

Foreign policy and GP Koirala

It is said that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. Geography and socio-historical tradition constitute the basic premise of a foreign policy. We can never ever underestimate external fall out of internal policies in foreign policy. Foreign policy represents domestic priorities and reflects global realities. Successful foreign policy demands a skillful management of domestic policy. As the ancient Roman precept says, *Salus populi supreme lex*: the good of the nation is the highest law.

Given Nepal's location between two great neighbors (India in the south, east, and west and China to the north), we have to be alert, careful, cautious, and rational. Nepal's permanent home is between India and China- the two huge countries and emerging global powers. China has already emerged as a global power- it is the largest trading nation, second largest economy, has the largest foreign currency reserves and stands as a manufacturing hub. India has the potentials to be a big power. It is the largest democracy in the world, it has become a tech superpower. Indian engineers have made great contributions to technology, in the USA-Silicon Valley and others.

Geography has remained a formidable factor in shaping the foreign policy all through. Notwithstanding the changes beyond recognition in the world, the "geographic location" of a country, wrote Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national security adviser to US president Jimmy Carter, "still tends to determine the immediate priorities of a state." He added that the greater the "military, economic, and political power, the greater the radius beyond its immediate neighbors, of that state's vital geopolitical interests, influence and involvement." This underlines the geophysical compulsion that can never be ignored in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy. Neighbours are our necessity, friends are a choice.

Along with geography, the contours of foreign policy are shaped by history and culture, demographics, trade, development, military strength, national character, political system, and natural resource endowments at home, along with other considerations that prevail at particular times in international settings. In democracy, the parameters of the foreign policymaking process also include public opinions, parliamentarians, people's representatives, civil society, the media, and the general public. Above all, the political culture of a nation's leadership, its determination, clarity, and credibility define its overall landscape. As the world gets more diversified in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, unity in diversity is *sine qua non* to maintain social stability, tolerance, and harmony. These factors together constitute the foundations of the comprehensive national power. Therefore, the stronger the foundations of national power, the more effective is the foreign policy. Strength abroad comes from strength at home.

Nepal has diversified its diplomatic relations. The number of countries having diplomatic relations with Nepal stands at 173. Friendship with all and enmity with none has been Nepal's longstanding policy. While foreign policy priorities begin with neighbouring countries, Nepal's engagements go far beyond the neighbourhood, with countries across several continents and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. Nepal engages with them and respects rules and norms. Relations with neighbours are more consequential for it. Double standard and confusion in foreign policy do not help to serve national interests. Their continuance in foreign policy makes the country rot from within.

Foreign Policy and GP Koirala

GP Koirala was born on July 4, 1925, at Tedideepnagar in Indian State of Bihar while his parents were in exile on charges of state treason at the hands of Rana rulers. He started his political career from Biratnagar leading labour movement.

His name is synonymous with the democratic movement in Nepal, first as one of the second rank leaders, and later as the front leader of the democratic movement. He was respectfully addressed as Girija Babu by his adversaries and admirers alike. He also displayed his greatness and large-heartedness towards them. He showed his patience and perseverance in his style of working. His willpower was remarkable and praiseworthy. Former US president Jimmy Carter called GP Koirala 'his hero' and the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh called him the legendary leader of the entire South Asia during his visit to India in 2006.

He initiated far reaching reforms after the launching of privatization and globalization. The country made significant progress. For the first time in the history of Nepal, 7% growth rate was registered. The GDP increased. The World Bank described the period as "golden age" of Nepal.

He was elected PM after the restoration of democracy in 1991. Shortly after assuming the Prime Ministership of the country, Prime Minister Koirala addressing the nation on May 29, 1991, said, his government's foreign relations will be based on "the strong cornerstone of nationalism and democracy. The government will strengthen and expand its relations with foreign countries, respecting their freedom, integrity, ideals of world peace and the role of the United Nations." The Nepali Congress government, said the Prime Minister, "will maintain very close and cordial relations with our big neighbours- India and China, and will expand goodwill and regional cooperation with other South Asian countries."

He was a six times PM, assuming the office subsequently in 1994, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2006. He fully understood the geographical compulsions, understood the ground realities, and acted accordingly in foreign relations. He worked to strengthen relations with our neighbours India and China, made these relations closer and more productive. He made it clear so many times that he was absolutely opposed to play the India and China card to serve his own domestic political interests."

Speaking at the House of Representative, Prime Minister underlined the foundation of Nepal's foreign policy is non-alignment, the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, human rights, ideals of democracy, mutual respect, and non-interference in internal affairs.

These principles enable Nepal to judge every issue on its merits without fear or favour and then form a national position. Nepal enjoys good relations with both of its neighbours-India and China, than they have with each other at the moment.

His thought-provoking speeches at the sixth SAARC summit in November 1991 in Colombo, seventh summit in Dhaka in 1993 illuminate his thoughts and visions on regional cooperation as a part of foreign policy. His addresses at the 10th nonaligned summit in Jakarta in September 1992, the UNGA in 1993, the Asia Society in New York are some of the major venues where he outlined Nepal's foreign policy priorities.

GP Koirala visited India at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in December 1991. Agreements on Tanakpur was signed, and also Nepal-India Transit Treaty. In March 1992, he visited the People's Republic of China at the invitation of Chinese premier Li Peng. They brought two countries closer to each other. A variety of interactions and cooperation in various fields took place during the visit.

He tried to solve the problem of refugees from Bhutan through dialogue and diplomacy. A joint ministerial committee to hold talks was formed but it could not make any progress due to Bhutan's intransigence. He

approved the a third country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees until conditions are created for their dignified return to Bhutan.

It was under his leadership that Nepal claimed that Kalapani belongs to Nepal. He told Indian leaders that “Kalapani belongs to Nepal and such a sensitive issue should be resolved through peaceful talks on the basis of evidence.”

GP Koirala wanted maximum resources to be allotted to development and bettering the lives of the people. He opposed arms race at all levels. The Koirala government said, “Nepal supports the NPT, and is a signatory to the CTBT. Accordingly nuclear tests conducted by any nation are a matter of concern to Nepal. Nepal hopes that the tests conducted by India recently will not unleash a nuclear arms race in the region.”

In 2000, Prime Minister GP Koirala addressed the UN Millennium Summit in New York, and said, “the challenge before world leaders is to bring peace, prosperity and justice to everyone in the interdependent globalized world.” PM visited France in 2000. UNSG Kofi Annan came to Nepal during his tenure of office.

GP Koirala maintained a remarkable consistency in foreign policy whether in office or out of office. Today, double standard of political leaders plagues the foreign policy of Nepal.

In the context of rapidly shifting geopolitics centered on Nepal’s neighbours-India and China, the pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy is even more relevant today than ever before. Nonalignment never meant indifference to any issue. It has enabled the country to judge every issue on its merits without fear or favour. Non-alignment in Nepal enjoys national consensus. It must continue and be further strengthened. The alternative to nonalignment is chaos and disorder in Nepal. This has also helped to strengthening the peaceful co-existence with huge neighbours.

Challenges in contemporary foreign policy: Lessons to be learnt from GP Koirala’s leadership

- There has been more talk than action. Actions have never matched words. Political leaders (particularly left parties) prefer to build their nationalist image on anti-Indian nationalism and create an impression among the electorates and project oneself as the right candidate to take on India.
- Good foreign policy needs a stronger domestic foundation. In Nepal, the challenge is politics, not policy. It is necessary to repair domestic front. It must be strong at home to firmly stand abroad. For successful foreign policy, it is necessary to master the art of statecraft and to sail through the turbulent politics. Equally important is to correctly read the changing geopolitical landscapes, distinguish vital from peripheral interests, separate friend from foes, capabilities from intentions.
- Foreign policy establishment should have the command of who, what, where and why of the foreign policy and link this to the people across the country. We have to accept our geography as a destiny and devise our national security strategy for survival as independent and developed nation.
- We need substance, not slogan, positive and inclusive nationalism. Foreign policy should have clarity, stability and consistency as having deeply reflected about strategy, priorities, and philosophy.
- For diplomacy to succeed, Nepalese must be united. There must be a national consensus on foreign policy issues. We must not forget that it is in the nature of every power, to prey on weaknesses and blind spots in strategically sensitive country like ours’ and exploit our divisions to their advantages. Nepal must do a better job of explaining its message and missions to the rest of the world both at home and abroad. What we need is not mere slogans, but credible narratives on foreign policy.

- Populist politics has made Nepali foreign policy less consistent and less credible. Nepal's credibility, reliability and reputation for competence is severely damaged. Diplomacy has been politicized, whereas it should remain apolitical.
- China is a dominant power in the region and sees itself as a US peer. This makes the arrival of superpower at Nepal's doorstep. Nepal needs strong institutions to make a critical, and comprehensive geopolitical assessment of the changing situations and their likely implications on its national interests and be able to project its image and stands in proper perspectives. With a weak domestic foundation of its comprehensive national power, it will face enormous constraints to practice a productive, predictable, trustworthy, and responsible foreign policy.
- We need to be mindful and watchful about the state of China-US relations, is there going to be US balance of power in Asia or containment of China? For Nepal, China-India relations are of utmost importance. We need to be closely watching the state of China-India relations and their likely landscapes. We have to be watchful of the directions they will take and make assessment of their likely implications on our national interests.
- China and India are two nuclear armed neighbors – home to one third of humanity. Sino-India relations are of paramount importance to Asia and the world at large for peace, stability and development. China's assertiveness on the LAC changes its earlier position and seems to give a new message of its growing power and demanding deference from its partners for friendship. Tensions are likely to remain in one form or the other in the neighbourhood and beyond. Failure of China and India to come together is a loss to regional and global stability

Needed a realist, principled and pragmatic foreign policy:

- Institute a separate and professional Nepal Foreign Service. In the twenty first century, Nepal does not even have a separate and professional diplomatic service. The previous government was all out to dismantle even a semblance of Foreign Service that was put in place by the Sushil Koirala government in 2015. A capable and competent foreign service alone lends substance to our stated goals.
- Have a road map, and long-term policy. Develop national consensus behind that road map. Identify redlines, speak people's needs and aspirations. Deepening rifts between domestic and foreign policy are no good. With internal tensions, no foreign policy can be projected successfully. Connect economic and social needs of people to foreign policy priorities. Any foreign policy should reflect the supreme interests of the people.
- The use of foreign policy to enhance domestic political power is rampant. It must stop immediately. This has distracted the country from focusing on core issues and threats and priorities. Leaders need to care about foreign policy because it is important and has critical bearing on Nepal's survival as an independent nation and welfare of the people.
- Nepal needs to pursue a balanced foreign policy. Good relationship with neighbours is of paramount importance for Nepal to have a firm footing for projecting its positions and stands farther away. Some talk of 'equidistance' between New Delhi and Beijing. This is far from reality and therefore not practical, and pragmatic. It is suicidal to play one neighbour against the other. Nepal's engagement with them needs to be more effective, visible, credible and result oriented. Leaders playing double standards makes national interests secondary to self-interests. Double standards are no standards at all.
- Nepal is facing unprecedented global threats and challenges. We have to assess what it means, and how do we take advantage of the situation and overwhelm challenges with opportunities. Yesterday's solutions are not the answers to today's problems. What is needed is to develop a new pair of lenses to look at them for proper perspectives.
- As globalization changed the geopolitical realities of the day. We need more unity, cooperation and collaboration to defeat pandemic, jihadism, denuclearization, and fight climate change, poverty

and ethnic conflict that are likely to spill across national boundaries. Nepal foreign policy must be tailored to cope effectively with these realities. In an interdependent world, we need a new realism to defend our national interests.

- The foreign ministry is understaffed and works without significant oversight from political parties, parliament and business community, media and academia. Give adequate resources to the Ministry. MoFA requires far reaching structural reforms and institution of a strong Foreign Service to meet the challenges of the twenty first century. In Nepal, there is no public diplomacy. Nepal lacks an effective strategy for communicating its message and countering the conflicting and competing narratives. What is needed is a realistic and principled foreign policy is needed.

Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai:

A career Foreign Service Official from 1983 to 2012, Dinesh Bhattarai was Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Ministers of Nepal in 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. He was Nepal's Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the United Nations including the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Organizations in Geneva, Rome, and Vienna from 2007 to 2012.

Bhattarai worked as Ambassador of Nepal to the Swiss Confederation and concurrently accredited to Republic of Italy and Republic of Croatia (2007-2012).

He has been a member of the Prime Ministerial delegations in bilateral/multilateral visits to the UN General Assembly, and SAARC/BIMSTEC summits, and has led several official level delegations. He did Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) from the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Masters in Public Administration, Bachelor of Law from the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and Post Graduate Diploma in International Relations and Development from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague. He obtained his Ph.D. Degree in International Relations from the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi.

He has co-authored a book, "*Nepal-India: Democracy in the Making of Mutual Trust*", published in 1993 by Nirala Publications, Jaipur, India, and edited "*Nepal's Foreign Policy: From Expediency to Pragmatism*", published by the Jananayak B.P. Koirala Memorial Trust, Nepal, in 2017. He has contributed book chapters and published a number of articles on contemporary issues in national and international newspapers and journals.