

India-China Border Dispute (Galwan Valley) and Nepal's Sovereignty Concerns

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Abstract

The India–China border dispute, epitomized by the violent June (2020) clash in the Galwan Valley, has re-ignited longstanding tensions between two of most powerful states. This article uses the theoretical lens of offensive realism to analyze, how shifts in relative power motivate territorial assertiveness and impact smaller neighboring states, with particular focus on Nepal. By detect the historical transformation of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) inspect recent strategic developments and integrate primary diplomatic communications with secondary scholarly analyses the study reveals the dynamics of great powers competition in South Asia. It argues that China infrastructural expansion and forceful maneuvers in eastern Ladakh pretend an offensive realist drive to attain material gain and strategic advantage. While India’s strengthen of border defenses and diplomatic outreach to his external partners constitute a defensive counterbalancing strategy. Caught between these rival giants, Nepal sovereignty and strategic autonomy are increasingly unnatural by economic dependencies, geopolitical vulnerabilities, and pressures to range. Nonetheless, Kathmandu’s strong matches hedging—through diversified economic engagement, multilateral diplomacy and domestic institutional strengthening offer a measure of durability within a highly competitive regional order. The findings emphasize the continued relevance of offensive realism for understanding, not only territorial conflicts between major powers but also the wooden agency of small states embedded in their shadow. Policy recommendation focus on enhancing crisis-management mechanism, promoting multilateral frameworks to protect small-state interest, and encouraging Nepal further economic diversification to allay dependency risks.

Keywords: Offensive Realism, Territorial Assertiveness, Defensive Counterbalancing, Strategic Hedging

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Introduction

The relations between India, China and Nepal in south Asia are a menace. This is an important topic for international relations essays. India-China border issue, more so the recent altercations in the Galwan valley have raised tensions between the two countries in bilateral relations and also posed serious concern for stability and security in the region. This quarrel is based on history and interest, and it has impact on the sovereignty and foreign policy of other states particularly Nepal. The Galwan Valley has become the site of the clashes in June 2020 between India China causing fatalities. It is located in eastern Ladakh. The incident is the first deadly clash between the two nuclear-armed rivals in more than four decades. The Galwan Valley shows that India and China have still not settled their border disputes after all these years. The reasons are many, they are geographical, historical and political.

Nepal, a landlocked country between the two Asian giants, gets an opportunity and challenge from the India China border feud. Nepal has always tried to maintain a balance in its foreign relations to secure sovereignty and have economic and diplomatic ties with both India and China. But, the recent clash at Galwan Valley has raised the alarm bell in Nepal over its territorial integrity and political independence. Due to strategic interests in Nepal both India and China have invested heavily in infrastructure and economy of the Himalayan nation.

Nepal is worried about its sovereignty because it is close to the disputed areas and has historical links with India and China. Nepal's Geopolitical Profile becomes important because its location is crucial to the regional power equation hence, where India-China rivalry plays out. Both India and China want to maintain their influence in South Asia. It is a challenge for Nepal to manage its foreign policy without provoking either one of the countries while also fulfilling its national interests.

The main goal of this research article is to investigate the India-China border dispute in the Galwan Valley and its impact on Nepal. Through the examination of historical contexts, strategic interests, and recent developments, this study will provide clear insight into the regional geopolitics. Through this article we try to contribute to the understanding of the complex relations of India and China and Nepal.

Review of the Literature

The whole of erudition on the India–China border dispute has evolved significantly over the past half century. Early work, such as Maxwell's (1970) seminal account of the 1962 Sino-Indian War, primarily point up diplomatic miscalculations and Nehru (forward policy) showing the conflict as double clash rooted in colonial era making legacies. This structuralist perspective was after round off by Hoffman (1990), who highlighted the curb of colonial border account and the absence of mutually recognized maps claim that ambiguous legal framework set the stage for repeated clash. Fravel (2008) subsequent additions shifted focus towards China internal regime security essential adorn how domestic political stability concerns have shaped Beijing's external posture along contested frontiers. The Galwan Valley happening of June 2020 catalyzed a fresh wave of analysis which pant and Super (2020) contextualize China behavior within the broader foreign policy stance of the Xi Jinping era. Noting that Beijing's capacity to project power across the Himalayas has been supplement by accelerated infrastructure development in Tibet. Tellis (2020) situates the clashes within a grand strategic trail, assert that China's moves are part of willful attempt to challenge India influence in South Asia and to reshape the status quo along the LAC. Bloomfield (2021) deepens this exposition by framing India China ties as an (enduring rivalry) driven by week match in capability and varying threat perceptions an argument that joint with Mearsheimer's (2006) contention that China's rise will inevitably produce counterbalancing coalitions.

Parallel streams of literature examine Nepal delicate position as a buffer state. Muni (2016) record Nepal historical trajectory, describing how Kathmandu 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India and the 1959 Chinese annexation of Tibet have deep set Nepal geostrategic significance while compel its maneuverability and how economic blockades and infrastructural hold up amplify Nepal dependence on India for shipment and essential supplies driving Kathmandu to seek alternative partnerships. Kumar (2022) provides a contemporary assessment of Nepal (strategic hedging) adorn how Kathmandu trick Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments with deep-rooted cultural and economic truss to India. Theoretical plea of offensive realism to Himalayan context remains comparatively underdeveloped but promising. Li (2016) settler this approach arguing that structural incentives in a bipolar or multipolar system compel rising powers to declare claims over neighboring territories to secure buffer zones and prevent potential threats. Mearsheimer's (2001) broader framework that states pursue relative gains and seek

to maximize security through territorial expansion. When viable offers a coherent explanatory model for the Galwan events. However, few studies have simultaneously non-segregated India, China, and Nepal into a single triadic analysis. This research addresses that gap by unify these disparate literatures. It builds on Fravel's (2008) and Tellis (2020) insights regarding Chinese strategic intent, while embody Bloomfield's (2021) and Pant and Super's (2020) emphasis on rivalry dynamics. At the same time, it leverages Muni's (2016) and Adhikari's (2018) work on Nepal exposure, and Kumar's (2022) exploration of hedging strategies, to susceptibility how small state behavior can be framed within offensive realism. By bringing these threads together study offers a comprehensive account of how material capabilities, power transitions, and geopolitical competition intersect to shape both powers bluster and the constrained agency of outlying state. This integrated perspective not only enriches the theoretical discourse on offensive realism but also provides practical insights for policymaker's strong match to maintain regional stability in South Asia.

Theoretical Framework

❖ Offensive Realism

Using offensive realism as the main theory, this research study will analyze the India-China border dispute and its implications to Nepal. The concept of offensive realism was proposed by John Mearsheimer (2001). This theory states that great powers are worried about maximizing their relative power to survive. States especially rising powers will try to take more territory whenever the benefits of that acquisition outweigh the costs (for them). According to offensive realism, China has legitimate claims on India's border regions, which allows us to understand its assertiveness. The theory says that as China has grown so much in material capabilities in the last few decades, it would want to translate this power advantage into territorial gain and regional hegemony. This explains China being more assertive when things get disputed like at Galwan Valley where it tries and chances its arm to change status quo.

India's response is also seen as a defensive reaction to the growing power projection capabilities of China. According to offensive realism, if India is perceived to be weak in territorial disputes, it will lead its aggressors, China, to further exploit its weakness or undermine its ambitions to become a regional power. For smaller states like Nepal, offensive realism sheds light on the strategic constraints faced when

caught between rival great powers. According to this approach, small states have limited options, that is, they bandwagon with one great power or balance between others. The location of Nepal as a landlocked state between two rising powers makes its sovereignty especially vulnerable in an offensive realist world. This theory will help us to know the trilateral relations. In specific terms, we will study how power differences shape state behavior, territorial disputes, and sovereignty of the states.

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative approach based on interpretation of primary and secondary data. The theoretical perspective of offensive realism informs the research approach of the study.

❖ Data Collection

Data was collected from multiple sources: Official government statements, diplomatic communications, policy documents, and bilateral agreements between India-China, India-Nepal and China-Nepal were examined.

Next, the authors reviewed academic articles, think tank reports and strategic analyses in order to understand the scholarly perspective on trilateralism.

Analytical Framework: The analytical process followed three sequential steps.

- The history of territorial disputes and sovereignty issues from the past to the present.
- Investigation of how properties of material power and power differentials shape state behavior in territorial disputes.
- The previous border skirmishes were evaluated in the context of the Galwan Valley incident to see what has changed in the past decades and obtain strategic conclusions on the behavior of both countries through an offensive realist lens.

This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics between India, China and Nepal trilateral relations.

Discussion

❖ The India-China-Nepal Trilateral Dynamics

Historical Context of Nepal's Strategic Position: Nepal's historic relations with India and China define its foreign policy orientation. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India created close security links. After 1959, the Chinese takeover of Tibet brought the Chinese frontier practically to Nepal's northern border. Because of the sandwich position, Nepal has to balance between two powerful neighbors wisely. After Nepal turned into a democratic nation - in the year 1990 - and the Nepali Maoist insurgency started - in the year 1996 - the traditional "Himalayan buffer state" role assumed more complexity. In the time frame, China began investing in infrastructure projects in Nepal and also offered economic aid to that country. On the other hand, India aimed to consolidate its old influence through culture, economy, and politics (Rose, 2020).

Nepal's Sovereignty Concerns Following Galwan: The June 2020 skirmish in Galwan Valley renewed concerns on Nepal's sovereignty in a number of ways.

- Nepal's western borders proximity to the incident raises concern for possible spillover effects. Meanwhile, Nepal itself was embroiled in a border dispute with India over Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. In May 2020, Nepal released a new political map in this regard.
- Economic Dependencies: Due to being a landlocked country Nepal must rely on India for transit rights and supplies.
- The economic blockade by India in 2015-16 showed that Nepal cannot counter Indian pressure much. This pushed Nepal in the direction of deeper economic engagement with China.
- As the India-China relationship heralds' rivalry, Nepal's strategic autonomy diminishes. Both states are viewing Nepal through the lens of their bilateral rivalry. Chinese infrastructure initiatives in Nepal located closer to the Indian border have caused India security concern and increased diplomatic pressure on Kathmandu.
- The internal politics of Nepal have become more complicated due to the geopolitical competition. Political parties get labelled as pro-India or pro-China.

Nepal's Diplomatic Response

Nepal is trying to carefully balance its relations with India and China due to rivalry. The government has

- Maintained official neutrality regarding the Galwan clash while quietly strengthening border security.
- Accelerated economic diversification efforts by engaging with third countries beyond India and China.
- Pursued multilateral forums like BIMSTEC and SAARC to reduce bilateral dependencies.
- Attempted to position itself as a potential bridge between India and China rather than a buffer state.
- Nepal realistically acknowledges its structural constraints while making the most of its available strategic space.

China's territorial assertiveness in the Galwan Valley and its implications for the regional power balance

China's conduct in Galwan Valley can be explained very well by offensive realism. According to Mearsheimer's theory, China is becoming more aggressive in claiming territories around its area as it grows in power and strength. The Galwan Valley incident is a calculated move from China to change the status quo in its favor and test India's resolve. According to offensive realism, China is motivated by several factors.

According to offensive realism, as China's economy and military might grow compared to its neighboring states, it will try to convert this power advantage into territorial changing. The Galwan incident occurred at a time when global powers were pre-occupied with COVID-19 pandemic.

Controlling regions like the Galwan Valley helps build up defenses against the rival and hence, forms a buffer zone. China is currently building new roads and railways in Tibet as part of its infrastructure development on the border to project power.

Offensive realism suggests that states will attack if they are in a position to thwart a potential rival. China's response to the development of the DSDBO road in India

indicates this logic. China moved to inhibit India from developing its position in a strategically valuable location.

The regional power imbalance has significant ramifications. India is rapidly upgrading its military and infrastructure due to threats posed by China. That China-India rivalry is tightening, and with both sides beefing up defense spending the perception of insecurity is only growing. China's aggressiveness has caused a shift in security arrangements in the broader region as India draws closer to the United States and other powers worried about China's rise. Elites will begin to line up regional balancing coalitions against the power threatening to achieve regional hegemony, in line with offensive realism.

China-India border dispute has undermined Nepal's control and strategic independence

After the Galwan Valley incident, the border dispute between India and China has severely constrained Nepal's sovereignty and strategic autonomy, as offensive realism suggests.

One such factor which has been increasing great power competition is the competitive behavior of India and China, as offensive realism suggests. This means that both the great powers are competing much more vigorously to exert influence in Nepal. This contest limits Nepal's diplomatic choices and piles up pressure to pick a side.

Both India and China have used economic instruments to push their strategic initiatives in Nepal. China and India's involvement in Nepal attempts to convert economic power into political power, as offensive realism would predict. (23 words) Security Vulnerabilities: Nepal is situated between two nuclear-armed rivals and so has security vulnerabilities. Offensive realism claims that small states caught up between two competing great powers face an increased risk to their sovereignty as their territory becomes a site of competition.

The data shows that sovereignty of Nepal has been severely impacted in many areas. Nepal has to rely on India for essential items like fuel and medicines. As was evident during the blockade in 2015-16, Nepal's economic sovereignty cannot be achieved so

long as it continues to be dependent on India for essential goods. At the same time, growing Chinese investment creates new dependencies.

Nepal's foreign policy decisions are tightly managed by India and China. The country, thus, is unable to take an independent position on most regional and international issues.

Border disputes with India on Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura are getting sharper as rivalry between India and China heats up. Two rivals want to secure the border area from each other.

All in all, the theory of offensive realism rightly predicts that small states like Nepal will have their sovereignty constrained when they are caught between contending great powers. The increasing conflict between India and China due to the Galwan incident is accelerating this process forcing Nepal to sail more and more troublesomely.

Nepal, as a small state caught between two competing powers, leverage its position within the constraints of an offensive realist international system

Minor states are likely to lose leverage against major powers, according to offensive realism. Nonetheless, Nepal has many options to optimize its limited strategic space.

For a long time, Nepal has not aligned with either India or China exclusively but has been hoarding itself with both nations. This approach does not abandon sovereignty constraints, but it does prevent total subjugation by a great power.

Another way to reduce the dependence on India and China is to diversify the economic relations of Nepal with European Union, Japan, United States, etc. Creating breathing space for diversification plan, in an otherwise limited setting.

Nepal has been participating in different regional forums like SAARC and BIMSTEC actively. Such participation allows it to engage with India and China in the presence of multiple players where power asymmetries are somewhat moderated. This will give Nepal more diplomatic options than just a bilateral approach.

By heroic governance and generating internal unity on foreign policy, Nepal can reduce vulnerability to external interference. This is consistent with the offensive realist constraint as it is related to internal balancing.

Offensive realism says Nepal has limited options no matter what. As Mearsheimer's theory argues, ultimately, international material power matters. As the rivalry between India and China intensifies, Nepal's geographic position and limited material capabilities guarantee that it will continue to face serious sovereignty challenges. According to an offensive realist, Nepal can best move towards its own security and choice if it continues to hedge. It should try to reduce its vulnerabilities by diversifying its economy and strengthening its institutional structures. Nepal can retain some autonomy, even in a power-political environment, if it exercises its limited leverage carefully and does not get overly aligned with any one great power. Using Offensive Realism in the Triangle Relationship.

When connected to the India-China-Nepal relationship, offensive realism offers many analytical insights

❖ Explaining Territorial Disputes

Offensive realism explains why territorial disputes like the Galwan Valley conflict continue to persist despite decades of diplomacy. Based on the theory, powers like China will attempt to bring changes to the territorial status quo in their benefit as their relative power grows. This explains China's growing assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control, especially in regions of strategic significance such as the Galwan Valley.

India's reaction is also explained through this theory as a rational move to keep China from gaining regional hegemony. According to offensive realism, states react offensively to rising powers in their neighborhood. India has been developing its infrastructure along the border, modernizing its military, and balancing against China using diplomacy.

❖ Understanding Nepal's Strategic Constraints

According to offensive realism, Nepal is pressured by big countries because it's small and in the middle. Due to its significant stress on material power capabilities, the theory explains Nepal's limited choices despite an informal sovereign equality. Nepal is landlocked. Its limited economic options and relatively small army make it

susceptible to pressure from India and China, a direct manifestation of offensive realism.

The theory attempts to explain why Nepal's effort to maintain strategic autonomy through balancing and hedging has succeeded in limited measure. A world governed by offensive realism ultimately means that small states must adapt themselves to power politics rather than transcend them.

❖ **Predicting Future Trajectories**

Offensive realism offers perhaps the most valuable insights about the future of the trilateral relationship. The theory suggests several likely developments.

With the increase of China's power, it is expected to be more assertive about its territorial claims and regional power – especially along the India-China border. This aggressive behavior is supported by offensive realism.

India will try to strengthen its position from South-Asia itself by internal balancing (military modernization) and external balancing (alliances and partnership creation with other powers concerned about China).

As the competition between great powers intensifies, Nepal's strategic space will increasingly shrink, forcing tough choices about its economic dependence and security arrangements.

India and China will use roads, railways and energy projects for projecting power in the region in 2023. These forecasts can provide policymakers across the three states with insights into their security dilemmas and the challenges posed by one another in the competitive regional space.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The study has studied the India-China border dispute in Galwan Valley and the sovereignty concerns of Nepal through the lens of offensive realism. The three parties interact with each other based on their power, competition and safety concerns, considered the main ideas of offensive Realism theory.

Thus, we found that China is becoming more assertive in the Galwan Valley and Offensive realism states that as the power with material capabilities rise in behavior,

it does not worry about the result of the state but increase the claim. India and other regional actors are balancing along the margins as this has changed the regional power balance, fueling security competition.

The battle between India and China over their borders has tied down the sovereignty of Nepal a lot and hindered its strategic autonomy. As the logic of offensive realism contends, small states sandwiched between great powers suffer severe constraints on their freedom of action. The rivalry between India and China has significant implications for Nepal because of its economic dependencies, geographical vulnerabilities and limited material capabilities.

Even though there are restrictions, Nepal has strategized to maximize the limited strategic space that it has under an offensive realist international system. Nepal has managed to display some degree of autonomy by avoiding exclusive alignment with either great power through careful hedging and economic diversification, multilateral engagement, and building domestic resilience.

Policy Implications

For policymakers, these findings suggest several important things:

Nepal's position will remain hedged in a situation of great uncertainty in the South. However, Nepal should do everything to diversify its economy and strengthen its institutions against vulnerabilities that continue to arise. Interacting with third parties and multilateral institutions can create added geographical space which cannot be provided by India and China.

India and China must recognize that too much pressure on Nepal will make it tilt towards the rival power. This does not serve their own interests. Stringboard robust crisis management mechanism along disputed borders could prevent tactical incidents from escalating to strategic conflicts.

Regional organization such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc., should evolve institutional arrangements for addressing the sovereignty concerns of smaller states under competition between two powers.

Future Research Directions - Several interesting paths and fields

- The role of domestic politics in shaping foreign policy responses to territorial disputes and sovereignty challenges.
- The effectiveness of small state hedging strategies in the context of intensifying great power competition.
- The specific mechanisms through which infrastructure development translates into strategic advantage in contested regions.

To sum up the previous premise, offensive realism is a potent theory that can help us understand the India-China border dispute and Nepal's sovereignty. The theory shows how material power affects what states do and limits what they can do. So, it offers useful insight to scholars and policymakers who deal with South Asia.

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