Nationalism, Unity, and Strategic Resilience: Nepal's Evolving Security Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Nepal's unique geopolitical location, deep social diversity, and enduring history of safeguarding sovereignty situate nationalism and national unity at the core of its security discourse. From the foundational unification campaigns of Prithvi Narayan Shah's Dibya Upadesh to Nepal's contemporary leadership in global peacekeeping, national resilience has consistently emerged from the cohesion between the state and its diverse populace. In this light, this paper argues that an inclusive civic nationalism, grounded in respect for cultural plurality and a shared constitutional identity, functions as a strategic capital for national security. Such a strong unity enhances collective capacities invigorate the country to promptly respond to crises, and strengthens international credibility and legitimacy. Employing a qualitative approach that analyses historical records, official policy documents, and secondary scholarly literature, this study examines how unity enhances resilience against modern multidimensional security threats. These risks include non-traditional challenges like natural disasters (the 2015 earthquake), public health crises (the COVID-19 pandemic), digital misinformation, and recent social unrest (the Gen-Z Movement 2025). The research examines the evolution of Nepal's security paradigm by analyzing the Nepali Army's constitutionally-defined role under civilian authority to assess how institutional restraint and adherence to constitutional democratic values contribute to nationalism, national unity, and strategic resilience. The findings conclusively suggest that inclusively cultured nationalism strengthens Nepal's adaptive capacity and provides the necessary social cohesion to address both internal polarization and complex cross-border challenges. Ultimately, the study reasserts that the nation's most enduring guarantee of stability rests upon the confidence and inclusion of its people.

Introduction

Nepal's identity as a nation has long been shaped by a delicate balance between diversity and unity. Since the unification campaign led by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the mid-eighteenth century, the notion of *ekikrit rashtra* (integrated nation) has underpinned the state's survival strategy (Whelpton, 2005). Shah's dictum of Nepal as a "yam between two boulders" continues to define the country's strategic consciousness, in which survival depends not only on diplomacy and defence but also on the strength of internal cohesion (Baral, 2022). This

intrinsic link between nationalism, national unity, and national security remains a cornerstone of Nepal's resilience in an increasingly complex regional and global environment.

Nationalism in Nepal is not merely a historical sentiment but a living, evolving force. Rooted in cultural pluralism and shared sovereignty, it has transformed from monolithic state-building nationalism into a more inclusive understanding of belonging. As Anderson (1991) explains, nations are imagined communities formed not by homogeneity but through a shared sense of participation in a collective destiny. In Nepal, this imagination is sustained through diversity; languages, faiths, ethnicities, and geographies that coexist under the consciousness of a common nationhood. The country's ability to integrate differences into a unifying framework of citizenship has been one of its most enduring strengths, while also remaining one of its most fragile achievements.

National unity, in this sense, functions as the living expression of nationalism. It is not imposed conformity but an active trust between citizens and institutions a form of social capital that transforms collective identity into strategic capacity. Modern security studies increasingly emphasize that national security is not limited to the protection of borders but includes societal stability, institutional legitimacy, and the capacity to manage internal dissent peacefully (Buzan, 1991). Nepal's experience demonstrates that unity has consistently acted as one of its most reliable shields. Whether during the 2015 earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the recent Gen-Z movement (Nepal Gazette, 2082), these moments of crisis have revealed that the legitimacy of the security apparatus lies in restraint, empathy, and service to the people rather than coercion. The Nepali Army's approach during such moments, grounded in the protection of citizens and proportional response, exemplifies how inclusive nationalism translates into strategic resilience.

The 2025 Gen-Z movement, which emerged as a spontaneous expression of youth frustration over governance, inequality, corruption and accountability (Dahal, 2025) tested this national fabric. Yet, the Nepali Army's dignified restraint, marked by protection rather than suppression, demonstrated the institution's evolution as a constitutionally mandated security institution committed to national unity. This conduct reinforced the Army's constitutional role under Article 267 of the Constitution of Nepal 2072which mandates it to safeguard independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity under civilian command. Such conduct reflects not only professionalism but a mature understanding that true security emanates from societal legitimacy rather than force.

In the 21st century, Nepal's national security environment has become increasingly multidimensional (Pandey & Jha, 2023). Hybrid threats such as misinformation, cyberattacks, and transnational crime intersect with internal challenges of political instability, economic dependency, and social polarization. In this shifting landscape, traditional notions of hard power are insufficient. Security today depends as much on the unity of the people as it does on the strength of institutions. Inclusive nationalism, anchored in respect for diversity, shared memory, and civic responsibility, has therefore become a form of strategic capital. When nationalism is inclusive, it nurtures participation; when unity is strong, it reinforces legitimacy; and when both align, the state attains resilience against internal and external shocks.

Nepal's security discourse, therefore, must be reimagined through the lens of this triangular relationship. Nationalism provides the moral foundation, unity provides operational

coherence, and security emerges as the outcome. The contemporary challenge is not whether Nepal possesses military strength but whether it can preserve social cohesion amid rapid modernization and generational change. The aspirations of youth, the pressures of digital mobilization, and the demand for accountable governance all test the maturity of Nepal's nationalism. Yet each episode of crisis has shown that when state and society act in mutual trust, national unity transforms into an instrument of peace, rather than suppression.

Thus, nationalism, unity, and security in Nepal are not isolated domains but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single idea: that the protection of the nation ultimately depends on the inclusion and confidence of people. As the nation navigates complex regional dynamics and internal transitions, reaffirming this inclusive nationalism remains the most enduring guarantee of sovereignty and stability.

Review of literature

In Sangroula and Karki-edited *Geo-strategic Challenges to Nepal: Foreign Policy and Way Forward* (2015), Kusum examines national security and its challenges. Kusum's study of Nepal's recent security trajectory underscores an empirical link between political exclusion and insecurity. Critiquing the post-1990 political economy in Nepal, Kusum points out that the democratic openings of 1990, while expanding civic space, failed to deliver socioeconomic reforms for marginalized communities, a failure that materially contributed to the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) and later eruptions in the Terai/Madhes. His tabulation of human costs (13,347 deaths; 89,171 internally displaced; 1,452 disappeared) starkly demonstrates that national security crises in Nepal were produced as much by governance deficits and social exclusion as by external pressures (Kusum, 2015, p.145). These evidences of security issue substantiate the argument that an inclusive civic nationalism one that addresses representation, economic justice, and reintegration is central to sustainable security.

Similarly, Basnet, in "A Holistic Approach to National Security Strategy in Nepal: Challenges and Prospects" (2022), examines Nepal's security vulnerabilities through political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions, proposing a "holistic approach" that integrates state and citizen efforts to strengthen sovereignty and stability. Using a qualitative, descriptive-analytical method, Basnet argues that Nepal's security challenges stem from political instability, weak governance, excessive foreign interference, and declining civic values. He highlights how geopolitical pressures from India and China, the politicization of institutions, and the erosion of national unity have undermined Nepal's independence. To address these gaps, he advocates for revitalizing civic programs, such as the National Development Service and the National Cadet Corps while reforming education to inculcate in people a strong sense of patriotism strengthening counterintelligence, and ensuring citizen participation in nation-building asserting that true national security depends on cohesive governance, responsible citizens, and inclusive development.

In "Understanding Civil-Military Relations for Better Civilian Control of the Military in Nepal" (2022), Rawal explores the evolving dynamics between democratic governance and the Nepali Army, emphasizing the need for effective civilian oversight to strengthen Nepal's democratic institutions. Using a qualitative, descriptive-analytical method, Rawal examines theoretical frameworks of civil-military relations to contextualize Nepal's challenges in

ensuring democratic control of its armed forces. In short, Rawal argues that the historical dominance of the monarchy and the weak institutional capacity of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have left a structural imbalance, allowing the Nepali Army to retain autonomy despite constitutional reforms. The paper highlights that true civilian control requires strengthening the MOD, empowering the Parliamentary Defence Committee, ensuring transparency in defence budgeting, and defining the military's role in line with the national security policy. Rawal contends that democratic civilian control is not merely bureaucratic oversight but a political and constitutional imperative in which elected representatives, not the military, determine defence priorities. By combining comparative theory with Nepal's historical experiences, the study concludes that sustainable civil-military relations depend on the balance between professional military competence and effective democratic accountability, thereby ensuring that the protector remains subordinate to the sovereign will of the people.

The contemporary security discourse in Nepal is challenged by a critical divergence between obsolete, state-centric security mechanisms and the rise of multidimensional, non-traditional security threats. As explored by Pandey and Jha (2023), the traditional focus on military defense and territorial integrity overlooks modern threats rooted in governance failures and social grievances. The literature emphasizes that national security must shift to a people-centred model, addressing issues such as cybercrime, health crises, corruption, transnational organized crime, political instability, and social discontent. Scholars argue that these internal vulnerabilities, including the high rate of youth migration and a lack of technological capacity, are as detrimental to national survival as external military threats, necessitating solutions that are multi-sectoral, holistic, and rooted in cooperation at local, regional, and global levels.

The discourse on Nepal's security is significantly shaped by its perennial geostrategic location, a relationship thoroughly explored in the edited volume *Nepal and its Neighbours in the Changing World* (Chand, Liang, & Panthi, 2019/2022). This work analyzes Nepal's enduring strategic consciousness as the "yam between two boulders," emphasizing that its national survival hinges not only on diplomatic acumen but also on a stable internal foundation. The collection of essays demonstrates how modern great power competition, exemplified by foreign policy tools such as the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and the MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation), actively tests Nepal's internal political stability and institutional sovereignty. This research reinforces the argument that managing these complex external dynamics requires an assertive, balanced foreign policy anchored by unwavering national consensus.

Methodological Justification and Case Selection Rationale

This study follows a qualitative, descriptive analytical research design grounded in interpretivist security studies. The selection of literature was guided by three criteria: (i) scholarly relevance to nationalism, security, and resilience; (ii) empirical or theoretical engagement with state security and civil-military relations; and (iii) publication credibility, prioritizing peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and official policy documents. Classical theoretical works were included, that remain foundational to contemporary debates.

The 2025 Gen-Z movement was selected as a critical case study based on its analytical significance rather than novelty alone. The case meets established criteria for qualitative case

selection: recency, national scale, direct interaction between state authority and civic dissent, and its stress-testing of constitutional civil-military norms (Yin, 2018). Unlike earlier protest movements in Nepal, the Gen-Z movement was largely decentralized, digitally coordinated, and framed around governance accountability rather than ideological polarization. This makes it particularly suitable for examining how inclusive nationalism and institutional restraint function as mechanisms of strategic resilience in a democratic setting.

Conceptual Foundations: Interlinking Nationalism, Unity, Strategic Resilience, and Security

Nationalism, unity, strategic resilience, and national security are not separate strands of statecraft; they are intertwined dimensions of a single social fabric. The theoretical roots of this interconnection lie in both classical and contemporary thought. Barry Buzan (1991) argues that the concept of security extends beyond military capability to encompass political stability, economic resilience, and societal harmony. In this expanded framework, unity becomes the foundation of national security, nationalism provides moral legitimacy, and strategic resilience ensures its sustainability. Likewise, Gellner (1983) emphasizes that nationalism arises not from ethnic sameness but from the political need to create coherence in a diverse society, a description that fits Nepal's historical experience precisely.

Nepal's nationalism, therefore, cannot be understood as ethnocentric or exclusionary. It is civic in nature, anchored in shared sovereignty and the idea of "unity in diversity." This inclusivity has historically enabled the state to transform cultural plurality into a sense of shared belonging. When citizens see themselves as participants in the same national project, they become vital contributors to both security and resilience. As Koirala (2018) notes, "the strength of Nepal's national security lies not in deterrence but in cohesion." Strategic resilience, in this sense, emerges from the people's collective capacity to adapt, withstand, and recover from disruptions, whether political, economic, or societal, without losing coherence or purpose.

This interdependence means that threats to unity, whether through polarization, disinformation, or external manipulation, are also threats to both security and resilience. Similarly, nationalism that turns intolerant undermines unity by alienating parts of the population, thereby weakening the nation's adaptive strength. The challenge for modern Nepal is therefore to sustain an inclusive and resilient nationalism, one that values loyalty without demanding conformity, protects sovereignty without compromising democracy, and builds long-term strategic resilience as the bedrock of national security.

Historical Evolution of Nepal's Security Paradigm

The genealogy of Nepal's security thought begins with King Prithvi Narayan Shah's doctrine of *Dibya Upadesh*, which described Nepal as a "yam between two boulders." This strategic metaphor captured the perpetual tension between vulnerability and resilience that has shaped Nepali statecraft ever since (Baral, 2022). Shah's emphasis on self-reliance, social cohesion, and moral governance established the philosophical basis for linking unity to survival.

From Unification to Rana and Panchayat Consolidation

Following unification, Nepal's rulers relied heavily on a defensive approach to security. During the Rana oligarchy (1846-1951), the concept of security was synonymous with regime

preservation rather than people's welfare. The Ranas maintained internal order through a tightly controlled bureaucracy and limited external interaction to preserve sovereignty.

After the fall of the Rana regime in 1951, Nepal entered a brief democratic phase, followed by King Mahendra's Panchayat system (1960-1990), which re-centralized power under the monarchy. Nationalism was deliberately employed as a tool for political consolidation. The Nepali Army's role during this era was largely confined to maintaining internal stability. Security thus remained state-centric with limited scope for public participation or inclusiveness (Baral, 2022).

The 1990 People's Movement and Democratic Transition

The first People's Movement of 1990 marked a watershed moment. The Panchayat system was overthrown, multiparty parliamentary democracy was restored, and a constitutional monarchy was established. The new system promised political pluralism and freedom; however, successive governments failed to address deep-seated inequalities, poverty, and regional disparities. This political instability and lack of economic vision sowed the seeds of disillusionment and radicalization among marginalized groups.

The Maoist Insurgency (1996-2006): Redefining Security

On 13 February 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched its "People's War" after the Deuba government rejected its forty-point demand calling for state restructuring and a constituent assembly (Sangroula & Karki, 2015). The ten-year insurgency resulted in 13,347 deaths, over 89,000 displaced persons, and more than 1,400 disappearances (INSEC, 1996-2006; Sangroula & Karki, 2015). The scale of human loss and destruction revealed that threats to Nepal's security were increasingly internal, rooted in structural inequality, exclusion, and poor governance.

Phase	Major Features	Security Implications
Unification (1740s-1846)	*Dibya Upadesh* and moral unity	Focus on territorial defense and moral authority
Rana Rule (1846-1951)	Isolationist governance and limited diplomacy	Regime-centric security
Panchayat System (1960-1990)	Centralized nationalism under royal control	State coercion and political stability
Democratic Phase (1990-1996)	Constitutional monarchy and multiparty politics	Governance instability and social grievances
Maoist Insurgency (1996-2006)	Civil conflict and human rights crisis	Shift toward human security and inclusion
Post-CPA (2006-2015)	Peace process, army integration, republican transition	Cooperative and inclusive security

Table Source: Author illustration

The Peace Process and Security Transformation

The Royal Palace massacre in 2001 and King Gyanendra's direct rule (2002-2005) deepened internal divisions, pushing Nepal toward crisis. The 2006 People's Movement, supported jointly by the Seven-Party Alliance and the Maoists, forced the king to relinquish power. The restoration of Parliament in May 2006 and the subsequent Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Government of Nepal and the CPN (Maoist) ended the decade-long conflict (Sangroula & Karki, 2015).

The CPA's key features disarmament, arms management under UN supervision, human rights commitments, and the creation of interim political structures symbolized a major shift in security orientation. The Nepali Army's role also shifted from combat operations to peace implementation and national reconstruction. By 2011, 1,352 verified Maoist combatants were integrated into the Army, while others chose rehabilitation or voluntary retirement. This institutional reform transformed the Army from a royal instrument into a republican institution accountable to civilian authority (Nepal Army, 2022).

Regional and Ethnic Challenges after the CPA

Despite the formal end of the Maoist conflict, the post-CPA phase witnessed violent agitation in the Terai and Madhes regions. Marginalized Terai/Madhesi communities, citing exclusion from governance and disproportionate representation in state organs, initiated protests and armed movements across twenty-two districts. Several armed groups emerged, causing ethnic clashes and insecurity. The Government's 22-point agreement with the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum in 2006 sought to integrate their grievances into the peace process, further illustrating the state's evolving preference for dialogue over coercion (Sangroula & Karki, 2015).

Constitutional Consolidation and Modern Security Policy

The promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, redefined the concept of national security as the protection of inclusivity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and citizen's well-being. This marked a decisive transition from regime-centric to people-centric security. The National Security Policy of 2073 BS (2016 AD) institutionalized this broadened understanding, identifying new challenges such as cyber risks, border management, climate change, and social unrest (MoD, 2016).

In this contemporary context, the Nepali Army has evolved into a multidimensional institution engaged in peacekeeping, disaster response, and civic reconstruction. Its transformation from a force of coercion to a guardian of stability and a humanitarian actor reflects Nepal's larger security evolution toward inclusion, resilience, and service (Nepal Army, 2022).

The 2025 Gen-Z Movement: Unity, Dissent, and Institutional Restraint

The nationwide Gen-Z Movement of 2025 represented a significant transformation in Nepal's civic landscape. Unlike previous mass movements driven by ideological or ethnic mobilization, this movement was largely issue-based and digitally coordinated, reflecting frustration over corruption, unemployment, and governance failures rather than rejection of the state itself (Dahal, 2025; Pokharel, 2025). From a security perspective, this distinction is critical; dissent

rooted in demands for accountability constitutes a form of democratic feedback rather than a direct threat to sovereignty.

Security studies literature increasingly recognizes that societal dissent does not inherently undermine national security; rather, the manner in which state institutions respond determines whether dissent escalates into instability or is transformed into adaptive reform (Buzan, 1991; Tilly, 2004). During the peak of unrest, Nepal experienced a temporary governance vacuum following violent clashes that resulted in civilian casualties and the withdrawal of police forces from several urban centers (Reuters, 2025). In this context, the Nepali Army's response marked a decisive shift from coercive control to constitutional restraint.

Multiple independent sources confirm that the Army prioritized the protection of critical infrastructure, facilitated dialogue among political actors, and refrained from the use of force against protesters (Pokharel, 2025). This approach aligns with what Barkawi and Laffey (2006) describe as "normative legitimacy," whereby security institutions derive authority not through coercion but through adherence to democratic norms. Rather than suppressing dissent, institutional restraint prevented escalation and preserved constitutional continuity.

From the perspective of strategic resilience, this consequence demonstrates how unity functions as an operational asset. When citizens perceive security institutions as impartial guardians rather than political instruments, trust replaces fear, reducing the likelihood of prolonged conflict. Comparative studies of protest management further show that restrained security responses significantly lower the probability of violent escalation and democratic breakdown (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Thus, the 2025 Gen-Z movement illustrates that unity, when nurtured through inclusive nationalism and constitutional discipline, can transform dissent into an opportunity for institutional correction rather than systemic rupture.

Counter-Arguments: Risks of Institutional Moral Authority and Over-Restraint

While this study emphasizes the stabilizing role of institutional restraint, it is necessary to acknowledge critical counter-arguments within civil-military and democratic theory. One concern is that excessive reliance on the moral authority of the military may unintentionally weaken civilian institutions, particularly when elected bodies lack legitimacy or capacity (Huntington, 1957; Feaver, 2003). In fragile democracies, repeated crisis intervention by security forces, even when well-intentioned can normalize extra-political arbitration and delay necessary civilian reform.

Evidently, restraint may embolden prolonged unrest by signaling state weakness, especially in polarized societies, where protest movements can be co-opted by disruptive actors. Scholars caution that legitimacy must ultimately be institutionalized through accountable governance rather than episodic military professionalism (Rawal, 2022). From this perspective, unity sustained solely through security institutions risks becoming temporary unless it is matched by political responsiveness and socio-economic reform.

This study addresses these critiques by situating the Nepali Army's role strictly within constitutional boundaries. The Army's restraint during the 2025 movement did not replace civilian authority instead facilitated its restoration, reinforcing rather than undermining democratic supremacy. Strategic resilience, therefore, does not arise from military moral dominance, but from the balance between professional restraint, civilian accountability, and inclusive nationalism.

Strategic Resilience: Redefining National Security in the 21ˢᵗ Century

In a rapidly transforming global and regional context, Nepal's conception of national security must evolve from a state-centered to a society-centered model. Strategic resilience, defined as the capacity of a nation to absorb shocks, adapt, and emerge stronger, represents this modern paradigm (Nye, 2011). For states like Nepal, resilience is not achieved through hard power but through the synergy of trust, governance, and social capital.

The National Security Policy 2073 (2016) articulates this clearly: Nepal's security rests on the twin pillars of sovereignty and citizens' welfare. The policy recognizes "human security, including food, health, environment, and cyber dimensions, as integral to defense preparedness" (MoD, 2016). In this holistic sense, unity becomes security itself.

The Nepali Army's strategic evolution has been central to this transition. Beyond its conventional defense role, the institution has consistently demonstrated competence in disaster management, peacekeeping, and civic assistance. During the 2015 earthquake, for example, the Army mobilized over 66,000 personnel within hours, rescuing more than 16,000 people (Nepal Disaster Report, 2015). This rapid mobilization strengthened institutional legitimacy and public trust, demonstrating how humanitarian performance functions as a core pillar of strategic resilience rather than as a peripheral military task. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, its logistical and medical contributions prevented a major crisis.

Resilience also depends on the ability to manage information in the digital age. Disinformation campaigns, divisive narratives, and cyber vulnerabilities now pose direct risks to national cohesion. As Dahal (2022) notes, "In Nepal, the battle for minds has become as critical as the defense of borders." Strengthening cybersecurity, digital literacy, and civic education should, therefore, be treated as strategic imperatives alongside military readiness.

In essence, strategic resilience transforms nationalism from a symbolic sentiment into a living architecture of preparedness, in which inclusion, trust, and adaptability form the core elements of security.

Unity through Inclusive Nationalism: The Sociological Core of Security

Nepal's enduring strength has always derived from its ability to convert diversity into unity. However, this strength must be maintained over the time. As sociologist Mishra (2020) observes, "The Nepali state survives not by erasing difference but by integrating it into the democratic imagination." In the aftermath of federal restructuring and successive political transitions, inclusive nationalism has become a key factor to both legitimacy and peace.

The Gen-Z movement that emerged in 2025 must be understood through this sociological lens. Unlike the ideologically polarized protests of earlier decades, this movement was largely characterized by issue-based mobilization, civic expression, and a visible effort by state security institutions to preserve public trust through restraint and humanitarian engagement rather than coercion (Sipahi Fortnightly, 2082 B.S.). Its calls for transparency, meritocracy, and justice reflected a deeper yearning for a more accountable state. In response, the Nepali Army demonstrated extraordinary restraint, ensuring the protection of life and property while avoiding direct confrontation. Its humanitarian engagement including setting up safety corridors, facilitating communication with civilian authorities, and assisting in emergency

medical logistics strengthened its image as a people's institution rather than an instrument of coercion.

Such conduct exemplifies what scholars of security studies call "normative legitimacy," the acceptance of authority not through force but through fairness and moral behavior (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006). In the Nepali context, this legitimacy translates directly into strategic stability. When citizens trust their security institutions, internal dissent transforms from potential threat into an opportunity for reform. Security studies literature establishes that dissent does not inherently threaten national security; rather, the risk of escalation depends on the interaction between protest movements and state institutions (Buzan, 1991; Tilly, 2004). Societal resilience theory demonstrates that inclusive social cohesion enables states to absorb internal shocks without systemic breakdown, thereby transforming dissent into adaptive institutional learning (Norris et al., 2008). Similarly, civil-military relations scholarship confirms that professional restraint by security forces during political unrest significantly reduces the likelihood of democratic backsliding and civil conflict (Feaver, 2003). Within this framework, the Nepali Army's restraint functioned as a stabilizing mechanism, preserving democratic continuity while enabling civilian political processes to reassert authority.

The Army's professional ethics, grounded in neutrality, service, and sacrifice, have therefore become central to maintaining national unity amidst democratic pluralism.

Policy Directions and Strategic Recommendations

As Nepal navigates this new security era, several strategic directions, grounded in academic literature and contemporary challenges, emerge for policymakers, scholars, and institutions:

1.   *Institutionalizing the Concept of Comprehensive National Security*

Nepal's security framework must formally move beyond a military focus to systematically integrate economic, environmental, public health, and informational domains. A restructured National Security Council (NSC) Secretariat is vital, not merely as a consultative body, but as a dedicated policy hub with advanced analytical and research capacity. Furthermore, Nepal should institutionalize annual National Risk Assessments to quantify non-traditional threats, allowing for budgetary allocation proportional to risks like climate change and food insecurity (Snow, 2016).

2.   *Strengthening Civil-Military Synergy*

A healthy democracy requires transparent and routine institutional dialogue between civil authorities and the defense establishment. To mitigate historical trust deficits, Civil-Military Relations (CMR) training programs should be mandatory for all top-tier bureaucrats and parliamentarians. Joint crisis-management exercises, such as those conducted during disaster response, should be formalized and expanded to include local government and civil society representatives. As Bhatta (2022) argues, "The trust between the Army and the people is Nepal's most sophisticated defense system." This trust can be quantified and measured through mechanisms that ensure military expenditures are transparent and accountable to the Parliamentary Defence Committeefostering a relationship based on democratic control, rather than mere deference (Rawal, 2022).

3. *Investing in Youth and Civic Education*

The Gen-Z movement highlighted the pressing demand for accountable governance and inclusion. This civic energy must be channelled constructively. Integrating comprehensive civic education into the national curriculum is critical, focusing not only on democratic values but also on digital responsibility, media literacy, and the evolution of Nepali nationalism from monolithic to inclusive. Youth-focused initiatives, such as revitalizing a modern, voluntary National Development Service (NDS) program, could integrate patriotism with practical community development, transforming civic discontent into constructive service and bridging the generational gap in national purpose (Basnet, 2022).

4. *Enhancing Strategic Communication and Cyber Defense*

In the age of misinformation and hybrid warfare, Nepal must develop a proactive information security strategy. The establishment of a National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), potentially housed under the Ministry of Defence but staffed by both civilian and military experts, is essential to counter foreign influence operations and protect critical national infrastructure. A Cyber Command Wing within the Nepali Army must be mandated not only for defensive digital surveillance but also for ensure effective digital deterrence. Furthermore, strategic communication protocols should be adopted to ensure the state's messaging during crises (e.g., pandemics or geopolitical events) is unified, evidence-based, and swiftly disseminated to prevent social polarization (Pandey & Jha, 2023).

5. *Expanding Defense Diplomacy for Strategic Autonomy*

Nepal's geopolitical reality demands calibrated and non-aligned engagement with its immediate neighbors and global powers. Defense diplomacy, leveraging the Nepali Army's globally respected expertise in UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), should serve as a primary instrument of strategic autonomy. Strengthening defense ties, joint training exchanges, and humanitarian collaboration with regional bodies such as BIMSTEC and ASEAN diversifies partnerships beyond the immediate north and south, enhances Nepal's international credibility and providing strategic space (Koirala, 2022). Maintaining Nepal's position as the largest troop-contributing country in South Asia to UNPKO remains a critical foreign policy asset, underscoring its commitment to global peace and stability (UN DPKO, 2024).

These measures align Nepal's security policy with its foundational ethos: prioritizing peace, safeguarding sovereignty, and deepening inclusion.

Analytical Link Between Unity and Strategic Resilience

The causal relationship between unity and security in Nepal operates through institutional legitimacy and societal trust. Unity enhances resilience not by eliminating conflict but by containing it within constitutional norms. Empirical research on societal resilience demonstrates that states with higher levels of social cohesion and institutional trust recover more rapidly from political shocks and experience lower levels of violence during crises (Norris et al., 2008). In Nepal, inclusive nationalism functions as a moderating framework that allows dissent to coexist with loyalty to the state.

This mechanism is particularly vital for states operating under geopolitical constraints. As external pressures intensify, internal fragmentation becomes a strategic vulnerability. Unity, therefore, is not merely symbolic but instrumental: it reduces the scope for external manipulation, strengthens diplomatic autonomy, and sustains long-term stability (Acharya, 2020).

Conclusion: Toward a Resilient and Inclusive Security Future

The nexus between nationalism, national unity, and strategic resilience defines the essence of Nepal's security philosophy. From Prithvi Narayan Shah's vision of a self-reliant kingdom to the civic aspirations of the Gen-Z generation, the idea of Nepal has survived through adaptation, prudence, and cohesion rather than aggression. The state's history demonstrates that its most reliable shield against internal fragmentation and external pressures has consistently been the strength of its social contract.

In the 21st century, the ultimate test of Nepal's strength lies not only in its military capability but also in moral coherence and institutional maturity. The dignified conduct of the Nepali Army during moments of domestic turbulence, such as the Nepal Earthquake of 2015, and the 2025 Gen-Z movement, provided a critical example: restraint can be the highest form of power. By responding to civic discontent with patience, protection, and proportional force, the institution safeguarded both security and democracy, embodying the very essence of inclusive, constitutional nationalism (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). This behaviour reaffirms the foundational academic argument that security derives from societal legitimacy, not coercion (Buzan, 1991).

As the region surrounding Nepal grows increasingly unstable, shaped by growing geopolitical competition and evolving security challenges (Chand, Liang, & Panthi, 2022), the need to strengthen inclusive nationalism, social unity, and strategic resilience becomes even more critical. The role of the Nepali Army, particularly in protecting sovereignty and supporting humanitarian responses, must continue to function strictly under democratic oversight and civilian authority. Ultimately, Nepal's long-term resilience depends not on any single institution but on enhancing public trust, ensuring accountable governance, and the country's capacity to draw strength from its cultural diversity during times of crisis.

In the words of scholar Bhatt (2024), "Nepal's security will endure not because it fears division, but because it transforms diversity into discipline." This is the spirit of modern Nepali nationalism: one that draws strength from inclusion, finds resilience in restraint, and secures the nation not through rigid control but through collective confidence and participation.

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