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India-China ties and Nepal's fragile democracy: A geopolitical tightrope walk

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of India-China relations on Nepal's democratic development. It examines how Nepal, situated between these two powerful neighbors, has historically balanced its ties with them while striving for sovereignty and democratic progress. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes this dynamic relationship's historical context, political influence, and economic implications, drawing on primary and secondary sources. The findings highlight the opportunities and challenges Nepal faces due to China's growing influence, primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative. While the BRI offers economic benefits, concerns arise about potential debt burdens and Chinese influence. The study underscores the diplomatic challenges Nepal faces in maintaining a delicate balance between India and China to safeguard its sovereignty and promote its democratic and economic aspirations. Nepal must adopt a multifaceted approach, including diplomatic neutrality, economic diversification, and strategic partnerships with other regional and global powers. If managed effectively, these partnerships can bring significant benefits to Nepal, fostering stability, prosperity, and democracy.

Keywords: Nepal, India-China relations, geopolitical tightrope walk, democratic development, belt and road initiative, sovereignty

Introduction

Nepal, a landlocked country in the Himalayas, occupies a strategically sensitive location between two Asian giants - India and China. Sharing a long and open border with both countries, Nepal's geopolitical situation is significantly influenced by India-China relations' complex and often fluctuating dynamics (Muni, 2018) ^[12]. Historically, India has been Nepal's closest ally, providing economic and military support and maintaining deep cultural and religious ties (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. This historical context is crucial for understanding Nepal's current geopolitical situation. However, China's growing economic and military power has significantly altered the regional geopolitical landscape in recent years, presenting Nepal with opportunities and challenges (Shakya, 2022) ^[17]. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure development and investment project, has brought substantial Chinese investments in Nepal's infrastructure, trade, and tourism sectors. This increased engagement has raised concerns in India about China's growing influence in its neighborhood, leading to a more complex and competitive geopolitical environment for Nepal (Muni, 2018) ^[12]. As a result, Nepal finds itself navigating a delicate balancing act, seeking to maintain friendly relations with its neighbors while safeguarding its sovereignty and pursuing its national interests.

The significance of India-China relations for Nepal

India-China relations hold immense significance for Nepal, shaping its political landscape, economic trajectory, and security environment. Historically, Nepal enjoyed close ties with India, benefiting from economic assistance, military support, and cultural exchange (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. This close relationship stemmed from shared borders, cultural affinities, and India's role as a regional power. However, China's economic and military rise has fundamentally altered the regional dynamics (Muni, 2018) ^[12]. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a game-changer, offering substantial investments in Nepal's infrastructure, energy, and tourism sectors (Shakya, 2022) ^[17]. While these investments hold the potential to boost Nepal's economic development, they also raise concerns about growing Chinese

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influence and potential debt burdens (Hsiao & Biswas, 2021, pp. 117-135) ^[7].

Nepal's geographical location as a buffer state between the two giants necessitates a delicate balancing act in its foreign policy. Any significant tilt towards either side can affect its domestic politics and sovereignty. The political instability in Nepal, marked by frequent government changes and internal power struggles, further complicates its ability to navigate this complex relationship (Baral, 2020, pp. 561-576) ^[2]. The open border between Nepal and India has facilitated the free movement of people and goods, contributing to Nepal's economy through remittances and trade (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. However, this open border also poses security challenges, as evidenced by the occasional border disputes and cross-border criminal activities (Muni, 2018) ^[12].

Furthermore, the ongoing border dispute between India and China casts a shadow on Nepal's security, as any escalation could directly impact its territory and stability (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. In this context, Nepal's ability to maintain a neutral stance and leverage its relationships with India and China for its benefit becomes crucial.

In conclusion, Nepal's future is intricately linked to the evolving relationship between India and China. The ability to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape and forge mutually beneficial relationships with both neighbors will be crucial for Nepal's stability and prosperity.

Thesis statement

This article analyzes how India and China's complex and evolving relationship has profoundly shaped Nepal's democratic development and the significant challenges it faces in balancing its relations with both neighbors. Nepal, a landlocked nation between these Asian giants, has historically maintained close ties with India, relying on it for economic and military support (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. This relationship has considerably influenced Nepal's political landscape, with India often playing a crucial role in supporting various political factions and influencing policy decisions (Baral, 2020, pp. 561-576) ^[2]. However, China's rise as a global power and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments have given Nepal opportunities and dilemmas. The BRI promises much-needed infrastructure development and economic growth but raises concerns about growing Chinese influence and potential debt burdens (Hsiao & Biswas, 2021, pp. 117-135) ^[7].

Nepal must carefully navigate its relationships with India and China in this geopolitical tightrope walk to safeguard its sovereignty and democratic institutions. Balancing these relationships is crucial, as any tilt toward one side could have significant repercussions for its domestic politics and stability (Gyawali, 2020) ^[5]. The article will delve into the historical context of Nepal's relations with India and China, examining their influence's evolution and the complexities arising from their competing interests. It will analyze the impact of India-China ties on Nepal's democratic institutions, economic development, and foreign policy choices. Furthermore, the article will explore the strategies Nepal has employed to maintain a delicate balance between its two neighbors and the challenges it faces in doing so.

This article examines the intricacies of Nepal's relationship with India and China to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise from this geopolitical reality. It seeks to shed light on how Nepal can leverage its strategic location to foster mutually

beneficial relationships with both neighbors while upholding its sovereignty and democratic aspirations.

Literature Review

Existing scholarly work on India-China relations encompasses historical perspectives, political and strategic dimensions, economic and trade relations, and soft power dynamics. Scholars such as Garver (2006) ^[4] provide historical context, while Mohan (2003) ^[20] analyze political and strategic aspects. Huang and Khanna (2003) ^[21] examine economic and trade relations. Shambaugh (2015) ^[22] explores soft power and cultural diplomacy. More recent works, like Pant (2018) ^[13], address the complexities of the contemporary relationship, highlighting challenges and opportunities in a changing global order.

The literature on Nepal's foreign policy and geopolitical challenges is robust, exploring its complex balancing act between India and China. Scholars like Hutt (2017) ^[9] and Muni (2018) ^[12] analyze these neighbors' historical ties and evolving dynamics. The impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on Nepal's foreign policy choices is examined by Shakya (2022) ^[17], while Baral (2020) ^[2] and Gyawali (2020) ^[5] focus on the implications of this geopolitical tightrope walk for Nepal's domestic politics and stability. These studies collectively underscore the challenges and opportunities Nepal faces in navigating its strategic location and maintaining its sovereignty.

The literature extensively explores the influence of external actors on Nepal's fragile democracy. Scholars like Hutt (2017) ^[9] and Baral (2020) ^[2] highlight India's historical role in shaping Nepal's political landscape. The rise of China and its Belt and Road Initiative have brought new dimensions to this dynamic, as explored by Shakya (2022) ^[17] and Hsiao & Biswas (2021) ^[7], raising concerns about potential debt traps and influence. Gyawali (2020) ^[5] further emphasizes Nepal's challenges in balancing its relations with these two powerful neighbors.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology rooted in a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, including official government documents, policy papers, speeches by key political figures, and diplomatic communiques from Nepal, India, and China, will be analyzed to gain insights into these actors' stated positions, actions, and interactions. These sources will provide a first-hand understanding of the evolving dynamics of Nepal's relations with India and China.

An extensive analysis of secondary sources, encompassing academic articles, books, and news reports from reputable sources, will be conducted. This will enable a critical evaluation of existing scholarly interpretations and perspectives on the subject matter. The secondary sources will also provide crucial background information and theoretical frameworks to contextualize the primary source analysis.

By meticulously examining these diverse sources, this research aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between India-China ties and Nepal's fragile democracy. The qualitative approach will allow for a deeper exploration of Nepal's underlying motivations, challenges, and opportunities in navigating its geopolitical tightrope walk.

Findings and Discussion

Historical context: A historical analysis reveals a complex interplay between evolving India-China relations and their profound impact on Nepal's history. The roots of this geopolitical tightrope walk can be traced back to the early 20th century when Nepal sought to maintain its independence by balancing its ties with both of its powerful neighbors (Shakya, 1998) ^[16]. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked a significant turning point, as Nepal was caught between India's concerns about Chinese influence and its desire for autonomy (Hutt, 2012) ^[8].

During the Cold War, Nepal skillfully navigated its non-aligned foreign policy, leveraging its strategic location to extract concessions from India and China (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) ^[1]. However, the Sino-Indian War of 1962 had a profound impact on the region, leading to heightened tensions and increased Indian security concerns about Nepal's northern border (Rose, 1971) ^[14]. In subsequent decades, Nepal's domestic political landscape was often influenced by the fluctuating dynamics between India and China, with both countries vying for influence in the Himalayan kingdom (Muni, 2009) ^[11].

The end of the Cold War and the rise of China as a global power have further complicated the geopolitical landscape for Nepal (Garver, 2018, pp. 70-85) ^[4]. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has presented Nepal with new economic opportunities but has also raised concerns in India about potential strategic encirclement (Pant, 2018) ^[13]. As Nepal seeks to modernize and develop its infrastructure, it must carefully balance its relationships with India and China to avoid becoming overly dependent on either (Sahni, 2021) ^[15].

The evolution of India-China ties has shaped Nepal's foreign policy and influenced its domestic politics. Political parties in Nepal often align themselves with either India or China, leading to internal divisions and instability (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6]. This has made it increasingly challenging for Nepal to maintain a cohesive national identity and pursue its development goals independently (Sharma, 2020) ^[18].

The historical context reveals that Nepal's fragile democracy has been continually tested by the shifting sands of India-China relations. As these two giants continue to compete for influence in the region, Nepal's ability to maintain its autonomy and safeguard its democratic institutions will remain a critical challenge in future years.

Political influence: India and China's influence on Nepal's political landscape, encompassing political parties, elections, and policy decisions, is a well-documented reality, playing a persistent role in shaping the country's nascent democracy (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6]. Both powers have actively cultivated relationships with Nepali political leaders, offering financial and logistical support to parties aligned with their interests and advocating for policies that favor their strategic objectives (Muni, 2009) ^[11]. This influence is often exerted through various channels, including diplomatic engagements, economic assistance, and cultural exchanges. It has sometimes led to concerns about Nepal's ability to maintain its autonomy and pursue its own national interests (Bhattarai, 2019) ^[3]. The competition between India and China for influence in Nepal's political sphere has also contributed to internal political divisions and

factionalism within the country (Gyawali, 2020) ^[5], further complicating the consolidation of its democratic institutions. India's deep-rooted historical and cultural ties with Nepal have traditionally provided it with substantial influence in Nepal's domestic affairs (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) ^[1]. This influence is often exerted through economic means like trade agreements and development aid, which can create dependencies and vulnerabilities for Nepal (Hutt, 2017) ^[9]. Moreover, India has sometimes resorted to political pressure, particularly during political instability or constitutional crises, to safeguard its perceived interests (Pant, 2018) ^[13]. The growing presence of China in Nepal has further intensified India's engagement, leading to a more proactive approach to maintaining its strategic foothold in the region (Sahni, 2021) ^[15]. This dynamic underscores the complex interplay between Nepal's domestic politics and its relations with its powerful neighbor, India.

While China's historical involvement in Nepal's internal politics has been relatively limited, its engagement has significantly increased in recent years, primarily through economic investments and infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Garver, 2018, pp. 70-85) ^[4]. This emphasis on economic cooperation has been welcomed by many Nepali politicians seeking to diversify the country's economic dependencies and reduce reliance on India (Sharma, 2020) ^[18]. However, the rapid expansion of Chinese influence has also raised concerns both domestically and in India about potential political leverage and the erosion of Nepal's autonomy (Pant, 2018) ^[13]. Critics argue that China's economic assistance, while beneficial in the short term, could lead to long-term dependence and strategic vulnerabilities for Nepal (Hsiao & Biswas, 2021, pp. 117-135) ^[7]. This growing Chinese presence has thus added a new layer of complexity to Nepal's geopolitical landscape, requiring careful navigation to ensure balanced relations and preserve national sovereignty.

The competition for influence between India and China has often played out prominently in Nepal's electoral politics, adding another layer of complexity to its democratic processes. Both countries have been accused of interfering in elections, overtly or covertly supporting candidates and parties whose ideologies and policies align with their strategic interests (Thapa, 2023, pp. 73-84) ^[19]. Such external interference, whether through financial contributions, diplomatic pressure, or media manipulation, not only undermines the integrity and autonomy of Nepal's democratic institutions but also exacerbates existing internal political divisions and instability (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6].

Furthermore, India and China's competing visions for Nepal's development and foreign policy orientation have created a challenging environment for Nepali policymakers. India, traditionally advocating for a closer economic and security relationship, views Nepal as a crucial buffer state and seeks to maintain its influence (Pant, 2018; Baral, 2020, pp. 561-576) ^[13, 2]. On the other hand, China emphasizes regional connectivity and cooperation, primarily through its Belt and Road Initiative, which promises significant infrastructure investment and economic opportunities for Nepal (Shakya, 2022) ^[17]. These divergent priorities force Nepali policymakers to make difficult choices, often caught between the immediate economic benefits offered by China and the long-term strategic and security considerations associated with maintaining close ties with India (Sharma,

2020) [18].

This balancing act is further complicated by Nepal's internal political landscape, characterized by frequent government changes, coalition politics, and intra-party conflicts. This instability can make it challenging for Nepal to maintain a consistent and coherent foreign policy, leaving it vulnerable to external pressures and potentially undermining its ability to pursue its national interests independently.

Overall, the competition for influence between India and China in Nepal's political sphere poses a significant challenge to the country's democratic consolidation. It necessitates skillful navigation of competing interests, careful policy choices, and a steadfast commitment to upholding national sovereignty and democratic values. The ongoing influence of these two powerful neighbors underscores the delicate balance Nepal must maintain to ensure a stable, prosperous, and democratic future.

The ongoing influence of these two powerful neighbors underscores the challenges facing Nepal's fragile democracy. Balancing competing interests while preserving autonomy and pursuing its development agenda remains a formidable task for Nepal. The country's ability to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape will determine its future political stability and democratic consolidation.

Economic impact

Nepal's economic relationship with India and China has always been complex and dynamic, with far-reaching consequences for Nepal's development path (Sharma, 2020) [18]. Historically, India has dominated Nepal's economy, controlling most of its trade, investment, and aid flows (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) [1]. This dependence has sometimes sparked concerns about Nepal's susceptibility to Indian economic pressure, potentially limiting its capacity to formulate and implement independent economic policies (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) [6]. Such reliance can create vulnerabilities for Nepal, especially during bilateral tensions or disagreements, as India could leverage its economic influence to achieve political or strategic objectives. This delicate balance between economic cooperation and maintaining policy autonomy underscores Nepal's challenges in managing its economic relationship with India.

China's increasing economic influence has presented Nepal with both opportunities and challenges. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has fueled a surge in Chinese investments in Nepal's infrastructure sector, including crucial projects like roads, railways, and hydropower plants (Pant, 2018) [13]. Some have perceived this positively as a way to accelerate development and decrease reliance on India (Sahni, 2021) [15]. It also aligns with Nepal's ambition to become a vital economic corridor between the two giants. However, concerns persist about the potential debt burden these projects may impose and the long-term consequences for Nepal's economic independence (Sharma, 2020) [18]. Critics caution that Nepal could become overly reliant on China, impacting its ability to make autonomous economic decisions. This delicate balance between economic opportunities and potential risks highlights the complexities of Nepal's engagement with China.

Despite the growing Chinese influence, Nepal's reliance on India for trade remains substantial, with India still being India's largest trading partner (Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, 2023) [10]. This underscores the

deep-rooted economic ties between the two countries, particularly in essential commodities and transit routes. However, Nepal's trade with China has expanded rapidly in recent years, fueled by a growing Chinese appetite for Nepali goods and services (Sharma, 2020) [18]. This diversification of trade partners offers Nepal greater leverage in economic negotiations with India and China (Pant, 2018) [13]. Nepal can enhance its economic autonomy and pursue a more balanced approach in its foreign economic relations by reducing its over-reliance on a single partner. This strategic shift also reflects Nepal's aspiration to capitalize on its location as a bridge between the two economic giants.

Aid from both India and China has played a crucial role in Nepal's development efforts. India has traditionally been the largest donor of aid to Nepal, assisting in various sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) [1]. On the other hand, China has focused its aid on infrastructure development and disaster relief, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake (Sahni, 2021) [15]. The competition for influence between India and China has led to a significant increase in aid flows to Nepal, providing the country with much-needed resources for development (Sharma, 2020) [18].

However, the economic impact of Nepal's relations with India and China has not been without its challenges. The landlocked nature of Nepal and its heavy reliance on trade routes through India have made it vulnerable to disruptions in bilateral relations, as evidenced by the 2015 Indian blockade (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) [6]. Additionally, the increasing Chinese economic presence in Nepal has raised concerns in India about potential strategic encirclement and its implications for regional security (Pant, 2018) [13].

In conclusion, Nepal's economic ties with India and China have been a double-edged sword, providing opportunities and challenges. While economic cooperation with both neighbors has contributed to Nepal's development, it has also exposed the country to external vulnerabilities and geopolitical pressures. Balancing its economic relations with these two giants while safeguarding its economic sovereignty remains a critical challenge for Nepal.

Nepal's balancing act: Nepal's geopolitical tightrope walk between India and China has necessitated the development of a delicate balancing act, employing a range of strategies to maintain cordial relations with both neighbors while safeguarding its autonomy (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) [6]. This balancing act has been characterized by diplomatic finesse, economic diversification, and strategic partnerships (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) [1].

Diplomatically, Nepal has consistently emphasized its commitment to non-alignment and neutrality, seeking to avoid entanglement in the broader geopolitical rivalry between India and China (Muni, 2009) [11]. This has involved maintaining equidistance in its foreign policy, refraining from taking sides in disputes between the two neighbors, and advocating for regional cooperation and peaceful coexistence (Pant, 2018) [13]. Nepal has also sought to leverage its cultural and religious ties with India and China to foster goodwill and understanding (Shakya, 1998) [16].

Economically, Nepal has recognized the importance of diversifying its trade and investment partners to reduce its

over-reliance on India (Sharma, 2020) ^[18]. This has involved actively seeking Chinese investment in infrastructure and energy projects while exploring trade opportunities with other regional countries (Sahni, 2021) ^[15]. Nepal has also sought to attract foreign direct investment from diverse sources to bolster its economic resilience and reduce its vulnerability to external pressures (Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, 2023) ^[10].

Strategically, Nepal has sought to forge partnerships with other regional and global powers to counterbalance the influence of India and China (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) ^[11]. This has involved strengthening ties with countries like the United States, Japan, and the European Union, which have expressed interest in supporting Nepal's development and democratic aspirations (Sahni, 2021) ^[15]. Nepal has also actively participated in regional forums like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) to promote regional cooperation and economic integration (Pant, 2018) ^[13].

Furthermore, Nepal has sought to leverage its unique position as a buffer between India and China to promote regional peace and stability (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6]. This has facilitated dialogue and cooperation between the two neighbors on issues of mutual concern, such as border management, transboundary water resources, and climate change (Sharma, 2020) ^[18].

However, maintaining this balancing act has not been without its challenges. The geopolitical rivalry between India and China has often put Nepal in a difficult position, forcing it to make tough choices between competing interests and navigate complex diplomatic minefields (Pant, 2018) ^[13]. Additionally, the domestic political landscape in Nepal, characterized by factionalism and instability, has made it difficult to formulate and implement a consistent foreign policy (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6].

Despite these challenges, Nepal has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in maintaining a balanced relationship with its neighbors. Nepal has managed to safeguard its autonomy and pursue its national interests in a complex geopolitical environment by employing a multi-pronged approach that combines diplomatic, economic, and strategic elements.

Challenges and opportunities: Nepal's geopolitical tightrope walk between India and China presents many challenges and opportunities that will shape the country's future trajectory. The challenges primarily stem from the delicate balancing act required to maintain cordial relations with both neighbors while safeguarding Nepal's autonomy and national interests (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6].

One major challenge is the risk of becoming overly dependent on either India or China, both economically and politically (Sharma, 2020) ^[18]. Nepal's reliance on India for trade, transit, and energy has made it vulnerable to disruptions in bilateral relations, as evidenced by the 2015 Indian blockade (Pant, 2018) ^[13]. Similarly, the growing influx of Chinese investment and aid has raised concerns about debt sustainability and the potential erosion of Nepal's decision-making autonomy (Sahni, 2021) ^[15].

Another challenge is the potential for domestic political instability due to external interference (Hachhethu, 2018, pp. 381-400) ^[6]. India and China have been accused of

meddling in Nepal's internal affairs, supporting their preferred political factions, and influencing policy decisions (Thapa, 2023, pp. 73-84) ^[19]. This external interference not only undermines Nepal's democratic institutions but also exacerbates existing societal divisions (Sharma, 2020) ^[18].

The geopolitical rivalry between India and China also poses a security challenge for Nepal (Pant, 2018). The country's open border with India and its proximity to the disputed territory of Tibet make it vulnerable to spillover effects from any potential conflict between the two giants (Baral, 2009, pp. 511-532) ^[11].

Despite these challenges, Nepal's geopolitical tightrope walk also presents significant opportunities. The country's strategic location, nestled between two of the world's largest economies, offers economic growth and development potential through increased trade, investment, and tourism (Sharma, 2020) ^[18]. Nepal can also leverage its cultural and religious ties with India and China to foster people-to-people exchanges and promote regional cooperation (Shakya, 1998) ^[16].

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) allows Nepal to modernize its infrastructure and enhance connectivity with the rest of the world (Sahni, 2021) ^[15]. However, it is crucial for Nepal to carefully assess the terms of these projects and ensure that they are aligned with its national interests (Sharma, 2020) ^[18].

Additionally, Nepal's commitment to non-alignment and neutrality can be valuable in promoting regional peace and stability (Muni, 2009) ^[11]. By acting as a bridge between India and China, Nepal can facilitate dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual concern, such as climate change, transboundary water resources, and disaster management (Pant, 2018) ^[13].

In conclusion, Nepal's geopolitical tightrope walk is fraught with challenges but offers significant opportunities. By carefully navigating this complex landscape, Nepal can leverage its unique position to achieve economic development, political stability, and regional peace.

Conclusion

Nepal's history, domestic politics, and economy are deeply intertwined with the evolving relations between India and China. The historical context highlights Nepal's delicate balancing act between these two powers, dating back to the early 20th century. India and China have sought to exert influence in Nepal, employing economic leverage, political pressure, and financial support to political parties. This competition sometimes leads to internal divisions and instability within Nepal's fragile democracy. While Nepal's economic ties with India and China have provided development opportunities, they have also exposed the country to vulnerabilities and geopolitical pressures. Nepal has adopted strategies like diplomatic neutrality, economic diversification, and forging strategic partnerships with other countries to navigate this geopolitical tightrope walk. However, maintaining this delicate balance remains challenging, requiring a careful approach to avoid over-dependence on either neighbor and mitigate the risks of external interference in domestic affairs. Despite the challenges, Nepal's strategic location and commitment to non-alignment also present opportunities for economic growth, regional cooperation, and political stability.

The implications for Nepal's future democratic development

The evolving India-China relationship has profound implications for Nepal's future democratic development. The historical analysis underscores the susceptibility of Nepal's fragile democracy to external influence, with political parties often aligning themselves with either India or China. This external interference has led to internal divisions, political instability, and challenges to national unity.

The economic impact of Nepal's relationship with these two powers is a double-edged sword. While India and China have contributed significantly to Nepal's economic growth through trade, investment, and aid, they have also made Nepal vulnerable to economic pressures and potential debt traps. The growing Chinese influence, mainly through the BRI, poses challenges to Nepal's economic sovereignty and could exacerbate existing disparities.

Nepal's democratic development hinges on its ability to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape. Striking a balance between India and China while maintaining autonomy will be crucial. Strengthening democratic institutions, diversifying economic partnerships, and fostering a cohesive national identity will be essential for Nepal to mitigate external pressures and ensure sustainable development. Additionally, maintaining neutrality and facilitating dialogue between the two giants could position Nepal as a crucial player in promoting regional peace and stability.

Overall, the future of Nepal's democracy is inextricably linked to its ability to effectively manage its relationships with India and China. While challenges remain, Nepal has opportunities to leverage its unique position for positive outcomes. The success of its democratic development will depend on its ability to chart a path that prioritizes national interests while fostering mutually beneficial relationships with its powerful neighbors.

Suggesting potential policy recommendations for Nepal to navigate this complex geopolitical environment

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