



## Research Article

# Role of Military Diplomacy in International Relations of Nepal

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### Abstract

Military diplomacy has helped Nepal achieve foreign policy goals in a better way. The countries in the world today, have no direct military threat, then if, the threats are weak diplomacy, unfavorable foreign relations, and immature foreign policy in the field of international relations. This article analyzes the role of military diplomacy focusing on international relations, UN participation and Joint Military Training Exercises.

Due to social media and ultra-modern communication technologies, access control, and censorship are over. The public has to possess a broad understanding of the role and legacy of Nepali Army (NA). Military and media should see themselves as equal partners in the successful conduct of diplomacy in fostering international relations. The study finds that military diplomacy plays an essential role in displaying diplomatic efforts to enhance international relations.

The qualitative analysis of primary and secondary source information has been done for this analytic methodology. The theoretical rather than the technical nature of the topic limit the ability for conducting this analysis as a purely quantitative one. This study recommends the requirement of an in-depth research on the policy and practical aspects in military diplomacy pertaining to the role of media, foreign policy and international relations.

**Keywords:** Nepali Army, Military Diplomacy of Nepal, International Relations, Foreign Policy of Nepal, Divyopadesh.

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### Introduction

Nepal is a small country that is geo-strategically located between the two major powers of Asia-China in the Northern border, and India, in the South, East and West (Sangroula & Karki, 2015). This location has shaped the psyche of Nepalese elite, and hence its foreign policy. With China and India's rise as the world's new economic powerhouses, it has increased the country's vulnerabilities.

However, it is also an opportunity for greater economic cooperation with immediate neighbors (Adhikari, 2018).

The first foundation of International Relations (IR) was when King Prithvi Narayan Shah, in his *Divyopadesh* (Divine Counsel or the Divine Teachings, a collection of teachings from Prithvi Narayan Shah), addressed Nepal as "Yum between two boulders." That was the first-ever known diplomacy to maintain relations with the giant



neighbors. King Prithvi Narayan Shah started the campaign for Nepal's unification in 1768 with the conquest of Kathmandu valley. His successors expanded Nepal from Kangra in the west to Tista in the East by the first decade of the nineteenth century with an ambition to expand the Gorkha Empire as far west as Kashmir (Amatya, 2018).

The treaty of Sugauli at the end of the Anglo Nepal war established the ties between British India and Nepali Gurkhas. British East India Company found exceptional courage and determination in fighting in Gurkhas. They started recruiting them in British Indian Forces with the establishment of the first battalion of the Gurkha Regiment in 1816 (Aneja, 2020). Nepal Britain Treaty of 1923, the most important treaty in Nepal's history, establishes Nepal's independent status. Up to this stage, Nepal faced various military expeditions with foreign powers (Rathaur, 2001).

Generally, small countries are less likely to engage in military diplomacy; Amatya (2018) states that Nepal, though small in size, has been frequently involved in military matters for centuries. It is a known fact that militaries have always provided states with an instrument for effective diplomacy (Menon, 2011). That has been noticed in the military diplomacy of Nepal.

The military diplomacy is part and partial of foreign policy and it collaborates with the foreign armies provided that it does not violate the principles of foreign policy. The main goal of foreign policy is to preserve and promote the core national interests: Nepal's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and its uninterrupted socio-economic progress for the betterment of the people. Initiatives towards clear and purposeful objectives and reinforced organizational set up must come sooner to assist Nepal's independent journey in the international arena as per need (IFA, 2013). The foreign policy of Nepal is in a state of flux, or in different ways, delaying the emergence of appropriate steering principles suitable to a federal democratic republic that Nepal exists today. Collective effects of high economic growth with integration in the international market through the successful introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) pursuing a sustainable development path contributes to the image development of any nation.

Nepal, with a poor foundation and un-utilized resources, still continues to be a country with low income and massive hardship. There has to be a critical yet productive examination of the variances and missing essentials of the foreign policy of Nepal, which sometimes creates a sense of imprecision and incoherence about her purposes and likely reactions to issues affecting her vital interests; Institute of Foreign Affairs, Nepal, states:

*"The country should have an elaborate and extensive analysis of political, military, economic*

*and social developments in foreign states and international relations. Nepal has no economic power, neither it is a military power; persuasion has to be a great power in the hands of Nepali diplomats to secure international goodwill, support and cooperation."* (IFA, 2013, p. p.29).

The study tries to find out the notion and importance of military diplomacy and its contributions in the IR, from a media perspective. The role that the media can play is vital in delivering and communicating the message to enhance military diplomacy. Military diplomacy is a set of all non-violent foreign-policy activities or programs of a nation, and implementing this is essential in protecting national interests. The study is to analyse the role of media in military diplomacy in the international relations of Nepal.

### **Research Methodology**

The study is based on open-ended questions. It is qualitative constructivism of the media and military of Nepal. The epistemology of the study is based on constructivists' paradigm of descriptive qualitative in nature. The constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001). The analysis of the expert's interviews and contemporary studies establish the legitimacy and necessity to address the topic concerning Nepal and current world dynamics. The sources demonstrate the increasing need and expanding role of not only traditional diplomacy but also that of media and military diplomacy.

The analytical methodology has been adopted to examine this topic through qualitative analysis of primary and secondary source information. Qualitative analyses of historical and theoretical references, expert's statements, and contemporary publications, as well as the author's own professional experiences, support this study. Making no claim as an expert, participating in some international conferences and seminars in the field of military and international affairs, and experience of various UN missions as a Military Observer provide the researcher with inspiration and personal insight into the importance of military diplomacy.

The researcher collected the meaning and information from the participants of purposive sampling. For more information on actual trends and diplomatic practices, the researcher also reached to retired military generals who once served as Defence Attache and retired MoFA officials. They are active and retired high ranking military officers, well-known journalists having excellent knowledge of military diplomacy, which were purposively selected to generate the meaning and context of military diplomacy and media. The researcher has validated the accuracy of findings by interpreting the data and created an agenda for



change or reform within participants on Nepali media and military diplomacy issues. Examining the expert's views and contemporary publications establishes the necessity of conducting a study on the topic.

The interviewees are coded to maintain their anonymity as AA, AB and AC for military experts and JA, JB and JC for journalists. Defence Attaches are coded as DA 1 and DA 2, and retired civilian officials from MoFA and diplomats are coded as C and D.

In-depth interviews, asking open-ended questions to military experts and journalists, were conducted. Similarly, the same questionnaire was presented to the retired diplomats, MoFA officials and DAs of the Nepali Army to address the trends and practices of military diplomacy. Numerous secondary sources were reviewed to collect the secondary data. In-depth interview is a form of non-standard or semi-structured oral interview through relatively large freedom of the interviewer in terms of content and design, which increase the willingness to provide information, and the spontaneity of the respondents.

### **Role of Media in Military Diplomacy**

The media needs to study in-depth, although there is an attempt to analyze military diplomacy, its status and media perspective. On the other hand, the important task of media in military diplomacy is to enhance international relations. News media are critical actors with respect to a humanitarian crisis and high-level foreign policy. In fact, it can be a key player to enhance military diplomacy. The internet, global media, social media, and media empowerments have changed foreign relations worldwide (Ditchey, 2011). Through enhanced engagements, improved transparency, increased efficiency and enhanced communication, media have contributed to advanced relations in diplomacy. Diplomatic entities communicate their agendas through media. But the subjectivity must be evaluated objectively.

Present media provide unparalleled access to information and can reach even disinterested audience members through personalized, peer-to-peer channels, like Facebook. Owen (2019) adds as usual, people join forces with the established press to perform the watchdog role, public officials are subject to greater scrutiny. Issues and events that might be outside the purview of mainstream journalists can be brought into prominence by ordinary citizens. New media can foster community building that transcends physical boundaries through their extensive networking capabilities. Although the legacy media coverage of political events correlates with increased political engagement among the mass public, mainstream journalists do not believe that encouraging participation is their responsibility (Owen, 2019). However, a new media explicitly seeks to directly engage the public in political activities, such as voting,

contacting public officials, volunteering in their communities, and taking part in protest movements. Military diplomacy is an essential tool in expediting the achievement of foreign policy goals.

Another important event that Nepal had experienced the role of media in military diplomacy was during the time of unofficial blockade by India. It was the media that advocated how military diplomacy had succeeded in easing the blockade. The main reason behind the unofficial blockade was to protect the pro-Indian politicians in Nepal on their demand of the whole Tarai as one province, which is very dangerous to the Nepalese security and sovereignty (Bhattarai, 2020). It was a diplomatic move where India had refused to accept it as the blockade, but it indeed was a blockade, albeit unofficial (Pant, 2018). Modi's diplomacy had failed in Nepal, and the anti-Indian sentiment was mounted at the time for the first time ever in history. According to Sangroula & Karki (2015) the main reason for the unofficial blockade is for India to rule south Asia as a big brother. It pressurized the Nepal government to impose the Indian hegemony in Tarai with the help of recently migrated Indians (Sangroula & Karki, 2015). It was designed to minimize the Chinese Communists' influences, but the move was backfired. And so, Nepal elected a communist government with ease and full majority.

Nepalese diplomacy seems weak to put an agenda to amend the Sugauli Treaty, the Treaty of 1950, the issues of Kalapani, and the Susta and Lipulek in Delhi (Sangroula, 2018). At the time of the first general election under Constitution of 2015, the entire political parties raised the issue against India as KP Oli did, which made the latter successfully win the election. The pain that was caused due to the blockade has been forgotten in the name of improving bilateral relations. When the devastating earthquake killed 10,000 people and millions were injured, India played the game through conspiracy theory (Sangroula, 2018). What should be known is that leaders may forget, but the people never forget (Pant, 2018).

### **Military Diplomacy in International Relations of Nepal**

The military diplomacy in the international relations of Nepal has a long history, and its root is related to classical realism. The history of diplomacy in military relations starts from the time of myths of gods and giant kings. Diplomacy is an art and a practice of conducting negotiations among various states. It usually refers to international diplomacy, the conduct of international relations through the mediation of diplomats on issues such as peacemaking, trade, war, economics, culture, environment and human rights.

Arms may compel the adversary to take diplomacy seriously. It reiterates the need for caution and precision to ensure the selection of an appropriate diplomacy tool to be



used in a particular situation to achieve positive results. It emphasizes the need of soft power to sway hard power towards the use of exchange and integrative powers that encompasses persuasion, negotiation, compromise, transformative long-term problem-solving. However, military power cannot be ruled out. Persuasion is always better than coercion, but the latter should never be ruled out in relation to the most vital issues and violent conflicts. A combination of tools depending on a careful assessment of a situation is the most ideal (Ochiel, 2013). Throughout history, military diplomacy has been the perfect mix of hard and soft power in international relations.

The military was used as the hard power in order to integrate all the scattered smaller states to found Nepal by King Prithivi Narayan Shah; however, after that, he believed that a defensive narrative should be maintained by Nepal in regard to its stronger northern and southern neighbors, and only go into war if it was inevitable. The famous quotation of him on *Divyopadesh*, “*Jaai Katak Nagarnu, Jhiki Katak Garnu* (Avoid aggressive battles and adopt only the defensive)”, was the most influential strategy in the history of military diplomacy and international relations of Nepal. “The Kingdom of Nepal is a yam between two stones. Friendship should be maintained between the Chinese and the southern emperor (British East India Company). The southern emperor is very clever as he has kept India suppressed and is entrenching himself towards the outer territory. He is very clever. He has kept India suppressed. He is entrenching himself in the plains. Fighting should be based on a defensive basis than offensive. If it is found difficult to resist, then even means of persuasion, tact and deceit should be employed”, Rawal (2019) claims from citing SD Muni. This is the historical learning and experience of military diplomacy in the international relations of Nepal.

Similarly, AB says, during the 17th century, military diplomacy of Nepal focused almost exclusively on the performance of functions concerning the gathering and analyzing of information on expansionist armed forces and on the security situation of 56 princely states (*Baisi Choubisi Rajya*) of Nepal with the emphasis on the evaluation of erstwhile military threats and possibilities of military intervention. After the demise of The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1775, his immediate successors, namely Rana Bahadur Shah and Surendra Bikram Shah, didn't continue to maintain a friendship with China and India. Instead of using it as a diplomatic tool to restore relationships with them, Ranas used the Nepal Army to challenge their neighbors. Nepal went to war first with Tibet and China in the north, then with the Sikhs in the west. Nepalese rulers' only understood the point of attaining nation's interests through diplomacy after they were defeated by the British East India Company in the Anglo-

Nepal War. Nepal has been known to employ its military as a diplomatic instrument in its dealings with India and China.

In order to understand the modern retelling of this practice, this history must be known. Nepal's earliest military-diplomatic relationship was with British India. S. D. Muni mentions that the decision by the Nepal Government in 1857 to support the British East India Company to suppress the Sepoy mutiny was a brilliant master plan to enhance Nepal's national security and to get favors from the British East India Company (Rawal, 2019). The British, for their part, responded favorably to the then Prime Minister Jang Bahadur's friendly overtures. As quoted by Rawal (2019), S.D. Muni notes that The British East India Company adopted a policy of strict non-interference in the internal matters of Nepal due to military diplomacy. Muni states that Britain and India were permitted to recruit Gurkhas for their armies under a tripartite treaty signed by Nepal, India, and the British in November 1947, following which the government of India agreed to meet the defence requirements of the NA. In fact, Ranas were those who practiced military diplomacy in Nepal from the early 19th century until the first democratic period in Nepal.

Similarly, AC says military diplomacy enhances formal diplomacy. Nepal's expansionist foreign policy came to an end after they incurred losses during the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816). It compelled Nepal to adopt a British-centric foreign policy, which would lead to the advancement of military diplomacy. For instance, the Sugauli Treaty signed between Nepal and British India, which ended the Anglo-Nepal War, is considered unequal, as it heavily favors British India. Nonetheless, the treaty can prove the British intending to establish an enduring relationship with Nepal rather than colonizing it.

Further, the media expert JA explains, it is important to mention that the political attitude of the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) towards NA was not positive during the time of People's Movement -2 in Nepal. In fact, the intention of some of the political leaders of SPA and Maoists was even to disband Nepal Army. They were trying to corner Nepal Army as they were with the monarchy. The Indian political leadership, with the advice of the Indian Army, tried to convince the Nepali political wing not to demoralize the army and humiliate the monarchy beyond a certain point. The SPA and Maoists, at this point, didn't heed their advice.

In the present context, AA explains, when Nepal–India relations were ruined politically, military-to-military ties between the two countries were still intact. Nepal also has a long history of military diplomacy with India. After the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal through the Nepalese constituent assembly by an overwhelming majority, the economic blockade of 2015, which Nepal's government blames on India, was applied. Indian Army



tried to maintain the history long relations with the Nepali Army. This can be taken as a prominent example of foreign relations due to military diplomacy.

Talking about the history of military diplomacy of the Nepali Army, Jung Bahadur Rana sent the Nepali Army to India to suppress the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in Lucknow. The military expert AA further states that Nepal had a tense relationship with the British, due to which their commercial strategy for the Himalayan states was undermined. As a consequence of that, the war with Nepal was considered necessary by the British, and Nepal's continuation of encroachment in the Indian border areas provided the British with another excuse to attack Nepal. It was a successful historical event of Nepalese Military Diplomacy that Nepal was able to reacquire Banke, Bardiya, Kailai, and Kanchanpur.

In the same setback, media expert JB elaborates that Nepal's participation in a number of bilateral conflicts and peacekeeping missions has enhanced its image, credibility, and professionalism of gallant fighters for the nation, friends, and global peace and security. Prithvi Narayan Shah built the trust of people in the army, recruited people from various social groups and utilized their comparative strength for national unification as well as for deterrence against outside invasions. British were distressed over the emergence of powerful Nepal with demonstrated military capabilities astride their vulnerable and strategic communication lines in northern India. At first, after continuously getting defeated, the British changed their fighting strategy in the mountains. The British East India Company staged a decisive victory over Nepal and threatened Kathmandu with renewed strategy and additional military resources. The war was a setback for Nepal. The Treaty of Sugauli signed on 4th March 1816 brought the war to an end. It was another milestone for the military diplomacy of Nepal.

Similarly, media expert JC said that Nepali Army got democratized when it changed its name to the Nepali Army from the Royal Nepali Army and saluted a civilian. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala became the head of the state after the People's Movement - 2. The Nepali Army respected people's will and democracy. The history of the Nepali Army, irrespective of its name, whether it's the Nepali Army or the Royal Nepali Army, proves that the army of Nepal, right from Prithivi Narayan Shah, up to the republican constitution, has taken the country and its interests as a priority over ambitions. In many instances, it has helped and steered the undemocratic and Hippocratic move to the right track; for instance, by guiding King Gyanendra not to go against the public will, hence preventing from additional bloodshed. But the scholars failed to narrate this part of history. Due to the lack of narration of the contribution of the Nepali Army to the

nation and democracy, some vested interests are getting space to play against. Nepali Army is exercising its military diplomacy in fostering the foreign policy of the country and being mobilized under the Ministry of Defence and provisioned to be mobilized under the decision made by National Security Council (NSC).

He further said that historically, Nepal practiced diverse military diplomacy in pursuing its foreign policy goals. Currently, Nepal engages both its neighbors, who have a conflictual history and competitive interests in the subcontinent. No matter what, the Nepali Army always contributed to the nation, people and sovereignty.

### ***UN Participation and International Relations***

After Ranas, King Mahendra was the one who had a very farsighted vision of protecting the sovereignty and independence of Nepal. In the mid-1950s, to reduce Nepal's dependence on India, King Mahendra looked for a strategy to balance two powerful members and keep the sovereignty intact. Rawal (2019) states that the king believed the UN to be the guardian of integrity, national identity, independence and sovereignty of small states like Nepal. Nepal believed that if it were to become a significant troop-contributing country to the cause of world peace, should there be any act of aggression or encroachment by its strong neighbors, it would be able to gain the attention of the UN. As a result of this, Nepal became a member of The UN in 1955.

Nepali Army participated in the UN peace support operations for over half a century, covering some 43 UN missions, in which over 1,35,399 have participated. For the first time in 1958, the army's long association with the UN peace support operations began with a team of five military observers in the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL, Lebanon). The army has contributed to UN significantly by deploying infantry battalions, including special capabilities such as engineers, medical teams and Special Forces contingents in different conflict zones of the world. They have been widely applauded for their devotion to duty and excellent performance. The Nepali Army has always accepted challenges and participated in the most difficult operations, having sacrificed 84 personnel for world peace and prosperity.

NA has established a training center of international standard named Birendra Peace Operations Training Center (BPOTC) at Panchkhal, which paved the way to establish itself as a "Center of Excellence" and a globally recognized Peace Keeping Training Centre in this region.

Military expert AA states that UN participation is one of the prominent examples of the military diplomacy of Nepal in the field of international relations. There are many instances of military diplomacy that contribute to Nepal's foreign relations and foreign policy, whether they be in the sector of Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) or in the areas



of UN peacekeeping operations or through foreign military exchanges and training. The support from foreign armies in the field of HADR and UN participation are results of such international relations. He remembers some bitter experiences during and after the settlement of the painful insurgency in Nepal. During the comprehensive peace agreement of 2062-63 with the Maoist insurgents, many human rights issues were raised by numerous NGOs and INGOs in Nepal. Almost all international communities stopped their aid to the Nepali Army. Even the UN participation of the Nepali Army was questioned. NA took harsh steps to bring the culprits into court. NA leadership convinced the international community that it would not be justice for the needy people to suffer in these fields of HADR and international peace under the influence of the NGOs and the INGOs. Finally, after the British army, the US army got won over by the notion too and continued their support to the Nepali Army. The participation of NA in the UN remained uninterrupted.

UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) is an innovation of the United Nations to ensure peace in war torn parts of the world. In the beginning, such PKOs were established with limited mandates. C, one of the retired officials from MoFA, has a similar argument with Expert AA in contributions of Nepali Army to UN Peacekeeping. He speaks as:

*“Continued participation of Nepal in UN Peacekeeping notwithstanding, the Nepal Army is facing tough competition mostly from its South Asian counterparts. The largest army and police contributors to the UNPKOs are from this region. Moreover, Nepal has its own painful history of an armed insurgency that has sometimes dragged the professional Nepali army into controversy as a few human rights organizations have been found criticizing it. At some juncture, when the country was in the midst of the internal conflict, a few human rights activists even lobbied against Nepal’s participation in the UNPKOs. Due to persevering efforts of the government to counter the logic of the activists, the embarrassing situation of non-deployment of Nepali security personnel in the UN Peacekeeping Operations has not occurred as yet.”*

Further, AB explains referring to K.C.S. (2004), in 1967, while highlighting the importance of the UN in the protection of the independence of smaller states, King Mahendra addressed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). King Mahendra sent troops for the participation of the NA in the peacekeeping mission as a foreign policy tool to preserve the Nepalese sovereignty against its giant neighbors. This strategy came to execution when Nepal was twice elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1969–70 and 1988–89. Thus by making a visible presence in the UN

and partnering with multi-lateral organizations, King Mahendra was carefully balancing both neighbors and was able to diminish the likely encroachment by India and China upon Nepalese sovereignty strongly. Thus, when Nepal floated its “Zone of Peace” proposal in 1975 to pursue a non-aligned nature of foreign policy, it was supported by 116 countries, which included four permanent members of the UN, but it was rejected by India. It was a great failure of diplomacy of both the country (K.C.S., 2004).

Expert AB again argues that the most important feature common to preventive and defence diplomacy is the fostering of a climate of “trust among states” and defence diplomacy, through its operationalization process, is designed to build “trust” so that preventive diplomacy can take it over, after it has already been developed or in the process of being developed, and use it in its undertakings or its conflict prevention process. It takes much time to build this confidence; more precisely, a series of clearly established historical events are taken into consideration, which, after an objective assessment, can lead to the conclusion that a certain state is trustworthy. Nepal is now a trusted Troop Contributing Country (TCC) in the UN. At the same time, building and preserving trust between neighbors in relation to the mutual respect of their national interests could generate situations in which one of the parties might get disappointed. He made clear that UN participation is one of the best ways of military diplomacy in the international relations of Nepal.

Peacekeeping missions began to carry out by regular military troops; the roles and responsibilities of peacekeepers are very different from those of troops carry out classic military operations. The focus is on executing a peace agreement and providing security while the situations between combatants are stabilized. It is also probable to provide support for humanitarian assistance operations. This needs a ‘soft’ method rather than the ‘hard’ method of fighting. This can present as a cultural challenge for some troops as the usual military instincts of soldiers, i.e. to apply maximum force, have to be restrained. In addition, referring to Puddephatt (2006), peacekeepers generally have rules of engagement that are very different from the rules of war. The fact that one cannot take sides, resulting in significant strain to troops in a number of the more bloody wars of recent years, is one of the political constraints upon peacekeepers (Puddephatt, 2006). Thus peacekeeping mission is one of the most important aspects of international relations in military diplomacy that the media have to address positively.

Similarly, AC elaborates, UN participation was founded on the concept of equidistance or NAM; in practice, it was different. Until the 1960s, Nepal had aligned with India. However, after the beginning of the 1970s, Nepal tried to balance India with China. UN peacekeeping participation



and foreign policy were not synchronized, which affected the complex geopolitical reality. King Mahendra carefully balanced major Indian pressure and warded off Chinese pressure on Nepal's sovereignty. Nevertheless, this was not the case when Nepal tried to buy Chinese weapons in 1989, and India expressed that the purchase of arms contradicted the spirit of the 1950 treaty (Rawal, 2019). Feeling threatened by Nepal's aligning with and buying arms from China, India clamped a 15-month-long economic blockade on Nepal in 1989 that strangled the Nepalese economy and had severe effects on Nepal.

He further says this was a case of a powerful neighbor's intervention on the internal matters of a smaller and weak state. The concept of collective security, provided by the UN for the security and protection of the smaller states for their rights to sovereignty, though, was not pronounced in this case. It was purposed for which Nepal had been a member of the UN and participated significantly in the peacekeeping mission to safeguard any intervention from the powerful members met with failure as the UN hardly contributed in lifting the sanctions imposed by India on Nepal.

King Mahendra had diversified the patterns of military diplomacy. He had expanded the limits of foreign policy by exploiting the conflicting security interests of India and China. Then, to diminish Nepal's dependence on India and China, he used global platforms like the UN and the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), seeking the support of regional and international institutions. It was a milestone to increase the Nepalese interest in active participation in UN missions. JA elaborates that through participation in UN peacekeeping missions and NAM, Nepal contributed significantly to world peace and actively participated in world affairs as an independent nation-state.

Similarly, JB also agrees that NA's participation in the UN has contributed a lot to global peace and security. It has built trust with those societies and gained experience in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, finally adding another dimension to the international relations of Nepal. Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan paid a three-day visit to Nepal on 23 May 2017. He and his Nepalese counterpart, the defence minister, signed an agreement where China agreed to provide military assistance worth USD 32 million to Nepal, to be spent on building the NA's capacity in disaster management and equipping NA for better UN peacekeeping performance. It was another dimension of military diplomacy in fostering the international relations of Nepal.

On the same sideline, JC explains, UN peacekeeping is not only the job of the NA, but the Government of Nepal (GoN) should seriously make efforts to capitalize on peacekeeping as an instrument of foreign policy and try to maintain Nepal's influence in UN affairs. UN peacekeeping is one

domain where NA has been playing a major role to support Nepal's foreign policy. Nepal has made significant contributions to world peace since its accession to the UN in 1955. When Nepal was twice elected as a non-permanent member of UNSC back in the 1970s and '80s, it had considerable clout over world affairs. In order to regain its reliability, Nepal should more closely align its foreign policy and military diplomacy in the context of UN peacekeeping.

After the end of the Cold War 1989, there has been a significant increase in the UN and other regional multilateral peace operations. The absence of great power rivalry and the reduction of inter-state conflicts were accompanied by the dramatic expansion of intra-state conflicts that were seen as the sources of new threats to international peace and security. Since the late-1980s, there has been a dramatic surge in the number of peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN. UN would turn to India and South Asia for providing the military workforce. After the cold war, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal provided the bulk of the peacekeepers in the UN Missions (Mohan, 2014).

### ***Joint Military Training Exercises***

It is highly contextual to materialize the peace and prosperity in local states. In addition to participating in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, the NA also conducts various multinational peacekeeping exercises requiring multinational interoperability that intends to develop the common tactics, techniques, and procedures required to execute effective peacekeeping operations (Nepali Army, 2021). In the year 2017, it conducted multinational Capstone exercises with participants from 28 countries. There have been numerous exchanges of joint military exercises with the US, UK, China, Canada, India, Bangladesh and many others. NA has continued to maintain international relations at another level through its diplomacy (Global Security.org, 2019). The number of friendly nations who participated in the Capstone exercise in 2000 was four, but by 2013, the number of participating member states rose to 23, and participating soldiers were 445 (Rawal, 2019). This demonstrates the high level of professionalism of the NA and its intent to increase military diplomacy with multinational partners; however, NA must coordinate with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and in line with the foreign policy of Nepal, but should not forget the role of media.

Mohan (2014) states, India emphasized that peacekeeping should always be with the consent of the state concerned. India has also sought a clear distinction between peacekeeping operations which it favored, and the new interest in coercive peacekeeping. However, India has not shied away from a debate on reforming the peacekeeping



operations and defining the role of the new Peace-Building Commission established in 2006 by the UN (Mohan, 2014). The peacekeeping mission of UN military diplomacy can go along with Indian military diplomacy as well.

From the journalistic viewpoint, JA explains that different issues and political propaganda create tension and conflicts among different interest groups. Conflicts are natural phenomena, but it needs to resolve peacefully. Hard power may be dangerous at this time, and soft power is more realistic and using excessive power can be counter attacking in many cases, which is harmful. In between India and China in the present context, hard power is entirely useless. The military must realize the fact that Nepal cannot contest militarily with India or China but can be actively involved in the international peacekeeping mission and National infrastructure development projects.

Due to its sensitive geopolitical location, it has been given different metaphors. Although the idea of the bridge is an alternative to the old metaphor of yam and buffer, some also consider the metaphor 'bridge' is used to reflect Nepal's foreign policy of equidistance. Although the idea of 'trilateralism', 'bridge' and 'transit' has been confined to discourse, they are different concepts that give more or less the same message that Nepal's geopolitical situation has both opportunities and threats (Bhattarai, 2017).

Trilateralism prioritizes partnerships between China, India, and Nepal on different issues, ranging from trade, economy to security. It is a partnership borne out of reciprocity and interdependence between the three countries. However, the bridge is simply a metaphorical representation of such a partnership, particularly in terms of trade and economy. But transit refers to a state or condition reached due to geographical proximity, connectivity, and transport and, most important, infrastructure development, to eventually foster more significant trade and business between India and China via Nepal (KC & Bhattarai, 2018).

### Contemporary Issues

Military diplomacy based on equi-proximity or balanced relations have evolved instead, with increased military assistance and political engagements from both India and China. Nepal has more recently modelled its military diplomacy such that it shares equal military ties with India and China. Given its two neighbors' geopolitical setup and status, neither does Nepal have the luxury to follow a pacification policy, nor can it balance one country against another. Despite the fact that the NA and Nepalese political leaders have stated that they wish to have equal relations and no enmity with their neighbors, this desire seems idealistic. Geopolitically, in terms of trade and transit, Nepal is very near to India, whereas China is still far away beyond the Himalayas. The 2015 undeclared economic blockade imposed on Nepal by India can be seen as

evidence of this reality. Even during this trying time, the military diplomacy practiced by the top army leadership of both countries played a crucial role in dousing the political animosity.

With both countries, Nepal holds interactions with senior military and civil defence officials, shares arrangements on bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, and engages in exchanges for training for military and civilian defence officers. In this issue, AA explains that NA has demonstrated its diplomacy with Nepal's powerful neighbors by holding joint exercises with India and China as equal sovereign nations. Yet, Nepal's last-minute withdrawal from the BIMSTEC military exercise hosted by India does not help the cause of practicing balanced military diplomacy as that back-pedaling only created a trust deficit between Indo-Nepal relations

Then press advisor to PM KP Oli, Dr Kundan Aryal said that "Within and outside the party, and within the intelligentsia, the decision to participate in the exercise was criticized. It was decided to not sending a Nepalese army delegation for the BIMSTEC summit." (Roy, 2018). As India conveyed its 'disappointment' to Nepal over the withdrawal from BIMSTEC's multinational military field training exercise, Roy (2018) refers Dr Aryal telling it "Small incident" and "should not have any negative consequences on its relationship with India" adding that Nepal is committed to "equal relationship" with both India and China.

Political instability, rampant corruption, crime, lack of law and order, lack of good governance develop hatred among people, and that gives room for raising voices. Ill political maturity develops bitterness among nations. Thapa (2011) states that politicians need to redefine their vision for people's sustainable political and economic development. If they want to be seen as a credible and legitimate government, the country needs to provide opportunities for all to optimally fulfil their potential. Striving for people's voice in government depends on a social contract—an unwritten agreement among individuals to resolve conflict through negotiation, compromise, and openness. When problems erupt, what is now at stake is not merely a procedural matter but an actual affront to democracy. What went wrong in Nepal was the expectation that the leader would assume responsibility and effectively diagnose the problems facing the country. While long-term political predictions are hazardous, there are reasons to be optimistic for democratic consolidation. The present freedom of expression and organization are absolute without precedent, particularly in the countryside. But, to maintain stability and build democratic legitimacy, Nepal must discard confrontation and achieve consensus on the basic rules of the game (Thapa, 2011).



Both the neighbors have assisted the weaker political section in intensifying the stagnation. Media expert JA comments, “Unstable Nepal is the vested interest of neighbors”. If the situations go beyond control, they can enter the territory of Nepal with arms. Entire Nepali must understand the strategy of neighbors, especially the political groups. Nepal must be politically stable. On the other hand, JB says that, Nepal is a beautiful country hillside holiday station. Nepal has an abundance of natural resources with amazing weather and greenery, plus massive mountains. They want to make it their holiday station. But Nepali politicians visit them for political assistance, which has created high instability in the Nepalese political spectrum.

Similarly, JC explains that, when Nepal, as a UN member, practiced non alignment and internationalism, it helped its national interests by giving it its own voice in the international platform. This then allowed Nepal to lessen India’s dominance. Had that not been the case, Nepal, as a buffer state, would also most probably have surrendered to India like Bhutan and Sikkim. The NA’s contribution to UN peace operations and GoN’s wise foreign policy helped Nepal become an active performer in world affairs, regardless of its strength and size. A major diplomatic victory was attained when Nepal, in 1960-70 and 1988-89, was selected as the non-permanent member of the UNSC by an overwhelming majority. As a result of diversification in its diplomatic approach, Nepal built clout in world affairs and could avoid encroachment on its territorial integrity (Rawal, 2019).

Nepal has been closely involved in global issues since world wartime. Nepal established a very cordial relation with the UK during the Rana dynasty. DA1 also urges that though military diplomacy is a tool for powerful countries, it has been more effective for small countries like Nepal.

## Conclusion

The role of the Nepali Army in military diplomacy is continuing to be influenced by the changing character of the threats of insecurity and fragile political situation that people face. As Nepal has contributed forces to internationally legitimate uses, such as UN peacekeeping, military diplomacy has been enhanced to the next level. The NA is conducting multinational joint military exercises that have given another height to international relations in the modern world. None of the countries has direct military threats today; the threats today consist of weak diplomacy, inimical foreign relations and immature foreign policy in the field of international relations. In the paucity of political maturity and stability, the military and the media can play a vital role. The size of the country does not matter; what matters are better identified national interest, stable foreign policy, and mature diplomacy.

On the one hand, the attitude of the Nepali Army to the media had been harsh and a 'close door policy'; the Nepali media, on the other hand, are fond of publishing negativity. The relation between them was made up of mutual distrust of each other’s intentions and capabilities. The Nepali Army lacks in understanding the media, and the media lacks in showing empathy for the Nepali Army’s roles, motivations, strengths and weaknesses. The hope for both the media and the military of Nepal is for them to be aware of the need for a healthy relationship and look forward to better interaction.

History is essential as it shows a persistent struggle between the military and the media executing their roles. It is observed that there is a lack of understanding in military institutions about media and its role in social responsibility. However, media is vulnerable to exploitation by the radicals and the armed group in the insurgency, and sometimes, an illegitimate relationship develops between these two, which was observed in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Some of the media are operated by vested interests, which might even threaten sovereignty. They might be operating against national integrity. Those partisan media and the media operated by foreign agencies must be handled with care. Professional journalists must be cautious that these media can be a threat even to professional journalism.

For better military diplomacy, a mature military-media relationship is a must. Both the media and the military should see themselves as equal partners, and a collaborative media–military relationship is essential for mutual trust between both parties for achieving foreign policy goals. Media has an even greater impact on the successful conduct of diplomacy to achieve foreign policy goals, and military diplomacy is key to safeguarding the vital national interests, the latter being part and parcel of the foreign policy of Nepal.

The relation had been a mutual distrust of each other’s intentions and capabilities. The hope is for both the media and the military of Nepal to be aware of the need for a healthy relationship. Foreign policy and Defence policy should be mature, and military diplomacy should be addressed. Media must be responsible, and study must be done in defence, international relations and diplomacy and military diplomacy.

## Ethical Considerations

The ethical consideration of the study is the vital parts of every research. Every researcher needs to maintain the codes of conduct. To follow them, the researcher has taken prior consent of respondents. The aims of data collection have been explained according to the questionnaire. The confidentiality of the respondents has been ensured—no cultural, religious and economic biases to the respondents. A good relationship has been maintained by the researcher at first hand of the study.



## Conflict of Interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest with this publication.

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