers the answers to the research question in a sequenced manner, which are as follows:

Effectiveness of Current Cooperation Practiced by Security Agencies of Nepal

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 had established a federal democratic republic that ensures justice, equality, and liberty for all its citizens. It seeks to promote national unity and foster social harmony by recognizing Nepal as a diverse, multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural society. The Constitution had provided a broad framework for national security and security forces of Nepal.

Article 267 establishes the Nepali Army as a key national institution committed to protecting the country's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, freedom, and national unity. Beyond its primary role in defending the country, the Nepali Army may also be mobilized by the government for various purposes, such as development, construction, and disaster management. This additional role reveals the Nepali Army's contribution to public welfare, national security, and development.

Article 268 highlights the role of the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and National Investigation Department (NID) as a Federal Security Force. The Nepal Police is regarded as the national and primary law enforcement agency of Nepal. It is primarily responsible for maintaining law and order, preventing crime, and investigating crime within the jurisdiction determined by the Constitution of Nepal. The APF, Nepal, has a prime responsibility of securing the borders of Nepal with thirteen different mandates relating to national security. The Constitution of Nepal mentions the NID as an intelligence agency that gathers and analyzes intelligence related to national security, including both internal and external threats. These also grant the NID to conduct surveillance, collect information, and engage in covert operations to protect national interests.

Article 266 of the constitution of Nepal has a provision for the National Security Council. It is an apex unit that recommends the government of Nepal by formulating a policy on national interest, national security, and defense. It is also considered a coordinating unit, as it consists of members from all the security agencies. The constitutional provision has mandated different tasks under the umbrella of national security. The difference in lead ministries of these four different security agencies requires coordinated efforts to achieve their task in order to maintain national security. The following table illustrates the different roles, tasks, and focal ministries of four security agencies of Nepal.

Table 2 *Security Forces of Nepal with its role, task and lead Ministry*

Agency	Role	Task	Ministry
Nepali Army	National Defense and Security	Strategic Planning, Disaster response, Nature conservation	MOD
Nepal Police	Maintain Peace, security and Law Enforcement	Crime Investigation, POM, VIP protection & Disaster management	MOHA
APF, Nepal	Maintain Peace and Border security	Patrolling, POM, Disaster Management & revenue support	MOHA
NID	Intelligence collection	Collection, analysis, and distribution of intelligence	OPMCM

Source: Adopted from related agencies website (2024)

The constitution of Nepal 2015 has a provision of fulfilling aspirations for sustainable peace, good governance, development, and prosperity of the country by adopting all forms of cooperation, co-existence, and mutual coordination among all the stakeholders. To adopt a coordination mechanism at all levels of government, the federal-province-local level coordination and inter-

relation Act 2077 has been a legally binding document to ensure interagency cooperation to achieve all the indicators as prescribed in the Good Governance Act 2064. Federal-province-local level The Coordination and Inter-relation Act 2077 has a provision for a National Coordination Council, State Coordination Council, District Coordination Committee, and local-level coordination.

All the agencies follow both intra-agency coordination and inter-agency coordination to achieve their designated task. The security agencies are having different ministries as lead supervising units, which may hinder prompt and real-time amiable cooperation in exchanging relevant information for operational achievement. At the central level, the National Security Council (NSC) has acted as the coordinating unit of all security agencies, which plays a role in strategic and policy formulation for national security concerns. Other operational committees, like the Central Security Committee (CSC), Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee (CNDRC), Joint Intelligence Mechanism (JIM), Integrated National Intelligence Mechanism (INIM), National Emergency Operation Center (NEOC), and Crises Management Cell (CMC), had played a vital role in security agency cooperation. The following figure shows the layer and area of cooperation from different levels of the security agency.

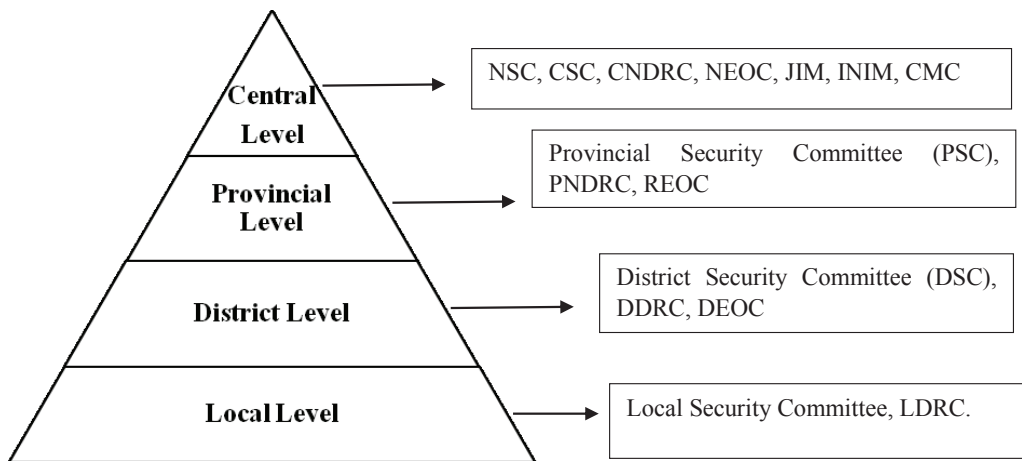


Figure 3. Security Force layer of coordination

Source: Researcher Compilation, (2024)

Analyzing the effectiveness of this cooperation of security forces of Nepal requires a depth of observation and excess time. The researcher has analyzed its effectiveness by interviewing related field experts who had practical insights into the level of cooperation. The first question asked the participant about the effectiveness of security agency cooperation in Nepal. Most of the participants are quite satisfied with the security agency cooperation at the central level. They view that security forces leadership is proactive in cooperation, and most of the cooperation meetings are scheduled as per the procedure law. The following are the themes generated after coding the data.

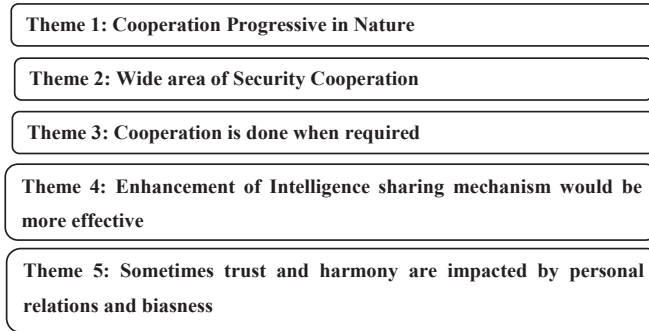


Figure 4. Theme Generated

Source: Theme generated after coding from participant statement, (2024)

Cooperation Progressive in Nature

During the interview, eight participants, claimed that security agencies are proactive in cooperation. Many legal provisions on interstate coordination mechanisms are a preface for security agency coordination and cooperation. All the participants agreed that security agencies are tactical components and operate their tasks in the field, so they should rely more on cooperation than coordination. Currently, the National Security Council is a lead agency that integrates all the security agencies together. All four security agencies at the National Security Council have been performing tasks such as daily situation analysis, threat assessment, intelligence collection, international relations analysis, and national security issues.

There have been improvements in existing intelligence mechanisms as they consist of all security agencies, including the Joint Intelligence Mechanism (JIM) and Integrated National Intelligence Mechanism (INIM). These mechanisms are designed to ensure coordination and efficiency in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence among different security and law enforcement agencies. JIM focuses on fostering cooperation between security agencies, enhancing information sharing to address national security threats. INIM, on the other hand, integrates various intelligence-gathering operations at both the national and local levels to provide comprehensive insights into security concerns, domestic security, border security, and geo-strategic concerns. Together, these mechanisms enable a unified approach to intelligence operations, which is an immediate need for Nepal. The joint statement from all the participants is as follows.

“There have been improvements in security agencies coordination. [In recent days] the security leadership has been insisting on cooperation. [Firstly], the constitution of Nepal and [...] are a major guideline in the formation of a cooperation mechanism. Secondly, the formation of JIM and INIM helps in real-time information sharing, which is a good indicator of security cooperation.”

Wide area of Cooperation (Disaster Management, Crisis Response)

Seven participants focused on the area of cooperation. The area is wide as it consists of crime control, riot control, border security, disaster management, VIP security, and civic action. Mostly, interagency communication is the essential requirement for effective cooperation in all the sectors. In terms of disaster management and crisis response, more cooperation is required. The Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, 2017, has legalized and rationalized the

security agency coordination from the central level to the local level. From the executive council, committee, Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC), District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC), and Local Disaster Management Committee (LDMC), the presence of all security agencies verifies the effectiveness of cooperation. Specifically, in terms of mega disasters, while coordinating with international actors, the Nepal Army Crisis Management Cell (NACRIMAC) coordinates with national and international search and rescue teams. The perfect example of such coordination and cooperation was seen in the Gorkha earthquake, 2015. While, in responding to the COVID virus, security agencies cooperation was strengthened. In regard to the wide area of cooperation, participants expressed the following:

“[While] there are specified acts, rules, and regulations for all the security forces. They are performing their duties as per their acts and guidelines. Due to the wide area of the task, [in terms of disaster search and rescue] and [...] every practical aspect cannot be covered in guidelines. [I think] The DRRM Act has rationalized the security agencies cooperation. [We know] In the Gorkha earthquake, the Nepali army coordinated with national and international SAR teams. During the COVID-19 phase, the COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) also proved the effectiveness of security agencies cooperation.”

Cooperation is done when required

Six participants observed that security agency cooperation needs to be done when required. Other four participants stress as hasty or extemporary in nature. However, all the participants do not agree with this fact, but this thematic analysis reveals that security agencies cooperate when they need to. Especially in response to crises or urgent situations rather than through continuous, proactive measures. Different mandates of agencies, different tasks, and different cultures may be responsible for this situation. This situation reduces effective cooperation and needs to be incorporated into an autoreactive structure. The participants expressed the following joint statement:

“[Not in everywhere] Sometimes security cooperation is done when necessary [hasty or extemporary]. It may be a situational requirement, but this does not result in good security governance. [May be] Kailaliriot, Balkumari riot, and recent monsoon disaster preparedness are the results.”

Enhancement of the Intelligence sharing mechanism would be more effective

All participants focused on intelligence-sharing mechanisms in order to build enhanced security cooperation. Intelligence is also one of the elements of foreign policy. The authorized intelligence agency of Nepal is NID, but all the agencies have their dedicated intelligence unit to gather, analyze, and share information to protect national security and prevent threats. Due to this absence of a centralized intelligence coordination body, fragmentation in communication, operational inefficiencies, and political interference exists, causing a derailment in the security agency. The point all the participants focused on is to construct a specialized interagency intelligence mechanism that ensures effective cooperation. The participants express the following joint statement:

“While the intelligence system always needs to be undercover and the existing mechanisms cannot be revealed.... Our [intelligence] system faces challenges like limited resources, lack of advanced technology, [and...] Efforts have been made to improve the intelligence network;

there is still a need for better collaboration, training, and modernization to make the system more effective for security agency cooperation. We need a specialized intelligence mechanism which reduces work duplication.”

Sometimes trust and harmony are impacted by personal relations and bias

Sometimes trust issues are seen between security agencies and between the general public and security agencies in Nepal. Security agencies have been accused of overreach, misuse of their powers, and being impacted by personal relations or biases. This has led to skepticism and reluctance, which have reduced the effective cooperation of security agencies. The following are the insights of the participants.

“I don’t know why trust issues [also] exist within the agencies, where officers of one agency might mistrust other agencies due to [...] such mistrust can impair communication and collaboration, undermining the overall efficiency of the agencies.”

Benefits of cooperation

After analyzing the effectiveness of security agencies cooperation, the participants were asked about the possible benefits of cooperation in Nepal. The participants reveal the same points as discussed in the literature review. More specifically, participants highlighted important points favoring the landscape of Nepal and its geopolitical domain. The following are the themes generated after coding the data on the second research question.

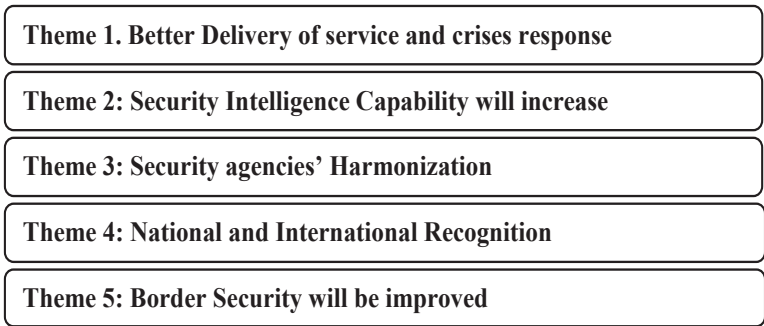


Figure 5. Theme Generated

Source: Theme generated after coding from participant statement (2024)

Better Delivery of Service and Crisis Response

The nature and tasks of the Army and Police are different, but their vision and goals are interlinked with national security. All the participants view that the service delivery of security forces plays a crucial role in winning the hearts of people and maintaining citizens’ trust in them. Nepali security forces have been praised for their operational coordination in efforts such as the unified command during the insurgency, the Gorkha earthquake, and the COVID response. Due to coordinated efforts at the policy level, better working spirit among all members of the security forces will arise, resulting in improved service delivery. Participants express the following joint statement.

“The [major] benefit of security agency cooperation in Nepal is service to people. Most people still do not believe in security forces. This may be due to a lack of security force leadership

cooperation. [We just saw] in disaster response how people believe security forces. So, this type of cooperation, not only in disaster response but in all sectors, will bring a massive response.”

Security Intelligence Capability will Increase

All the participants emphasized the importance of security intelligence capabilities due to security agency coordination. They focused on security agencies, particularly the Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Nepal and the NID, playing a proactive role in intelligence gathering. The participants noted that the integrated command post under the command of the Nepali Army will enhance effective intelligence collection and dissemination, which will result in the selection of the best intelligence officers, particularly experts in information and communication such as data analytics, cybersecurity, and surveillance tools. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of the dedication and integrity of such officers for effective operations. Joint training of intelligence security personnel is necessary, but more training is not required to maintain secrecy. In their view, this will be possible only through cooperation. The joint statement of participants expresses the following:

“[We know] security force cannot conduct work without intelligence. Instead of having many intelligence departments in all agencies, [Make] one effective, integrated, dedicated, and national intelligence command post, which will be enough. This will reduce work duplication, resources, and [.]”

Security Agencies’ Harmonization

Another important point mentioned by the participants was the harmonization of security forces. The major benefit of security agencies will be establishing transparent and standardized communication channels between the agencies. In recent days, joint training programs between the Nepali Army and APF Nepal, such as counterinsurgency and jungle warfare, command and staff college, and weapon handling, have helped security personnel and individuals to understand each agency’s roles, capabilities, and limitations. This intimacy clarifies each agency’s jurisdiction, authority, and responsibilities by reducing organizational and personal conflicts.

Also, working together in a team, serving together in the United Nations Mission, joint training, and joint operation between security agencies builds closer relationships from top officials to personnel by fostering a culture of trust. Hence, security forces are harmonized and feel proud of their existence. Many participants share their experience as a district commander, as a member of the National Security Council, which helps to build organizational relationships stronger. All participants stated that:

“[Our] simple effort will, by working together in a team, increase inter-agency harmony. This will benefit in stability and organizational discipline.

National and International Recognition

Eight participants focused on recognition of security force due to cooperation. They also gave the example of the USA, Israel, and India security force international recognition. Effective cooperation will increase attainment of organizational goals, resource utilization, and citizen trust, which turns into recognition. Participants sought different questions (like, are we recognized by our people? Are we capable?)

Similarly, global recognition is possible only by the best practices of cooperation. Different troops of the world, such as the CIA, MOSSAD, US Army, Indian Army, and IPS, are recognized due to their cooperative behavior. However, our international recognition as being the world's second United Nations peacekeeping contributor is also a part of cooperation. Hence, security agencies must prioritize not only operational tasks but also uphold ethical standards and accountability by setting a standard of professionalism to be recognized abroad. Out of a total of eight participants, the statements are as follows:

World's best security forces are recognized due to their cooperation. In the time of disaster rescue, we are praised because we work together. We see [our] strength as our capabilities. [I think] expect some cases, our security forces are recognized, and three combat dress [...] working together makes us really proud.

Border Security

Border security has been regarded as one of the challenges of national security. As APF Nepal, is deployed in the border; it has insisted on multi-sector engagement for robust border security. Security cooperation among agencies can better monitor, control, and respond to cross-border threats. The establishment of coordinated intelligence-sharing, joint operations, and surveillance will capitalize on a complete and the proactive approach to border security. APF Nepal's source claims that in recent days, proactiveness of APF Nepal, Nepal Police, and NID in major border crossing points like Kakarbhita, Raxwal, Sunauli, and Gaddachauki has decreased in cross-border smuggling, which has consistently increased revenue.

“The main problem of our border security can be improved by security agency cooperation. Specifically, border intelligence processes, legal processes, technical processes, and administrative processes are group tasks. Border security is not just a security issue; it is more complex [so] it requires multisector engagement.”

Challenges

While discussing the current challenges and weaknesses in Nepal's intelligence mechanism. The participant expressed different views on existing legal constraints and different other issues. Participants expressed views on the Nepali geopolitical context regarding local governance issues. The themes generated from their interview are highlighted below.

- Theme 1. Lack of Legal Framework**
- Theme 2: NSG considered as a reserve poll**
- Theme 3: Lack of Technological knowledge**
- Theme 4: Citizen Distrust**
- Theme 5: Leadership apathy to cooperate**

Figure 6. Theme Generate

Source: Theme generated after coding from participant statement, 2024

Lack of Legal Framework

The security forces of Nepal face significant challenges in existing cooperation mechanisms. These include the lack of a centralized authority to oversee the coordination and integration of intelligence activities, overlapping mandates and responsibilities, bureaucratic delays, and hierarchical inefficiency. This lack of a centralized authority results in inefficiencies in information sharing and delays in decision-making, reducing the overall effectiveness of the cooperation. The overlapping mandates and responsibilities of these agencies create confusion and inefficiency, leading to redundancy and gaps in operational performance. The bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of these agencies further exacerbates the problem, slowing down the process of information gathering, analysis, and dissemination. The statement of the participant in this regard is as follows:

“Lack of adequate legal framework [further] weakens the operational capabilities of the agencies involved. A centralized authority allows each agency to operate autonomously, leading to inefficiencies in information sharing and delays in decision-making. So, inadequacies in the system can be improved if the government and political leadership are willing to.”

NSC acting as reserve pool

Participants blame that, currently acting as a National Command Post, the National Security Council is considered to be a reserve pool. The lack of competent, active, and motivated manpower in NSC significantly impacts the country’s ability to address its security challenges effectively. The lack of manpower results in inadequate coverage of critical areas, particularly in remote and sensitive border areas, which pose significant security risks. When asked how it had an effect on cooperation procedures and what could be done, the participants said the following:

“We have been facing this problem from the very beginning. But still, we have to work on it. Mainly limited manpower, [specialized skills] and adequate training and development is another issue [...] NSC officers must undergo regular training to stay updated on the latest security threats. We have to motivate NSC officers and make them happy to work by avoiding the narrative of NSC as a reserve pool.”

Lack of Technological Knowledge

Participants have observed a lack of technological experts in the security field, which leads to inefficiencies, operational weaknesses, and reduced effectiveness in addressing security threats, compromising its overall capacity to safeguard national interests. The following are the joint responses of the participants.

“Our [security] agencies face numerous challenges due to technical knowledge, including training and development. In this age of technology, this deficiency can lead to the agencies’ operational capacity being diminished. So [...] political patronage, nepotism, or bureaucratic inefficiencies are the main factors.”

Technology is the main issue, as resources and investments should be directed towards acquiring cutting-edge technology. The failure to invest in these advancements leads to a significant inability to detect and prevent security threats. Training and development programs are also

affected by resource deviation, with underprepared personnel lacking the skills required to handle complex or evolving threats. Lack of knowledge of security software, digital surveillance devices, drones, radar, scanner devices, hardware firewalls, cyber threats, and data analytics devices are prevailing challenges to security personnel.

Citizen Distrust

Many reports show a significant gap in trust between the general public and security agencies in Nepal. Historically, Nepal's security forces have been alleged to misuse power and violate human rights. This has led to skepticism and reluctance among citizens to cooperate with security agencies, which is crucial for gathering local confidants and preventing threats. The following are the insights of the participants:

“I don't know why trust issues [also] exist within the agencies, where personnel might mistrust their colleagues or superiors due to internal politics, favoritism, or a lack of accountability.... Such internal conflicts can impair communication and collaboration, undermining the overall efficiency of the agencies.”

Leadership apathy to cooperate

A major issue with the leadership of security agencies in Nepal is the tendency for commanders or high-ranking officers to be politically aligned. These biases can compromise the impartiality of intelligence work, as commanders may direct resources or focus towards political rather than national security priorities. These problems have been highlighted by all the participants in the following way:

“This is a burning issue for us. [Our] commanders are always biased, which leads to favoritism in the assignment of critical tasks or promotions, which may not be based on merit but rather personal connections or loyalty. [So], there is low morale within the agency, and it weakens operational effectiveness.”

Addressing these challenges requires institutional reforms, including merit-based recruitment and promotion, enhanced professional development programs, fostering public trust through transparency, and minimizing political interference to ensure the agencies operate in the best interest of national security.

Summary

In summarizing the overall findings on the prospects of security agency cooperation in Nepal, the research highlights various field experiences and voices from the participants. Most of the findings align with the theoretical context mentioned in the literature review. As security governance has become an integral part of national security, the practical aspects of cooperation cannot be overlooked. The findings from the participant interviews reveal that the prospects of cooperation among security agencies in Nepal include both strengths and challenges. In recent times, security agencies have demonstrated increasing cooperation with one another. The following is the overall summary of the research presented in the conceptual framework format.

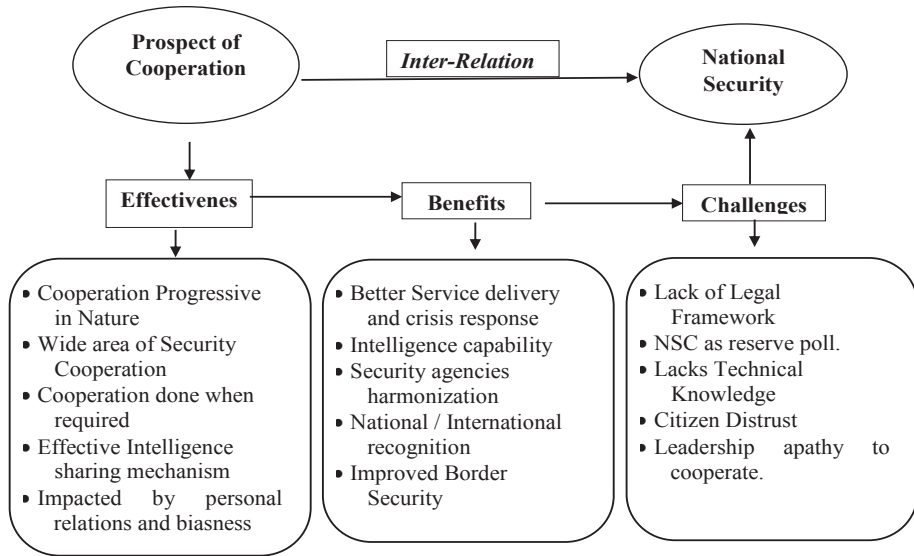


Figure 7. Summary

Source: Research findings, 2024

On the positive side, cooperation is progressive and covers a wide range of security areas. Still, ad hoc basis cooperation is practiced, and adopting intelligence-sharing mechanisms is often influenced by personal relations. The benefits leads to better service deliver of security agency cooperation, better service delivery and improved crisis response, intelligence capabilities, agency harmonization, and better border security, gaining both national and international recognition. However, in challenges, a lack of a legal framework for cooperation, technical knowledge gaps, citizen distrust, and leadership reluctance to cooperate acts as a major hurdle.

Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, security agency cooperation is proven significant in the context of Nepal. All participants confirm the relevance and rationality of cooperation. When comparing the theory of security governance and its practical application in Nepal, a diverse result can be found. Most of the prominent scholars, like Jones (1998) and Mihalka (2005), consider security agency cooperation as a vital tool for foreign policy. However, most of the parameters of cooperation match the Nepali context.

Security agency cooperation in Nepal is highly significant to national security. The findings show both strengths and critical areas for improvement, particularly in institutional alignment, operational consistency, and public trust. Nepal's security cooperation is largely progressive, demonstrating adaptability and willingness to work together across diverse security domains. The ad hoc nature of this cooperation allows flexibility in addressing evolving security issues, but it also introduces inconsistency. Security operations are mostly dependent on intelligence, so integrated intelligence-sharing mechanisms are a prompt requirement to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation. The major areas of cooperation, such as operational, technical, logistical, and legislative, need to be prioritized, which reduces the biases and subjective decision-making and has a positive impact on the reliability and impartiality of the cooperation process.

The major areas for integration and strengthening cordial cooperation are enhancement of skills and knowledge. Especially, the members of security forces need to have joint training. Considering a collective training form member from the Nepali army, Nepal police, APF, Nepal, and NID will add value by rising personal to organizational wealthy relations. Other activities, such as leadership familiarization programs, inter-agency visits, interaction programs, brainstorming programs, conferences, seminars, workshops, sporting events, and joint research, can be precious efforts.

There are numerous benefits to security agency cooperation, which include improved crisis response, better service delivery, enhanced intelligence capabilities, and solidifying national unity. A harmonization among agencies is a perfect example of a disciplined society that encourages a unified response to both domestic and international security threats, and the international recognition gained from a consistent security structure further strengthens Nepal's diplomatic stance. Additionally, enhanced border security is crucial in managing transnational issues, such as illegal trade and trafficking, which are of particular relevance for a country like Nepal that shares open borders with India and close proximity to China.

Despite the benefits, several structural and operational challenges hinder the effectiveness of security cooperation in Nepal. One of the most critical challenges is the absence of a legal framework governing cooperation among security agencies. This legal gap can lead to ambiguity in roles, responsibilities, and authority, resulting in fragmented efforts. Firstly, NSC needs to be authorized and active rather than a reserve body entity. Additionally, technical knowledge and capacity within agencies need to be upgraded. To address these issues, a combination of structural reforms, training, and community engagement is essential. An incident command post that clearly defines the roles, responsibilities, and protocols for inter-agency cooperation would provide the necessary structure for a consistent and integrated approach. This creates standardized operating procedures for cooperation among agencies, which can help in eliminating the reliance on personal relationships. This includes a formalized system for intelligence sharing and crisis management to ensure impartiality and consistency, which should be led by the Nepali Army.

Conclusion

The prospect of cooperation among security agencies in Nepal shows peace, harmony, and national unity. The research suggests addressing the proliferation of critical gaps that need to be resolved for a more cohesive and effective national security strategy. Through legal reforms to maintain incident command posts, capacity building by conducting joint training, trust-building through joint operations, and active leadership, a more integrated and robust security cooperation can be achieved.

Investment in security agencies, especially in technical knowledge and skill development, is crucial for modernizing Nepal's security capabilities. Agencies need to be equipped with advanced tools, techniques, and training to handle complex threats like cybercrime, terrorism, and border security challenges. Technical partnerships with international agencies could also be explored to enhance expertise.

Increasing transparency and accountability in security operations is essential to rebuilding public trust. The research emphasizes the active role of leadership in promoting

security cooperation. Setting up incentives for successfully collaborating on security projects could encourage a shift in attitude.

The research was confined within the periphery of key informant information, and the study focused on the central level within the Kathmandu Valley. Therefore, further research on the following subjects can be conducted.

- (a) Factors affecting security agency cooperation in Nepal.
- (b) Challenges of security agency cooperation in the federal structure of Nepal.
- (c) Strengthening intelligence capabilities among security agencies of Nepal.

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