

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of Nepal's foreign policy from an Indian-aligned "special relationship" to a strategy of sophisticated diversification between 1950 and 1962. Utilizing a neoclassical realist framework, it argues that the institutionalization of Himalayan equidistance was a deliberate orchestration by the monarchy to ensure domestic survival and sovereign parity rather than a passive reaction to regional shifts. The analysis identifies King Mahendra's December 1960 royal coup as the critical domestic catalyst. By dismantling the democratic Koirala ministry and leveraging the "China card" against a disgruntled New Delhi, Mahendra successfully framed the democratic opposition as foreign-tethered, creating the nationalist leverage needed to welcome Beijing as a non-interfering partner. This diplomatic shift was validated by the 1961 Sino-Nepali Boundary Treaty, which granted Nepal territorial gains and symbolic sovereignty, and the Kathmandu-Kodari Highway agreement, which physically breached the Himalayan barrier to reduce economic dependence on India. Ultimately, the 1962 Sino-Indian War shattered India's exclusive security umbrella and solidified the China card as a permanent feature of Kathmandu's statecraft. The study concludes that this pivotal era permanently replaced total alignment with a resilient framework of strategic balancing between two competing giants.

Keywords: *Nepal Foreign Policy, Neoclassical Realism, King Mahendra, Sino-Indian War (1962), Himalayan Equidistance, Sino-Nepali Boundary Treaty*

The period between 1950 and 1962 represents the most transformative era in modern Himalayan geopolitics, marking Nepal's transition from an isolated kingdom into a strategic pivot in the Cold War's Asian theatre. This paper employs a Neoclassical Realist (NCR) framework to analyse the evolution of China-Nepal relations, arguing that the institutionalisation of Himalayan equidistance was a calculated response to systemic shifts. It posits that Nepal's foreign policy was driven by a "strategic diversification" framework, resulting in a conscious attempt by the monarchy to use the "China Card" to counter Indian hegemony and safeguard its domestic political survival.

To understand the shifts of the 1950s, one must recognise the structural ruins of the previous century. For over a hundred years, Nepal's relationship with the North was governed by the 1856 Treaty of Thapathali. However, the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the 1949 Communist victory in China created an existential crisis for the Nepali state. The entry of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into Tibet in 1950 destroyed the soft buffer Nepal had enjoyed

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Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

for centuries. Recognising this shift, Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher declared in May 1948 that isolation was no longer "possible nor desirable" and that Nepal would seek "co-operation from our neighbouring and friendly countries" (Rose, 1971, p. 180). This led to Nepal's application for the United Nations admission in February 1949, signalling an urgent need for international recognition as a sovereign entity separate from the British-Indian shadow.

A central pillar of this chapter is the reign of King Mahendra (1955–1972), the pioneer architect of Nepal's modern balancing act. Following his 1960 dismissal of the Koirala ministry, Mahendra faced intense pro-democratic pressure from New Delhi. In response, he turned toward Beijing to legitimise his direct rule. The 1961 Boundary Treaty was not merely a technical settlement of seventy-nine boundary pillars; it was a symbolic masterstroke. By resolving it, Mahendra demonstrated that China treated Nepal as a sovereign equal partner. This quest for parity was realised through the Kathmandu-Kodari (Aniko) Highway. While Nehru famously fretted that the road would open "undesirable possibilities" for smuggling and subversion, Mahendra countered with a realist wit, famously remarking that "communism does not travel in a taxi." As detailed ahead, this "no strings attached" Chinese aid became a critical tool for reducing Nepal's economic dependency on Indian transit routes, despite the "ideological spillover" that would later haunt the kingdom.

The 1962 war serves as the geopolitical reset for this study. The defeat of Indian forces validated Nepal's neutral stance. Before analysing the 1950–1962 phase in detail, it is essential to understand the period when Nepal was rightly viewed as a "sphere of Indian influence." This chapter is structured to follow this evolution from cautious engagement to a resilient partnership, with a dedicated sub-section on "The Tibet Question" highlighting the central role the plateau played in shaping Himalayan foreign policy.

1.2 Era of "special relations" with India

During the reign of King Tribhuvan (1951–1955), Nepal lacked a truly independent foreign policy, remaining largely under the shadow of New Delhi's "middle way" approach. This strategy, articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru, sought a compromise between the traditional Rana order and emerging democratic forces to prevent regional instability (Government of India, 1963). While India facilitated the 1951 "Delhi Settlement" to create a coalition government, the arrangement proved fragile and collapsed within months. Ultimately, Nepal's diplomatic orientation during this period was dictated by India's overwhelming influence, rooted in geographic contiguity, shared socio-cultural ties, and Nepal's total economic dependence on the south. King Tribhuvan, in a New Year (Nepali) broadcast in April 1953, stated:

"I want to make a particular mention of our very cordial and affectionate relations with our neighbour, India. We are akin to each other in so many spheres: religious, social, geographical, historical and so forth. Even Nepal's democracy is the result of an inspiration from India." (Muni, 1973, pp. 61)

Another significant aspect of India's "special relations" with Nepal was its guidance in Nepal's foreign policy. In May 1954, Nepal's Foreign Minister D.R. Regmi, along with the other Ministers of the Nepal government, reached India for discussions incorporated into an Aide Mémoire (Rose, 1971, pp. 205-6) which stated that:

1. "There should be close and continuous contact between the two Governments in regard to their foreign policies and relations, in so far as they affect each other.

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

2. In any matter under consideration by the Government of India which may relate to Nepal, the Government of India will consult the Government of Nepal;
3. The Government of Nepal will likewise consult the Government of India in regard to any matter relating to foreign policy or relations with foreign powers, with a view to a coordinated policy
4. In particular, in matters relating to the relations of Nepal with Tibet and China, consultations will take place with the Government of India;
5. The Government of India agree to arrange that wherever the Government of Nepal wishes, Indian Missions abroad will undertake to represent the Government of Nepal and to look after Nepalese interests;
6. All Foreign Missions of the Government of India will be instructed to give all possible help and assistance to Nepalese nationals.
7. The two governments will, from time to time, exchange information relating to foreign affairs and relations with foreign powers in so far as they affect each other.”

1.3 Nepal's Cautious Approach to China

In 1950-51, China laid a “historical” claim to Tibet. Rose (1971) argues, “Mao Tsetung had once listed Nepal as one of the 'dependent states' the British had seized from China, and who could be sure that Nepal would not share the same fate as Tibet?” The Nepali leaders were cautious of China since, in 1939, Mao had listed Nepal as a “tributary state” and declared its objective of liberating Nepal after liberating Tibet (Muni, 1973, pp. 62). In January 1952, Tibet sent its tributary delegation to Nepal, continuing a practice that dated back to the signing of the 1856 Treaty. This was done despite China's warning to Tibet, instructing it to discontinue such missions². Also, India was not in favour of a separate friendship treaty between China and Nepal. Yang Gongsu mentioned in his memoirs, “Our negotiations in the Nepalese capital on the major questions were in reality tripartite talks between China, India and Nepal.”

Furthermore, Kunwar Indrajit Singh, also known as Dr KI Singh (1905-82), a Nepali politician and revolutionary, led an armed resistance against the Rana forces in Bhairahawa during the 1950s revolution. He redistributed land to peasants and raised his banners against the government owing to disappointment with the revolution. Singh was arrested and imprisoned in Kathmandu in 1951; however, in January 1952, he broke out of prison and attempted a coup, which failed. Reportedly, he tried asking China to help him overthrow the government in Nepal. Atwill (2018) argues that "The Chinese rarely, if ever, publicised his arrival or used him in politically motivated ways... There also does not seem to be any evidence that they contemplated at any point benefiting from his presence in fomenting Communist activity in Nepal.” Thus, one can say that in the early 1950s, Nepal opened relations with China from a position of instinctive distrust.

² The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement on 20 January 1950:

“Tibet is the territory of the People's Republic of China. This is a fact which is known to everybody in the world and which has never been denied by anybody. Since this is the case, the Lhasa authorities, of course, have no right to arbitrarily send out any missions and still more to prove 'Tibet's independence.’

...If the Lhasa authorities... send out illegal mission to engage in splitting and traitorous activities; the Central People's Government of China will not tolerate such traitorous activities of the Lhasa authorities. Any country receiving such illegal missions will be regarded as harbouring hostile intentions towards the People's Republic of China.” Chinese Foreign Ministry, *Statement by the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry regarding "Good Will Missions" of Lhasa authorities (Extracts)*, January 20, 1950, in R. K. Jain (ed.), *China–South Asia Relations, 1947–1980*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers).

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

However, the resolution of this tension coincided with the formalisation of bilateral ties. Shortly after the conclusion of the 1955 China-Nepal agreement, and likely as a direct strategic consequence of it, King Mahendra granted a pardon to the exiled leader. As Rose (1971) notes, despite his years in the north, Singh emerged as a staunch advocate for closer ties with India and became a vocal critic of the potential dangers inherent in maintaining contacts with China. This shift placed him in a unique position relative to other contemporary political leaders, most of whom were actively advocating for a more balanced relationship between Nepal and its two neighbours (Rose, 1971, pp. 208-209).

1.4 Diplomatic and High-level Engagement (1950-1959)

After the fall of the Rana regime, the Bandung Conference marked Nepal's first major international exposure. It convened leaders from 29 Asian and African countries in Indonesia from April 18 to 24, 1955. The initiative resulted in the 10 points of struggle for world peace and cooperation known as the “Bandung Spirit³,” the “Bandung Declaration”, or the “Ten Principles of Bandung”. Bhattarai (2021) discusses Nepal's evolving relationship with China stating that Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (leader of the Nepali Congress who later became the Prime Minister of Nepal), at an event organised by the Nepal-China Friendship Association, said, “The interest of our small country, which is situated between China in the north and India in the south, lies in ensuring friendship with both the large nations. We have deep cultural relations with both these large nations. It is regrettable that the cultural unity with one friendly nation is being widely publicised, while with another nation is being kept confined to the pages of history.”

A delegation of six members headed by General Yuan Chung-hsien was sent to Kathmandu in July 1955 for dialogue with the Nepalese government. As a result, an agreement was reached to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries on August 1, 1955. Ambassador Yuan Zhongxian from China and Sardar Gunja Man Singh, Principal Royal Adviser from Nepal, signed the agreement to establish diplomatic relations between China and Nepal. The Chinese ambassador in New Delhi was assigned to Nepal; however, a resident embassy was not established in Kathmandu at that time. A second Chinese delegation, headed by Pan Tzu-li (Ambassador to India and Nepal), arrived in Kathmandu on August 14, 1956. As a result, China and Nepal signed an agreement to establish friendly relations and trade and commerce on 20 September 1956⁴, which was ratified on 17 January 1958. The two countries agreed to have their relations guided by the fundamental principles of the Panchasheel. The other main provisions were:

1. All past agreements between Nepal and Tibet were abrogated.
2. Nepal was allowed to establish trade agencies at Lhasa, Shigatse, Kerong and Kuti in Tibet, and China was given the right to establish an equal number of trade agencies in Nepal at locations to be determined later.

³ Wang, Y. (2025, April 17). China Public International Forum Association. Retrieved from <https://www.cpifa.org/en/article/2786>

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2000, November 15). *Agreement to maintain the friendly relations between China and Nepal and on trade and intercourse between the Tibet region of China and Nepal*. Retrieved from https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2752_663508/2753_663510/202406/t20240607_11411411.html

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

3. Nepali merchants were permitted to trade at Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse and Yatung, and an equal number of trade markets in Nepal would be specified for the use of China when this became necessary;
4. pilgrimage by Nepalis and Tibetans in each other's territory would continue according to "religious custom," and
5. Traders involved in local trade in the border regions of Nepal and Tibet "may do as they have customarily done heretofore."

The conclusion of the aforementioned agreements implied official recognition of the communist regime of China. Further, it also implied recognition of China's new position in Tibet by Nepal, as all past agreements between Tibet and Nepal were abrogated.

The late 1950s marked a period of intense experimentation in Nepal's foreign policy under Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya (1956–1957), when Nepal made its first significant move toward balancing Indian influence, as his official visit to China (September–October 1956) was a watershed moment in economic diplomacy. The Chinese government promised Nepal Rs. 20 million (in Indian rupees) in cash and Rs. 40 million in machinery, equipment, and other supplies for the construction of a cement factory and a paper mill over the next three years. However, the economic assistance agreement seemed to have gone to waste as neither of the two projects was completed on time. Instead, the currency aid was utilised in meeting the obligations of the American and Indian aid programs; still, the Nepalese people appreciated the Chinese aid program (Rose, 1971, pp. 212). This created a favourable public perception of China as a "disinterested benefactor," a sentiment summarised by the slogan "*Nepal Cheen Maitri Amar Hos*" (May Nepal-China Friendship be Immortal) at the reception hosted by the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce⁵, Lhasa, Kathmandu office, at Seto Durbar during Premier Zhou Enlai's reciprocal visit in January 1957. The momentum of the China-tilt was abruptly checked by King Mahendra's domestic political strategy. As analysed by Thapa (2019), Mahendra was a master of "calculated instability," using and discarding Prime Ministers to consolidate royal authority. He dismissed Acharya under the pretext of his inability to conduct elections⁶ and appointed Dr. K.I. Singh as the Prime Minister of Nepal in July 1956. This appointment represented a sharp pivot in the domestic filter since Singh returned as a staunch proponent of the "special relationship" with India. His short-lived premiership (lasting only 110 days) was defined by resurrecting the theme of Indian security priority. Further, he accepted the draft agreement of the Gandak River project submitted by New Delhi, which was domestically controversial and viewed by many as a concession of water rights. Effectively cooling the diplomatic warmth Acharya had cultivated, Nepal's foreign policy was often a casualty of the King's internal power plays.

By the late 1950s, King Mahendra's foreign policy shifted toward "strategic diversification" to prevent any single power from dominating Nepal. A pivotal moment was the 1958 agreement to establish resident embassies with the United States, which catalysed a broader permanent diplomatic presence for the Soviet Union and China in Kathmandu (Thapa, 2019). Notably, India tolerated this expansion, viewing the American presence as a necessary counterweight to the inevitable arrival of a Chinese mission. This era taught Mahendra that the "China Card"

⁵ Nepalese Chamber of Commerce Lhasa, Kathmandu Office. (1957). *Image 01 Lhasa chamber reception* [Photograph]. Internet Archive. <https://dn720706.ca.archive.org/0/items/15-lhasa-chamber-reception/01%20lhasa%20chamber%20reception.jpg>

⁶ Thapa, H. B. (2019, July 26). *Mahendra's machinations*. *The Annapurna Express*. Retrieved from <https://theanapurnaexpress.com/story/16623/>

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

was a more potent tool of leverage when managed directly by the Palace, setting the stage for the assertive, monarch-led diplomacy that followed the 1960 coup.

1.5 The Tibet Question

Geostrategically, Tibet⁷ was a remote and largely irrelevant security landscape to the Manchus. Historian Pamela Crossley referred to Tibet as an “empty constituency” of the Qing dynasty, as the Manchu rulers were not concerned with the socioeconomic well-being of the Tibetan people. However, gradually they realised the ideological importance of Tibet for managing the Buddhist Mongols. Consequently, for the first time in Chinese cartographic tradition during the Qing emperors, Xizang Toshiuo (Illustrated survey of Tibet) was created by Songyun, the twenty-seventh amban (1794-99). It included sixteen maps depicting various topographical features. Another significant contribution of Qing governance was the establishment of “ordained patronage”, where the Qing government drafted the zhangcheng (ordinances) for Tibet. Five sets of zhangcheng (ordinances) for Tibet were drafted by the Qing government between 1724 and 1907 (Goldstein, 2019).

In 1911, the Han-centric disposition of the Chinese communist revolution resulted in the “five-race republic” formula, referring to the five principal subjects of the Qing Empire (Manchu, Mongol, Han, Hui, and Tibetan). However, Sun Yat-sen, after relinquishing power of the ROC to Yuan Shikai, ignored the other four “races” and focused on creating a Han-centric unitary conception, Zhonghua Minzu (Chinese Nation). The KMT government, headed by Chiang Kai-shek, favoured using military means to control Tibet (Liu, 2020, pp. 21-23).

1.5.1 Strategic expediency: Mao's acceleration of the Tibet campaign

In early 1949, Stalin sent Anastas Mikoyan, a member of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party. In the following statement, Mao informed Mikoyan⁸ about his Tibet plans:

“We are prepared to grant autonomy to the Tibetan people residing in south-western China. The Tibetan question is extremely complicated. In practice Tibet used to be a British colony and belonged to China only in name. Lately the United States has spared no effort to ingratiate itself with the Tibetan people...Once we end the civil war and begin to deal with political issues at home and when the Tibetan people can see that we do not threaten them with aggression and treat them equally, we can begin to decide the destiny of the region. We must be cautious and patient in dealing with Tibet, and we have to take into consideration the complex and troublesome religious affairs and the influence of Lamaism there.”

The July incident of 1949, known to the Chinese as the “Han expulsion incident”, led the CCP leaders to not exclude Tibet from the original plan of a “war of liberation”. Between July 10 and 22, more than two hundred people were expelled from Lhasa, including the Kuomintang mission personnel, the Panchen lama, Han merchants, and some Khampas suspected to be communist agents. Pertinently, China perceived an Indo-US alliance in opposing the communist regime and supporting anti-China activities in Tibet. In this regard, a statement issued by Radio Peking is significant. The statement said, “Han people and KMT (Kuomintang) personnel in Tibet” were expelled by the Tibetan authorities in early July 1949, “under the

⁷ The PRC authorities use Xizang to refer to the area of the current Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) that is largely consistent with the political domain of the traditional Tibetan government before 1959.

⁸ Mikoyan's memo on his conversation with Mao Zedong, 1949/1997, pp. 441–446

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

instigation of British and American imperialism and their stooge, the Indian Nehru Government.” The Radio announcement further stated:

“The purpose of this 'anti-Communist incident' enacted by British, American and Indian reactionaries working hand in glove with the Tibetan reactionary authorities is an attempt not only to prevent the Tibetan people from attaining liberation at a time when the People's Liberation Army is about to liberate all China, but also to deprive Tibet of independence and freedom⁹...”

In terms of economic development, Mao Zedong emphasised (in April 1956 talks) opposition to "Han chauvinism" toward the national minorities, while also highlighting the exploitation of the rich mineral resources present in the region. "The national minority areas are extensive and rich in resources. While the Han nationality has a large population, the national minority areas have riches under the soil that are needed for building socialism," Mao said. He further stated, "The Han nationality must actively assist the national minorities to carry out socialist economic and cultural construction, and, by improving relations between the nationalities, mobilize all elements, both human and material, which are beneficial to socialist construction."¹⁰

1.5.2 Tibet as a security concern for border stability

In 1959, as the Nepali Congress government had won the first general election in Nepal, significant developments were unfolding in the Himalayas. Notably, a full-scale rebellion had occurred against the communist rule of the Chinese in Tibet and the subsequent flight of the 14th Dalai Lama to India. Subsequently, the first wave of Tibetan exiles reached Nepal. Mao wrote, “If the situation continues like this, we may be compelled (such 'being compelled' is very good) to solve the Tibetan question earlier than expected...It would be the best if ten to twenty or thirty to forty thousand lamas and other reactionaries flee abroad. Such a situation would of course become unbearable to India, Bhutan, and maybe also Nepal. But, whereas Bhutan and Nepal are different, India will have brought this onto itself and cannot blame us.”¹¹ Against this backdrop, Nepal tried to pursue a balanced foreign policy with its two neighbours. Pertinently, a joint communique issued (on June 14, 1959) by PM Nehru and PM B.P. Koirala stated, "there was an identity of views¹², the policies of the two countries, both in the international and domestic spheres, being animated by similar ideals and objectives." It was further said that "the Prime Ministers are further convinced that in the interests of peace as well as national and human progress, no country should be dominated by another and colonial control in whatever form should end." Also, it stated, "there is no conflict of interest between the two countries, and they face similar problems and have common approach¹³."

⁹ Jain, G. (1960). *Panchsheela and after: A reappraisal of Sino-Indian relations in the context of the Tibetan insurrection*. Asia Publishing House, pp.17. Retrieved from <https://girilaljainarchive.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Panchsheela-and-After-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, "On the Ten Great Relationships," April 25, 1956, in *Chairman Mao Talks to the People; Talks and Letters: 1956-1971*, ed. Stuart Schram (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 74.

¹¹ Liu, X. (2020). *To the end of revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Tibet, 1949–1959* (pp. 774–778). Columbia University Press.

¹² Elucidating the phrase "identity of views", Mr. B. P. Koirala told a Press conference on June 20, in Kathmandu that it emphasised that there was no difference between the views of the two Governments on international and allied problems, including Tibet. Mr. Nehru had earlier, at his Press conference in Kathmandu on June 14, declared that "there is concurrence between India and Nepal in their approach to the Tibetan question."

¹³ *Joint communique issued at the end of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Nepal, Kathmandu, June 14, 1959*. (1959). In A. S. Bhasin (Ed.), *Documents on Nepal's relations with India and China, 1949–66* (pp. 44). New Del

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

At the United Nations, when the resolution on Tibet was adopted in 1959, Nepal abstained¹⁴ from voting. Nepal also supported China in seeking a permanent seat at the UN. In this regard, B.P. Koirala remarked, “The United Nations can neither become universal nor can it reflect the political realities existing in the world outside until the People's Republic of China is given rightful place in our organization. The United Nations will not be able to fulfil effectively some of its most important purposes and functions until the People's Republic of China is brought in”¹⁵. China and Nepal opened embassies in their respective capitals in January 1960. To address Nepalese concerns about Tibet, China sent its ambassador posted in Delhi (who was also concurrently accredited to Kathmandu) in May and October 1959. Later, Zhou Enlai visited Nepal to call on Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, the PM of Nepal, from April 26 to 29, 1960, to relieve concerns over the border situation. The visit was significant, as it occurred only a year after the 1959 Tibetan uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. On the occasion, both the leaders stated that the “friendly relations” between the two countries had entered “a new phase”¹⁶. Marshal Chen Yi, Vice-Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chang Han-fu, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and others accompanied Zhou Enlai. The Nepalese side was represented by Ganesh Man Singh, Minister of Works and Communication; Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Minister of Home and Law; and Nara Pratap Thapa, Foreign Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the visit, the two countries signed the Sino-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1960. They exchanged instruments of ratification of the “Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and His Majesty's Government of Nepal on the Question of the Boundary Between the Two Countries”¹⁷. The two leaders expressed sympathy¹⁸ for the struggles of Asian and African nations against colonialism and racial discrimination. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Asian-African Conference, they decided to further enhance mutual understanding and development based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence and the Bandung spirit. Zhou Enlai had also addressed the Members of the parliament at a joint session of the Maha Sabha and Pratinidhi Sabha of Nepal where he stated that China's government “warmly welcome[d] and fully support[ed]” Nepal's intent “to pursue an independent policy of neutrality, not to join any military bloc, and to carry out firmly the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”¹⁹.

hi: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Retrieved from <https://pahar.in/pahar/Books%20and%20Articles/Nepal/1970%20Documents%20on%20Nepals%20Relations%20with%20India%20and%20China%201949-66%20by%20Bhasin%20s.pdf>

¹⁴ Tibetan Parliamentary & Policy Research Centre. (1959). *Agreement and treaties collection 1959* [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://www.tpprc.org/documents/agreements/1959.pdf>

¹⁵ Anupam, B. (2025, September 8). *Nepal's five historic diplomatic 'records' made by former PM BP Koirala*. *Lokaantar*. Retrieved from <https://english.lokaantar.com/news/detail/14776/>

¹⁶ *Peiping and Nepal hail new accords; Premiers applaud friendship and stress peaceful coexistence*. (1960, April 30). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1960/04/30/archives/peiping-and-nepal-hail-new-accords-premiers-applaud-friendship-and.html>

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (1961, October 5). *Treaty between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal on the boundary (English version)*. Retrieved from <https://treaty.mfa.gov.cn/tykfiles/20180718/1531876402103.pdf>

¹⁸ Eastern Initiative for Social Science Research. (2015, November). *Joint communique issued at the end of Premier Zhou En-Lai's visit to Nepal, Kathmandu, April 29, 1960*. Retrieved from <https://eissr.blogspot.com/2015/11/joint-communique-issued-at-end-of.html>

¹⁹ *Address of Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai to the joint session of the Maha Sabha and Pratinidhi Sabha, Kathmandu, April 28, 1960* (Doc. No. 1241). (2005). In A. S. Bhasin (Ed.), *Nepal-India Nepal-China relations, documents 1947–June 2005* (Vol. 5, pp. 3074–3075). New Delhi: Geetika Publishers.

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

1.6 Mount Everest²⁰ Debate

During the border demarcation talks between China and Nepal in April 1960, a dispute arose over the location of Mt. Everest. B.P. Koirala had earlier discussed the issue with Mao during his state visit to China (March 11 to 22, 1960). The controversy erupted because Chinese maps had shown the entire Mahalangur Range (where Everest is situated) as being in China. Koirala told the Nepalese media, “But, we have staked our claim. This needs to be sorted out by [the] joint border committee.”²¹ The discussion between Mao and Koirala has been reproduced below:

Koirala: “To you, the currently disputed places are of no importance, while they matter to us. It is a question of prestige.”

Mao: “Don't worry. They can be solved.”

Koirala: “There is another question, a question of sentiment. We call it Sagarmatha, the West calls it Everest and you call it Qomolangma. This place has always been within our territory, but Premier Zhou Enlai said it was within yours.”

Mao: “You should not feel uneasy about it.”

Koirala: “It is a sentimental question.”

Mao: “It can be solved, half for each side. The southern part is yours and the northern part is ours.”

Koirala: “How about the mountaintop?”

Mao: “Half for each side as well. Will that be all right? If it cannot be solved now, we may postpone it as well. The mountain is very high and it can safeguard our security at the border. Neither of us will suffer losses. If all of it is given to you, sentimentally we shall feel sorry. If all of it is given to us, sentimentally you will feel sorry. We can have a boundary marker on top of it.”

Shailendra K Upadhyay: “Who is to do it?”

Mao: “Difficult to do! We may have a written record of it. We shall inform you when our people are to climb it from your side and you will inform us when your people are to climb from our side.”

Upadhyay: “In the past, mountain climbers had to have a Nepalese [sic] visa.”

Mao: “A mountain climber from a third country intending to climb from your side may obtain a visa from your country.”

²⁰ The peak was named ‘Everest’ after the former surveyor-general of India, George Everest, by the British Royal Geographic Society in 1865.

²¹ Anupam, B. (2021, August 23). *Everest diplomacy in the Sino-Nepali relationship: From conflict to collaboration. The Record*. Retrieved from <https://www.recordnepal.com/everest-diplomacy-in-sino-nepalese-relationship-from-conflict-to-collaboration>

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

Pan Zili: “In the past, mountain climbers had to have a permit from [the] local government of Tibet when they wanted to climb it from Tibet.”

Luo Guibo: “In the past, some foreign mountain climbers obtained visas from our embassy in Switzerland.”

Koirala: “No.”

Mao: “The long-term practice is that to climb from Tibet, one has to get a permit from the local government of Tibet. The mountain can be renamed. We shall not call it Everest; that was a name given by Westerners. Neither shall we call it Sagarmatha, nor shall we call it Qomolangma. Let us name it Mount Sino-Nepalese Friendship.”

Koirala: “All right”²²

During the third session of the Joint Boundary Commission in July 1961, Mao had once again suggested the “sovereignty formula”²³, but the Nepalese government rejected it. The Mt. Everest issue seemed to have been resolved by the time King Mahendra went on an official visit in 1961 to China, as both leaders seemed satisfied with the issues at hand. The verbatim conversation between Chairman Mao and King Mahendra is as follows:

Chairman Mao: “How is everything with Your Excellency? Have all the problems been solved?”

King Mahendra: “Everything is settled.”

Chairman Mao: “Fair and reasonable?”

King Mahendra: “Yes. We all agree.”

Chairman Mao: “It is good that we agree. There is goodwill on both sides. We hope that will get along well, and you hope we shall get along well too. We do not want to harm you, nor do you want to harm us.”

King Mahendra: “We fully understand.”

Chairman Mao: “We are equals; we cannot say one country is superior or inferior to the other.”

King Mahendra: “We very much appreciate the way of speaking.”²⁴

²² This verbatim conversation happened between Chairman Mao Zedong and Nepal's Prime Minister B.P. Koirala. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China & Party Literature Research Center under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Comp.). (1998). *The Sino-Nepalese border should be peaceful and friendly forever* (Original work published March 18, 1960). In *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy* (pp. 302–307). Foreign Languages Press. <https://michaelharrison.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mao-Zedong-On-Diplomacy-1998.pdf>

²³ As proposed by Mao to B.P. Koirala, under the “sovereignty formula”, Mt. Everest would be placed under the joint sovereignty of China and Nepal, and the crest of the peak would be the boundary line.

²⁴ This verbatim conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and King Mahendra happened on Nepal-China Border Treaty day of 5 October 1961. Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Party Literature Research Center (Comp.). (1998). ‘Talk with Nepal's King Mahendra and the Queen’ (pp. 366 and 367). Retrieved from <https://michaelharrison.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mao-Zedong-On-Diplomacy-1998.pdf>

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

1.7 The Mustang Incident

On June 28, 1960, Chinese troops opened fire on an unarmed Nepalese police party. The incident happened in the demilitarised zone near the Kora La pass in the northern Mustang region of the Nepal-Tibet border. Retired British General Sam Cowan mentions²⁵ that Subedar Bam Prasad was killed, and another man was wounded. Further, ten other men of the party, along with the horses, were taken into custody by the PLA forces. Six people were able to flee from the scene and reported the incident via the check post radio. The incident gained international media attention. One such example is the following news snippet from The New York Times dated June 30, 1960.

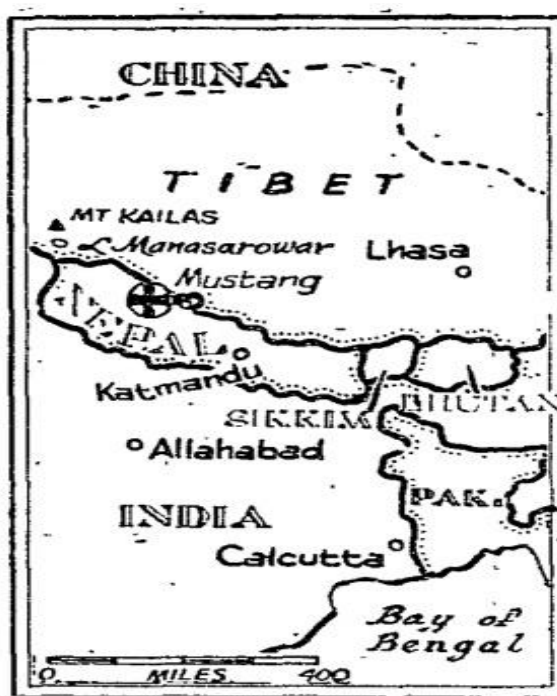
CHINESE TROOPS KILL A NEPALESE

18 Captured in Reds' Raid Across Border—'Urgent' Protest Sent to Peiping

Special to The New York Times.

NEW DELHI, India, June 29—Chinese Communist troops clashed with a Nepalese border patrol Monday in the territory of Nepal, according to an official report received today by the Nepalese Government. One Nepalese soldier was killed and eighteen persons were reported to have been taken prisoner.

The incident took place at Mustang, a small trading place about 140 miles northwest of Katmandu, Nepal's capital.



The New York Times June 30, 1960
CLASH IN HIMALAYAS:
Nepal's border policemen fought Chinese Communist troops at Mustang (cross).

The Chinese government tried to explain the incident by referring to the June 26 cable²⁶ in which the Nepalese Ambassador to India and China, Lieutenant General Daman Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana and the Nepalese Consul General in Lhasa, U.B. Basnyat, were notified by the Chinese Ambassador to India and Nepal, Pan Tzu-li, that they had decided to send troops to tackle the rebel bandits on the China-Nepal border. It was also clear that the Chinese government had first learnt about the said incident via foreign dispatches. Zhou Enlai, in his response to B.P. Koirala, said, "Your Excellency's letter of June 29, 1960, reached me at 10

²⁵ Cowan, S. (2016, January 17). The curious case of the Mustang incident. The Record. <https://www.recordnepal.com/curious-case-mustang-incident>

²⁶ Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). China-South Asian relations, 1947-1980: Vol. 2. Pakistan, 1947-1980; Bangladesh, 1971-1980; Nepal, 1950-1980; Sri Lanka, 1951-1980. (pp. 327-329) Radiant Publishers. https://ia801502.us.archive.org/3/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.118087/2015.118087.China-South-Asian-Relations--1947-1980-Vol-2_text.pdf

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

a.m. on June 30. Before I received Your Excellency's letter, we had already learnt from foreign dispatches the news that there had occurred on Sino-Nepalese border the killing of a Nepalese national by Chinese troops. The Chinese Government is much concerned about this and has immediately contacted the local authorities for finding out the truth of this matter. The Government of Nepal will be immediately informed as soon as a report is received. If the unfortunate incident of the killing of a Nepalese national referred to in Your Excellency's letter is true, the Chinese Government will express its deep regret. If it has actually happened that any Nepalese nationals have been detained, they will of course be released expeditiously."²⁷

Further, Zhou Enlai, in his July 2, 1960, reply to B.P. Koirala, admitted that the PLA had mistaken the Nepali police party for Tibetan rebel bandits. However, it was further clarified that "this incident occurred at a point north of the Kore Pass, but not in the Mustang Area"²⁸, which lies to the north of the Sino-Nepal traditional boundary line, thus falling under the Chinese territory. Zhou Enlai expressed regret and apologised for the unfortunate incident. He informed that Chinese troops involved in suppressing Tibetan bandits were not to enter within ten kilometres on the Chinese side of the boundary, and the Chinese troops would withdraw from the areas within 20 kilometres on the boundary as soon as the task of suppressing the bandits was completed. In the July 12 response²⁹, Zhou Enlai provided compensation of Rs. 50,000 for the losses incurred by Nepal's side. He also suggested establishing embassies in each other's capitals, along with direct telecommunication contact between the two countries to avoid any such unfortunate incident in future. To this, B.P. Koirala, in his response³⁰ of July 24, agreed that "it would not serve any gainful purpose to continue arguing over the incident" and agreed to establish embassies. However, he continued to state that the incident took place inside the Nepalese territory as he remarked, "I want to place on record however, that nothing has given His Majesty's Government reason to change their stand that the incident took place on Nepalese territory"³¹.

It is worth mentioning Rose's assessment of the incident. He mentions, "The behaviour of both the Nepali and Chinese governments in the Mt Everest and Mustang incidents is curious indeed, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that much more lay behind these events than was apparent on the surface. Is it really possible that the Chinese expedition to Everest and the assault on an unarmed Nepali police party were unintentional infringements of Nepal's rights and sensitivities? It seems most unlikely. It is far more reasonable to presume that these were deliberate provocations carried out in such a way as to constitute a subdued but pointed reprimand to the B.P. Koirala government, and a reminder of the ease with which China could create difficulties all along the border."³²

²⁷ Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). *China-South Asian relations, 1947-1980: Vol. 2. Pakistan, 1947-1980; Bangladesh, 1971-1980; Nepal, 1950-1980; Sri Lanka, 1951-1980.* (pp. 330) Radiant Publishers. https://ia801502.us.archive.org/3/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.118087/2015.118087.China-South-Asian-Relations--1947-1980-Vol-2_text.pdf

²⁸ Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). *China-South Asian relations, 1947-1980: Vol. 2.* Pp. 331.

²⁹ Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). *China-South Asian relations, 1947-1980: Vol. 2.* Pp. 333-336.

³⁰ Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). *China-South Asian relations, 1947-1980: Vol. 2.* Pp. 336-337.

³¹ In a footnote in Jain, R.K. (Ed.). (1981), it is stated that in August 1961, after an on-the-spot investigation of the border by the joint teams sent out in April 1961 by the Sino-Nepalese Joint Boundary Commission, the Chinese conceded an area measuring 3 miles by half a mile, adjacent to Mustang, thus clearly accepting the Nepalese charge that the Mustang incident took place in the Nepalese territory.

³² Rose, L. E. (1971). *New directions in foreign policy, 1955–60.* In *Nepal: Strategy for survival* (p. 229). University of California Press.

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

1.8 The Royal Coup and the 1961 Boundary Treaty

The royal coup of December 1960 serves as a critical juncture in this study, illustrating how a significant shift in Nepal's domestic filter accelerated bilateral cooperation with Beijing. While the international community reacted with varying degrees of concern, the People's Government of China maintained a discreet silence, merely reporting the dismissal of the B.P. Koirala ministry without editorial comment. This reticence likely reflected a sense of strategic satisfaction; Beijing recognised that the transition to an authoritarian royal regime brought opportunities ripe for exploitation. While China had remained scrupulously correct in its official dealings with the democratic Nepali Congress government, its preference for the absolute monarchy was manifested in the favourable agreements concluded in the months following the coup. Although preliminary negotiations on several of these issues had begun under Koirala, King Mahendra consistently secured more advantageous terms from the Chinese than his predecessor could have reasonably expected (Rose, 1971, p. 228).

The King's justification for this drastic political shift was rooted in a defence of national identity against perceived external assimilation. In a March 1961 interview with the Associated Press, King Mahendra articulated a grave rationale for his actions, alleging that B.P. Koirala had intended to overthrow the monarchy and eventually merge Nepal with a neighbouring state (Nehru Archive, 1961). Although he did not explicitly name the state, the subtext of his remarks suggested a deep-seated anxiety regarding Indian influence. Mahendra underscored that the Nepali Congress leadership was composed of individuals who had been raised in India and possessed a fundamentally "Indian way of thinking"—an approach he deemed incompatible with the realities of an underdeveloped nation (Nehru Archive, 1961).

By labelling the democratically elected government as "un-Nepali" and ideologically tethered to New Delhi, Mahendra created the domestic space necessary to welcome China as a partner that—unlike India—did not demand democratic reforms or threaten the traditional power structure. The King contended that his people lacked the educational foundation for a Western-style system and argued that economic development must take precedence over political liberty (Nehru Archive, 1961). He envisioned a slow return to democracy, estimated at five years, built upon a tiered system of village councils comparable to Pakistan's "Basic Democracy."

Regarding the detained ministers, the King maintained total executive finality, indicating that no trials were planned and dismissing any rumours of reconciliation with exiled leaders like Subarna Shamsheer (Nehru Archive, 1961). This authoritarian consolidation was the domestic filter that Beijing found so attractive. By dealing directly with a monarch who held absolute power, China could sidestep the unpredictable nature of parliamentary debates and Indian-aligned political factions. Consequently, Mahendra's personal intervention was framed not as a move toward tyranny, but as a popular and necessary measure to rectify "misrule" and preserve the kingdom's independent identity—a narrative that Beijing was more than willing to validate through high-level diplomatic and economic support.

In September 1961, having consolidated power under the nascent Panchayat system, King Mahendra embarked on a seventeen-day official visit to China. This visit was the ultimate diplomatic validation of his direct rule. King Mahendra was greeted by Liu Shaoqi as an "esteemed friend of the Chinese people." The centrepiece of the trip was the signing of the Boundary Treaty with Liu Shaoqi, which finalised the findings of the Joint Boundary Committee established a year prior in accordance with the Boundary Agreement. As per the

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

new alignments³³, Nepal transferred 1836 sq. km to China, and China transferred 2139 sq. km, thus Nepal gained an area of 303 sq. km, including pasture lands for border communities. China-Nepal Joint Communique on King Mahendra's visit to China stated, "all outstanding problems regarding the boundary between the two countries have been solved to the satisfaction of both parties."³⁴ Further, about the Mt. Everest issue, King Mahendra, in a civic reception, remarked, "It may also be mentioned in connection with the border area and Sagarmatha that the northern boundary area dispute, which had been going on without settlement since the time of Bhimsen Thapa's premiership, has been solved in such a manner as to benefit Nepal."³⁵ The border was demarcated in accordance with the watershed principle and established seventy-nine main boundary pillars, running from west to east. During the signing of the border treaty, Mao told King Mahendra, "We are equals; we cannot say one country is superior or inferior to the other."³⁶ This rhetoric was a calculated departure from the "special relationship" often dictated by New Delhi. By treating the Himalayan kingdom as a sovereign equal, China provided Mahendra with the international legitimacy he needed to counter domestic and Indian criticism of his coup. The 1961 treaty did not just settle a border; it institutionalised a partnership where the Monarchy was viewed as the sole, stable interlocutor for Chinese interests in the Himalayas. This effectively moved the relationship from a phase of "instinctive distrust" to one of "strategic interdependence."

1.9 The Arniko Highway

The most significant aspect of King Mahendra's visit to China was the signing of the agreement³⁷ for the Kathmandu-Kodari Road project on 15 October 1961. According to the terms of the agreement, China was responsible for constructing the section of the highway within Tibetan territory, and the Nepalese government was responsible for the section within Nepal. The Chinese government also agreed to grant economic aid of three million and five hundred thousand pounds sterling in instalments within the period from July 1, 1962, to June 30, 1966. It is pertinent to note that the economic aid was of the 'no strings attached' kind, i.e., without any conditions for the use in constructing the highway. Furthermore, China offered technical assistance, machinery, and materials for the highway.

While addressing the American and Indian suspicions, King Mahendra, in a speech (delivered on 18 November 1961) at the inauguration of Parthi Dam in Pokhara, stated, "I've heard that some people say building the Kathmandu-Lhasa highway will be akin to inviting communism. It makes me laugh. I have nothing to tell those who, in their parochial ways, maintain that communism will only travel in a taxi. I can only express sympathy for them. What else can I

³³ The Rising Nepal. Outline of Nepal-China border deal. <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/66593>

³⁴ China-Nepal joint communique on King Mahendra's visit to China, 15 October 1961 (Extract). Jain, R. K. (Ed.). (1981). *China South Asian relations, 1947–1980: Vol. 2*. Radiant Publishers. (Pp. 358-359) <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.118087>

³⁵ King Mahendra, speech at a Kathmandu civic reception (extract), October 27, 1961, as quoted in R. K. Jain (Ed.), *China South Asian relations, 1947–1980: Vol. 2* (p. 361) (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1981), https://ia801502.us.archive.org/3/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.118087/2015.118087.China-South-Asian-Relations--1947-1980-Vol-2_text.pdf

³⁶ Anupam, B. (2020, October 18). Nepal-China boundary treaty: An example of peaceful Himalayan frontiers. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/10/18/nepal-china-boundary-treaty-an-example-of-peaceful-himalayan-frontiers/>

³⁷ Government of the People's Republic of China & His Majesty's Government of Nepal. (1960). Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and His Majesty's Government of Nepal on the question of the boundary between the two countries [Treaty]. <https://treaty.mfa.gov.cn/tykfiles/20180718/1531876407122.pdf>

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

say?³⁸” In reaction to this, Nehru, said in Rajya Sabha, “Well, when we heard about the Lhasa-Nepal Road, well, we did not like it; it opened out possibilities which were not desirable, apart from everything else, from the point of view of smuggling goods from India via Nepal to Tibet, goods we had forbidden the export of but which could go to Nepal... We cannot order them about in this matter, but to say that they have not consulted us is partly true and partly not so; that is, from time to time, they talk generally about these matters, but about these specific matters, there was no reference to us.”³⁹

The construction of the Arniko Highway illustrates how King Mahendra utilised the China card to reshape Nepal's geopolitical landscape. The project was not merely an infrastructural development but a calculated “breach of the Himalayan barrier” designed to alleviate the pressures of a southward-leaning geographic determinism. According to S.D. Muni (2016), there exists a pattern in which the Kathmandu regime flashes the China card whenever it encounters friction with domestic democratic forces that enjoy Indian support. In this context, a politically besieged King Mahendra solicited Chinese assistance to build the road as a means of securing his own authority against a democratic opposition backed by New Delhi. By seeking Beijing's role as a security provider, Mahendra effectively flouted the spirit of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signalling that the northern frontier was no longer a closed, secondary concern (Muni, 2016).

Beyond these immediate diplomatic manoeuvres, the highway represented what Rankin et al. (2017) characterise as a profound project of “state-making.” While the Indian-built Tribhuvan Highway reinforced Nepal's historical and economic linkages to the south, the Arniko Highway acted as a physical challenge to the systemic relegation of Nepal to an exclusive Indian “sphere of influence.” The project allowed the nascent Panchayat regime to mobilise local labour through the rhetoric of nationalist modernisation, utilising Chinese technical expertise to consolidate royal authority in a northern frontier that had been largely neglected by central administration. Consequently, the road functioned as more than a simple conduit for commodities or “taxis”; it was a “material manifestation of the state” that physically extended the reach of Kathmandu's sovereignty to the border at Kodari (Rankin et al., 2017).

Ultimately, the highway transformed the domestic filter of royal survival into a permanent shift in regional alignment. By reframing the ancient trans-Himalayan mule trails into a modern strategic corridor, Mahendra successfully decoupled Nepal's survival from its total dependence on the south. While critics like Muni (2016) view the project as a desperate tactical move to safeguard an authoritarian regime, the material reality described by Rankin et al. (2017) suggests that it fundamentally altered the “infrastructures of governance.” This infrastructural pivot ensured that any future Indian pressure could be countered by the physical and symbolic presence of a northern alternative, thereby institutionalising the “China Card” as a permanent feature of Nepali foreign policy.

³⁸ Mahendra Bir Bikram Shaha Deva (Maharajadhiraja of Nepal). (1961). *Pages of history: A collection of proclamations, messages, and addresses delivered by His Majesty King Mahendra (Dec. 15, 1960–Dec. 10, 1961)*. Ministry of National Guidance, Department of Publicity and Broadcasting, HMC, Nepal. Retrieved from <https://pahar.in/pahar/Books%20and%20Articles/Nepal/1961%20Pages%20of%20History--Collection%20of%20Proclamations%20Messages%20and%20Addresses%20by%20King%20Mahendra%20s.pdf>

³⁹ Nehru, J. (1961, December 11). Statement on the proposed Kathmandu-Kodari (Araniko) road between Nepal and China [Parliamentary debate]. Rajya Sabha Official Debates. Rajya Sabha, Parliament of India. <https://sansad.in/rs/debates/officials>

Himalayan Equidistance: A Neo-classical Realist Analysis of Nepal's Modern Foreign Policy (1950–1962)

1.10 The Consolidation of Himalayan Equidistance

The transition of Nepal's foreign policy from a state of Indian-aligned special relations to a sophisticated strategic diversification culminated in the events of 1950–1962. Utilising a neoclassical realist framework, this study concludes that the institutionalisation of Himalayan equidistance was not merely a reaction to regional power shifts but a deliberate orchestration by the monarchy to ensure domestic survival and sovereign parity. The royal coup of December 1960 serves as the primary domestic filter in this analysis. By dismissing the democratic Koirala ministry, King Mahendra fundamentally recalibrated Nepal's internal political variables. To counter the resultant pressure from a pro-democratic New Delhi, Mahendra leveraged the China card, transforming an authoritarian domestic shift into a diplomatic asset. Beijing's discreet silence and subsequent favourable treatment of the monarchy illustrated a strategic preference for a centralised, stable interlocutor over a volatile parliamentary system. Mahendra successfully framed the democratic leadership as un-Nepali and ideologically tethered to India, thereby creating the nationalist space necessary to welcome China as a non-interfering partner.

The 1961 Boundary Treaty acted as the ultimate diplomatic validation of the King's direct rule. By resolving age-old disputes, including the sensitive Mount Everest (Sagarmatha) debate, on terms that granted Nepal a net territorial gain of 303 sq. km, the treaty provided Mahendra with critical international legitimacy. Mao Zedong's rhetoric of sovereign equality offered a potent psychological alternative to India's paternalistic way. The treaty was less about technical cartography and more about the symbolic elevation of Nepal from a sphere of influence to a respected sovereign equal in the eyes of a global power.

The signing of the Kathmandu-Kodari (Arniko) Highway agreement in 1961 represented the physical manifestation of this new strategic reality. As an infrastructural project, the highway served as a material challenge to geographic determinism. It provided a northern alternative to reduce Nepal's total economic dependence on Indian transit routes while extending the reach of the central Kathmandu administration into historically neglected frontiers. By breaching the Himalayan barrier with no strings attached, Chinese aid, Mahendra effectively signalled that the northern border was no longer a secondary concern, directly challenging the spirit of the 1950 Treaty with India. Ultimately, the 1962 Sino-Indian War served as the geopolitical reset that validated Mahendra's high-stakes balancing act. The defeat of Indian forces shattered the myth of an exclusive Indian security umbrella and institutionalised the China card as a permanent, indispensable feature of Nepali diplomacy. Through the calculated interplay of systemic external shocks and domestic political imperatives, the period of 1950–1962 concludes with Nepal firmly established as a strategic pivot. The era of special relations had been replaced by a resilient framework of Himalayan equidistance, ensuring that Nepal's survival would no longer be dictated by a single neighbour, but by the careful management of the friction between the two.

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