

The Architecture of Influence: Indo-U.S. Strategic Alignment, Youth Mobilization, and the Struggle for Nepalese Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the effect of Indo-U.S. strategic positionality on the sovereignty of Nepal in the post-Gen Z era. By stepping up relations with India as a counterweight to China, the US puts Nepal at risk of being drawn into supranational alliance politics. The significance of this study lies in how youth activism, and especially the 'I am generation (Z)' campaign, resists political positioning and outside forces. The project is organized as a qualitative study, analyzing the connection between state diplomacy and social mobilization through media analysis, archival research, and a survey and review of institutional resistance. Indo-U. S. Alignment is undermining economic and security sovereignty, neoliberalism, and unratified military agreements; the Gen Z movement is a much-needed respite from informational opacity. Nepal must engage with new diplomatic partners and utilize youth-led civic engagement to maintain its historical non-alignment and national political sovereignty.

Keywords: Gen Z Movement, Geopolitics of South Asia, Indo-US Strategic Alignment, Nepalese Sovereignty, Non-Alignment

I. INTRODUCTION

In a post-Gen Z world, global youth-led movements like "Fridays for Future" and "Black Lives Matter" have challenged narratives on national sovereignty and redefined how foreign policy is framed (Hanif & Muzaffar, 2025, pp. 41-63). In Nepal, the rise of the "I am generation (Z)" movement comes at a time when Indo-U. S. tutelage, entailing important questions of political self-reliance and reliance (Koirala, 2025). Because the US is attempting to counterbalance regional Chinese influence by strengthening its relationship with the Indo-Nepal axis, this threatens to pull Nepal into an external alliance framework that runs counter to its historically non-aligned stance (Lynch, 2022).

This study analyses the possibilities and consequences of Indo-U. S. policy politicking of Nepalese sovereignty with reference to their recent youth mobilization (Chan & Lee, 2023, pp. 483-508). In particular, the research analyses the dynamics of Gen Z's protests against foreign-financed projects and local corruption (Vinod, 2023). Analyzing the tools of economic dependency, security compacts, and diplomatic leverage in the region, the study unravels strategic policy alternatives to sustain Nepal's sovereignty by engaging with all regional powers to mitigate imbalances within the complex tri-polar geopolitical landscape.

Background of the Paper

A surging Indo-U.S. Strategic Alignment is now complicating Nepal's traditional diplomatic tightrope between China and India. S. strategic alignment (Lynch, 2022). This alliance is aimed at redressing Chinese hegemony. It may be extended in the future to include smaller states joining larger collectivities of 'alliance' (Chan & Lee, 2023, pp. 483-508)—meanwhile, post-Gen Z ushers in a get-back-to-basics change. Campaigns are spurred by youth online activity (such as "I am generation (Z)" protests) demanding reforms at the levels of governance and territorial integrity (Mia & Hasan, 2025, pp. 8789-8998). Confronted with these uprisings at home, "the standard methods of politics come to collide with the external security and economic networks set up: a framework made by the 2015 Constitution" (Musaddi, 2025, p.209). Channeling these interwoven dynamics is crucial as we assess Nepal's autonomy and continued adherence to the principles of non-alignment in an ever more polarised South Asia.

Significance of the Paper.

In this paper, the concept of the sovereign state in the context of Nepal is disputed. The paper emphasizes the importance of untangling second-generation youth movements like 'I am generation (Z)' that span different political lines (Koirala, 2025) and an evolving home sphere, with calls for transparency and governance (Vinod, 2023). However, the issue is whether the reliance on

outside security and economic architectures might pull Nepal towards more ambitious regional alliance formations and compromise its history of non-alignment (Lynch, 2022). It also addresses the role of youth in protecting Himalayan biodiversity and culture from external development (Pumfrey, 1997). Finally, this paper provides important policy lessons for enabling political order in Nepal within a tri-polar regional configuration and argues that Nepal's future lies in marrying first-order power interests with shared domestic governance (Johny, 2024).

II. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative case study to investigate the effects of Indo-US alignment on Nepalese sovereignty from the perspective of the Gen-Z movement. An examination of diplomacy between India and the US illustrates a shift away from traditional, national-interest-driven approaches. This constructive conception of sovereignty is one based on cartographical rather than behemoth geopolitical claims. The piece also considers lessons from diplomatic history and prospects for social mobilization in the post-pandemic era. The evidence base is provided by monitoring of media/institutional care. This multi-layered approach will help to understand the impact of youth activism in South Asian strategic space on the coherence of foreign policy, as well as the practices of territorial integrity in the state, economy and extra-territorial sub-systems.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sovereignty of the Nepalese state can be understood in the context of political autonomy, economic interdependence and co-determination of security within the theoretical framework of this study. In this view, sovereignty is no longer just a matter of territorial autonomy but the aggregate capacity for independent decision-making within an ever-more interdependent global order (Bagwell & Staiger, 2018). The Indo-US link is best explained by the Hegemonic Stability Theory, which maintains that US-led alliances to contain China in small states like Nepal are embedded as a regional security practice (Lamichhane, 2025; Lynch, 2022).

Furthermore, the “Gen Z Movement” is included in the narrative as a domestic factor, in which youth mobilization as a social organization signals opposition to external meddlers and nativism (Koirala, 2025). According to this model, Nepal's strategic space lies within the scope of external and internal pressures to conform. Given these dynamics, the article examines how strategic partnerships and 21st-century activism are

recasting the classical “Yam between two boulders” path of diplomacy (Johny, 2024).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Post-Gen Z youth-led organizations such as ‘Fridays for Future’, ‘Black Lives Matter’, and the ‘Me Too’ movement have posed opportunities and challenges to national sovereignty, affecting foreign policy options (Hanif & Muzaffar, 2025, pp. In Nepal, these movements have energized debates on sovereignty at a time when an expanding Indo-U. Partnership that has questioned political, economic, and security dependencies after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution. The US seeks to contain Chinese influence by deepening Indo-Nepal relations, which carries the risk of Indo-Nepal's assimilation into the Indo-U. S. alliance structure (Lynch, 2022)—regional and national stakes determine this alignment.

The Politics of Diplomacy in Nepal and Regional Fallouts

Historically, Nepalese diplomacy has been characterized by a predominantly Chinese-Indian standoff, either within the bipolar system or as part of a trilateral alignment involving the Tibetan Plateau. Nepal remains an important player on the South Asian chessboard and an enigma when analyzed objectively. The nation witnessed the unprecedented mobilization of Gen Z, a revolutionary phenomenon in the political arena, one that has also been observed internationally. The Indian century in Nepal is integral to the US direction in Indo-Nepal and the Indo-Pacific, with the Himalayas strategically positioned to link South Asia. At times, the politics of Nepal needs to be studied to inform Indo-US policy alignment and its implications for Nepali sovereignty (Chan & Lee, 2023, pp. 483–508).

Nepal's Gen Z Movement: The Demands, Dynamics and Domestic Implications

The Generation-Z uprising in Nepal was triggered by students from the Nepal Student Union (NSU) and the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU), who chanted expletive-laden slogans such as “Go Back, Black.” The new American-financed project in Nepal, intended to promote development and alleviate poverty, would end all their grievances. They recognized that the country's unique biodiversity, culture, and living heritage must be conserved to sustain Nepal's future tourism (Pumfrey, 1997).

Their interests extended beyond US roles in Nepal to include good governance, anti-corruption, security, and sovereignty (Vinod, 2023). It was primarily student-led, but it involved other sectors, including civil society, teachers' unions, and social

movements. IT-based communication for blog/social media-based promotion of government issues. The Generation Z Movement was successful in some respects, but internal strife dominated the day; it became clear that this group was protesting against the US, not America as a whole (Mia & Hasan, 2025, pp. 7979-7986).

The Youth Development Committee (YDC) urged the government to rescind its approval of the project. If the civic entreaties of the Gen Z movement are unlikely to prompt immediate political conversion, they may nonetheless compel ruling parties to respond. However, these parties are currently involved in constitution-making and upcoming elections, which may explain the apathy (Chetri, 2018, pp. 114–142). However, what will they really do after winning the elections? It is uncertain, given the misleading propaganda from controversial figures such as Swami Suryananda Udasin. As the demand for governance, peace, and security recedes, will responsibility for youth issues be assumed by other political actors?

Indo-US Alignment: Strategic Concerns, Mechanism and Regional Perspective

The US and India are on an ambitious path of strategic alignment that has created space for cooperation across hard and soft security. India-specific mentions in U.S. documents have increased exponentially, reflecting India's rise on the U.S. security horizon. Indo-U. S. alignments represent the intersection of perceptions about regional order and the imperative to prevent China from projecting power. The US-India alignment is particularly relevant to Nepal and the broader South Asian context (Muraviev et al., 2022, pp. 1119–1138).

The alignment has implications for Nepal's strategic space and the degree of autonomy with which Nepal exercises its sovereignty, not to mention its neutrality. Many small states have realized that external alignment has often deepened internal divisions. After the convulsions of multi-party democracy and the subsequent deal with an autocratic monarchy in 2002, it has faced externally imposed political conditionality alongside demands for regime change and a reconfigured relationship with regional powers. With no geographical barriers limiting access from China and to the south toward India, Nepal has important geostrategic attributes that make it capable of balancing among the great powers. Placing the cigar-inspired situs of alignment and youth mobilization within a broader framework of political insecurities and Gen-Z orientation may also help to understand changes in power relations along the Himalaya (Johnny, 2024).

Implications for Nepalese Sovereignty: Political Autonomy, Economic Policy, and Security

Nepal's youth movement "I am generation (Z)" in 2021 raised the issues of political integrity, foreign influence, and the development of national identity (in democracy). The mobilization sparked nationwide youth protests against Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli. Fuelled by frustration at further misgovernance and corruption, protestors questioned the legitimacy of Oli and the 2017 parliament. In April 2020, a major nationwide protest, with the slogan "I am generation [Z]," was organized in Kathmandu, indicating public dissatisfaction with rampant corruption and non-transparent governance under Oli's government (Koirala, 2025).

Dominated by youth and students and joined by many first-time voters, the Nepalese protest was the most organized, energetic, well-articulated, youth-based, and youth-targeted protest during K. P. Sharma Oli's tenure, accelerating on April 12, 2021. Although Nepalese foreign policy has remained consistent and focused on maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity throughout history, the struggle to safeguard political and economic sovereignty in the wake of the Indo-US alignment partially related to the shifting of Nepalese politics from a monarchy to a multiparty democracy in the early 1990s was in the constitution of Nepal adopted in September 2015, just after the promulgation of the constitution and the commencement of several high-profile agreements between India and the United States (Musaddi, 2025, p. 209).

Mechanisms of Influence: Economic Dependence, Security Arrangements, and Diplomatic Leverage

The influence of international strategic alignments on Nepal's sovereignty depends on three mechanisms: economic dependence, security arrangements, and diplomatic leverage. Nepal's significant economic dependency on India and, to a lesser extent, China constrains its foreign policy choices. The Indo-US 'special relationship' and a well-established goal of promoting "some" (and not "significant") defense cooperation with Nepal could further make Nepal more security-reliant on India without any de jure security guarantees. In addition, the Indo-US convergence provides India with greater leverage through bilateral diplomatic maneuvers and in checkmating pro-China elements (Johnny, 2024).

Domestic Responses: Institutions, Civil Society, and Public Opinion

Sovereignty is key to understanding Nepal and weak states, including their social, cultural,

economic, and political aspects. International relations involve opportunities and challenges. “Nepal was one to see the face of colonialism (suggesting a history of constant battle for freedom)”. The implications of Indo-US contextual relations, based on these three types of sovereignty referents, are: political autonomy (i.e., freedom in decision-making), security commitments (e.g., alliances, international interventionism), and economic commitments (e.g., structural adjustment policies, FTAs, and FDIIs that bear upon the question of autonomy).

This sovereignty is necessarily collective; individual states cannot secure autonomy unilaterally. The UN General Assembly’s 1993 solution for South Asia focuses on reducing interdependence. Nepal is susceptible due to its dependence on stronger neighbors, which requires individual case analysis, including ties to China, Russia, and other states. The US and India are challenging the youth uprisings in Nepal. Youth uprisings in Nepal are a function of high-stakes commitments (Roka, 2022, pp. 401-413). Government, Bureaucracy, Civil Society, Business, and the Media are also among the bilateral actors that provide entry points into Nepal’s sovereignty framework. Sometimes, the following fallacies are reiterated: that Nepal’s stance is nothing but a by-product of foreign influence and that its national identity is under threat (Imran, 2021, pp. 67-86). Media analysis indicates that specific issues affect Indo-US alignment and local balance dynamics. Presumptions can, to some extent, be counteracted by the absence of official documents (Lamichhane 2055: pp. In the past, crises have bred skepticism toward discussions of alignment, and attention has instead been concentrated on more immediate concerns. CSO reactions are closely entwined with, and can shape, processes of government formation or breakdown, which in turn interact with ongoing regional security dynamics. No youth leaders are addressing the need for greater regional sovereignty or alignment.

Attempts to promote such an understanding include media translations that cast Indo-US relations as instances of counter-accumulation. Work in progress: using public sentiment analysis to understand national patriotism and generational perspectives. The state retains structural capacity to make national policy and borrow from the public. Politicians aim for adaptive governance; however, policy processes can compromise sovereignty. The executive branch shows resilience amidst legislative gaps (Metzger, 2020, p. 695). Monitoring will eventually include broader analyses of non-formation sectors and event responses, especially capturing youth sentiments during Indo-US interactions.

Comparative Perspectives: Nepal vis-à-vis Regional Neighbors

The Indo-US alignment influenced Nepal’s foreign policy. Geo-strategically, Nepal has two closely related neighbors: India and China. Following the political changes in Nepal in the 2000s, the ‘pro-China’ attitude increased among the Nepalese population. Moreover, Nepal has a long-standing history of maintaining a balance between its two neighbors. Indo-US alignment increased after the eighth decade of the past century; however, Nepal continued to maintain a balance among its neighbors. Nepal attained democracy in 2006, but soon thereafter, the youth movement known as Gen Z emerged (KC, 2024, pp. 45–52).

The Nepali government’s policies are now under surveillance. Unlike its neighboring countries, such as Bhutan and Myanmar, Nepal maintained firm sovereignty in the neighborhood. The previous regimes in Bhutan treated Nepal as a primary diplomatic focus; however, they are now solely dependent on India. Cambodia under the Myanmar regime was also under scrutiny, and Nepal was considered a probable disaster point, but Cambodia was later removed from Indian watch (Aryal, 2022, pp. 285-303).

Policy Options for Protecting Sovereignty through Strategic Partnerships

Independent partnerships are necessary for small states like Nepal to preserve political autonomy and economic independence in an era of globalization (Muraviev et al., 2022, pp. 1119–1138). Nepalese youth demanded sovereignty with great vigor (Acharya, 2024, pp. 1–13). For the Indo-US convergence in the inner lung, Nepal will need to build/maintain a careful partnership through constructive engagement with key regional actors; expand resources; reduce dependence on foreign direct intervention and support; and enhance governance responsiveness through youth and civil society participation, while upholding sovereignty. Nepal is leaning toward China, which could offer economic benefits through regional connectivity following the Gen Z movement. However, it might also contribute to internal fragmentation and bolster local forces seeking to build economic ties with foreigners. Nepal’s independent foreign policy comprises neutralism, non-alignment, and abstention from security pacts (Johny, 2024).

Methodological Considerations and Evidence-based

This paper focuses on the consequences of Indo-US proximity and Nepalese sovereignty in the era of Gen-Z activism. It uses a case study to explore the nature of Nepal’s diplomatic engagements with

India and the US, which symbolize a significant break from previous national priorities.’ This genealogy of Nepalese diplomacy and external support, along with its historical context, exemplified by the Gen-Z movement, is an important pillar in shaping the political landscape of 21st-century Nepal. The investigation of Nepalese sovereignty in the context of Nepal’s support for India and the U.S.A., and of social mobilization by the Generation-Z movement, shows how domestic politics is connected to external factors (Koirala, 2025).

Sovereignty is employed in a limited sense, understood as the exercise of sovereign principles rather than as broader processes such as nationalism or geopolitical acceptability (Smith, 2022). Nepal is a significant front for Indo-U. S. competition in South Asia. While some sections may advocate a stronger relationship with the U.S., Nepal maintains a non-aligned foreign policy. Since joining the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961/62, it has sought to maintain an equidistant stance toward major powers. The politics of the visit have been dominated by endorsements, youth activism, and the temerity of Indo-Nepal relations. Generation Z youth-driven movements in the face of COVID-19 have thus sprung up, resisting perceived domination of their destinies by forces abroad while also appealing to new post-Gen Z audiences.

Youth activism remains, but concerns linger that Nepal is spiraling further into India’s orbit, particularly under Modi, who has been in power since 2015. The sociopolitical fallout of the Gen Z movement and India’s diplomatic maneuvering indicate that the country’s political establishment and foreign policy are increasingly exposed to public scrutiny, including by mass organizations. This paper examines how these variables have affected Nepal’s sovereignty in the context of the Indo-US alliance.

V. RESULTS

The rapidly changing geopolitics of the region pose a significant challenge to Nepal’s historic quest for independence, and closer U.S.-India relations could further erode its path to independence. Now the question is how to respond to this crisis and to Gen Z’s pioneering efforts to change political conduct itself, which are still less than fully formed in terms of their potential impact. A systematic examination of sovereignty, alignment, and youth movements clarifies their relationships and the influence they exert across the subsystems of state, economic, and extra-territorial sovereignty.

The Indo-American alignment primarily undermines economic sovereignty by increasing dependence on the U.S., a process exacerbated by

the U.S.’s aggressive neoliberal foreign policy, the expansion of the pro-U.S. governmental apparatus, and a related systemic incumbency that limits alternatives. Alarming indications of jeopardized security sovereignty stem from the yet-unratified military agreements, the unobserved security principles by engaged actors, and the direct invitation extended to the American diplomatic apparatus. Moreover, the associated normative characteristics pertinent to the core value of Nepalese sovereignty are reinforced by increased official and semi-official linkages between policy entrepreneurs and their political machines across the Himalaya-Pakistan belt (Lamichhane, 2025, pp. 43–91).

Several characteristics of the two aligning actors, namely their formal and semi-official engagements, direct and extra-territorial inroads, and the behavior of protagonists, suggest the existence of a degree of collective agency. A gradually expanding influence throughout the policy cycle is evident in the pre- and post-formulation phases, forecasting an increase in the influence of existing incumbents in future strategic partnerships. Direct feedback from the movements enacts a signaling system that scrutinizes prevailing discourses after broad public mobilizations and engages specific yet confined dominant brokers during collective constraints or heightened tensions, safeguarding an absolute insulation from both alignments.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Indo-US alignment is a crucial issue and a source of apprehension for Nepal’s sovereignty, unfolding amid the dense terrain of strategic dependence and domestic and global conflict. Main findings show that US-India cooperation to balance China risks freezing Nepal into an overly securitized and economized grid of containment politics. This convergence destroys economic sovereignty and adheres to neoliberalism, while also eroding security and independence through unsigned military pacts. At the same time, however, the Gen Z movement has become a significant counterweight. Frustrated with abuse and foreign interference, young activists are using online tools to demand transparency and defend the country from incursions on its territory. Politicians find themselves pulled between the country’s international obligations and domestic pressures to remain neutral. The quest for Nepali autonomy by post-Gen Z will be predicated on their ability to enhance diplomatic ties, capitalize on youth-driven civil activism, and establish a 21st-century strategic non-alignment path in accordance with the realities of regional power equations.

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