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How may we explain Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy?

The case of a weak and small state in the international system
and its foreign policy behavior and strategy.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the foreign policy behavior and strategy of weak and small states in the international system. Further, it explains the behavior and strategies employed by those states by examining several concepts and theories and applying them on the case of Nepal. In a realist world and among states that are most interested in their own integrity and survival, and partly in maximizing their power, weak and small states like Nepal try to keep a neutral position between all actors, try to maintain and extend bilateral relations to the immediate neighbors and other actors in the international system, and further integrate themselves into regional and international frameworks to secure their survival. Because they are the most vulnerable actors, the study of those states and their behavior and strategies is both interesting and compelling. Methodologically, this paper employs interviews as the main source of data and additionally peruses the foreign policy reports of Nepal from the last five years (2015-2019). The data is being analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. After studying the case and its implications, the author suggests that especially geographic patterns are important to understand the foreign policy of weak and small states, and further neutrality and bilateral as well as multilateral relations are indispensable for those actors to secure their integrity and survival in the international system.

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Introduction

The field of International Relations (IR) is very diverse, focusing on compelling issues of international politics. “Matters of war and peace, the organization of the global economy” (Baylis et al., 2017:3), the inequality between North and South or environmental issues and its effects are just a few to be mentioned. According to Baylis, Smith and Owens, key concepts of the study of IR are among others power, violence, states, and democracy (Baylis et al., 2017:3).

General Topic and IR Relevance

Going away from broad terms and general ideas of IR, this paper focuses on the implementation of foreign policy. Foreign policy was studied by many scholars in the last decades, however this paper moves away from the traditional study of foreign policy analysis of major and great powers and the examination of their behavior and strategies (Elman, 1995). Differently, this contribution centers on the foreign policy behavior and strategy of weak and small states in the international system.

The foreign policy of weak and small states is particularly interesting since policy actions and strategies employed by those actors must be well conducted and primarily ensure the nations integrity and survival. Different than major powers, weak and small states are continuously exposed to the powerplay and foreign interests and influence of greater powers. In an international system of anarchy, interests of maximizing power and self-help, weak and small states are the most vulnerable actors in the system (Hey, 2003; Baylis et al., 2017:3).

Research Aim and Question

More precisely, this research paper focuses on a unique case of foreign policy, asymmetric power conditions and the unfavorable geographic landlockedness of Nepal. The thesis intends to answer the question of *how we may explain and understand Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy*, which can be characterized as a weak and small state in the international system. The aim is to find out how Nepal ensures its national integrity and survival not only in an international system that is shaped by a realist structure, but also finding itself in the difficult situation of being captured between the two major powers India and China which arguably have structural realist tendencies.

Throughout my research process and by focusing on weak and small states, I examine theoretical concepts and approaches explaining the behavior and strategy of those states.

After agreeing on some concepts and contradicting others, this paper argues that in the case of Nepal, a weak and small state is affected by reactive factors and employs several proactive strategies to ensure its integrity and autonomous survival. Even though the international system is covered with major powers like India and China that use their power and resources to extend their influence, actors like Nepal always try to keep a neutral position (Kassab, 2015). Further, in the case of Nepal, the country aims to keep good relations with its immediate neighbors, continuously tries to expand its bilateral relations with other states, integrates itself into regional frameworks and lastly employs multilateralism as an approach to show presence in the international system and thereby ensure survival (Labs, 1992:390; Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013; Keohane, 1969).

Method and Data Selection

Using both interviews and the foreign policy reports published by the Nepalese government in the years between 2016 and 2019 as data, this paper analysis the material both qualitatively and quantitatively. By conducting interviews with experts and affiliates of the Nepalese foreign ministry and additionally by examining the foreign policy reports, this paper presents both relevance and validity.

Structure

This thesis starts by presenting the existing research, hereby concentrating on firstly weak and secondly small states and their foreign policy. This section further includes a more detailed segment with my theoretical framework. Secondly, I present the chosen method that was used to conduct the research. The collected data is analyzed in the third and major part of this paper. Finally, the paper concludes with a comprehensive conclusion on the findings.

Literature Review

The Analysis of Foreign Policy

The behavior of states, powerplay between actors in the international system and foreign policy has been studied for several decades. The analysis of foreign policy specifically deals with various questions, beginning from general policy tendencies of states to the decision-making of a single event. Derek Beach presents a theoretical toolbox to analyze foreign policy including IR theories. Broadly speaking, foreign policy analysis

helps to explain what states want when it comes to their foreign policy, how they take decisions, how this behavior differs in areas like economy or security, and how the behavior might undergo a change over time (Beach, 2012:1). His toolbox includes the theories of Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theories (Beach, 2012:27). But what is foreign policy in the first place?

According to Beach, foreign policy is the external behavior of states, or more specifically, policies that are “explicitly directed towards other actors” (Beach, 2012:2). Beach does not include private collective actors or international companies into the actors who possess a foreign policy. He defines foreign policy as follows:

“Foreign policy is both the broad trends of behavior and the particular actions taken by a state or other collective actor as directed toward other collective actors within the international system. Foreign policy actions can be undertaken using a variety of different instruments, ranging from adopting declarations, making speeches, negotiating treaties, giving other states economic aid, engaging in diplomatic activity such as summits, and the use of military force” (Beach, 2012:3).

Providing a detailed explanation on factors, choices and policies of foreign policy, he is not, at least not specifically, elaborating further on the foreign policy behavior of specific actors in the system, for instance weak and small states. Beach explains how we can understand foreign policy and how we can analyze it, however in this literature review I want to gain a more in-depth understanding of the foreign policy of weak and small in the international system. How may we analyze, explain, and understand the foreign policy of a weak and small state like Nepal, and which implications are important to do so?

Two ‘camps’ and the separation of weak and small states

Since my thesis deals with the case of Nepal and how we may explain Nepal’s foreign policy, I suggest focusing mainly on literature about the foreign policy of weak and small states. However, after examining several arguments and positions, I argue that it is beneficial to divide the literature on weak and small states into two different parts, one specifically focusing on arguments and concepts concerning weak states’ foreign policy, and the second one concerning small states’ foreign policy. In earlier research, concepts of weak states’ behavior have often been confused with small states, which led to unclear

and partly false argumentation and concepts (Ingebritsen et al., 2006:8). It seems like weak and small states and their behavior go hand in hand, but weak states can be big and small states strong. Therefore, I separate both. This literature review will continue with the definition of weak states and small states, and thereafter with the foreign policy of weak states and small states in a separate part. Hereby I want to make sure this paper and the literature review are comprehensive and allow for the possibility to apply concepts from both 'camps' on the case of Nepal.

Defining a weak state

The foreign policy strategy of weak states and small states can be similar and sometimes identical. Concepts overlap and so do the explanations of their behavior. However, starting with a short definition of weak states, one should consider the importance of a separation of weak and small states and their concepts in the literature review. Therefore, a definition of small states will follow.

Weak states are considered weak due to the structure they are situated in, the lack of resources, or the lack of foreign relations (Feraru, 2018). According to Feraru, weak states differ from small states because they "lack empirical sovereignty and their governments often act contrary to societal or state interests" (Feraru, 2018:101). Weak states do not have the ability to control and manage their population and the territory of the state, and further lack of legitimacy among the population. Thus, the weakness of a state and its foreign policy is not caused by its size, resources, military power, or economic prosperity, but by the relationship between the state and the population (Feraru, 2018). Other scholars contradict these statements, arguing for the importance of small territories, the small population, or the lack of economic or military capacity to define weak states (Reeves, 2014). Again, others deny the importance of material capabilities and argue that a state's relation to regional and international actors is important to define an actor as either weak or strong (Reeves, 2014). Further, Rothstein and Keohane considered more psychological thinking, arguing that the belief of a state and its leaders to be weak and insignificant, and the inability to protect its own state against others, makes them a weak state. The dependence on another state is thus psychologically defined (Keohane, 1969:296; Reeves, 2014). Summarized, the definition of a weak state is anything but easy or consistent, hence concepts explaining their foreign policy behavior and strategy are just as diverse.

Defining a small state

Even though some definitions of weak and small states overlap, there is a difference between them. Therefore, this section focuses on small states. According to Hey a small state either sees itself as small or is seen by others as small. Moreover, often the size of a state is not important, rather the competence of a state is. Politically and economically stable states might be small, however they differ from weak states due to their domestic structure, capacity, and agency (Hey, 2003).

Small states were studied by several scholars, however unclear measures defining a small state impede to pinpoint an actual definition. According to Baehr, “whatever the criterion is adopted, small states form too broad a category for the purposes of analysis. There does, of course, exist a continuum of the size of states in international relations. However, notions of a sharp dichotomy between large and small states, and of a special role played by small states, should be discarded” (Baehr, 1975:466). If we rely on scholars of the field, there are four approaches to define a small state. The quantitative, the perceptual, the behavioral, and the relational.

The quantitative perspective focuses on measures and numbers. Depending on the scholar, the population, the gross national product (GNP) or the size are the most important figures to define a small state. According to Thurer, a nation with less than ten million inhabitants must be considered small (Thurer, 1988:37). Contrary, Karl Deutsch argues that instead of population size one should focus on the GNP. A country with less than one percent of the global GNP is small (Baehr, 1975:460).

The perceptual perspective looks at the own self-perspective in the international system. State leaders consider themselves as small, because they compare their own state to others (Hey, 2003). According to Keohane, “a small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by using its own capabilities and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognized by other states involved in international politics” (Keohane, 1969:293). This was already argued in the section of weak states.

The behavioral approach suggests different than the others that the actual behavior and the foreign policy of a state determines if it is small or big. A limited involvement in

global affairs, the engagement in regional frameworks, a weak military capacity, and the significance of international law define a small state (Evans & Newnham, 1999:500-501).

Lastly, the relational perspective argues that the relations to other states and asymmetric relationships affect “the nature of functioning of the relationship on its own” (Archer, Bailes & Wivel, 2014:9). Smallness thus appears through the regional and geographic context a state is finding itself in.

The foreign policy of weak states

Behaviors and strategies to ensure survival

Even though the definition of a weak state is highly controversial among the scholars and includes several distinct positions, one can see patterns and similarities when it comes to arguments considering the foreign policy strategy and the behavior of weak states. Besides scholars arguing for the domestic and individual level of analysis, most IR scholars argue that structural and system level factors explain the foreign policy of weak states, or at least consent that the system and structure the state is situated in has a significant impact on the foreign policy behavior and strategy of weak states.

Structural Realism, and thus the structural explanation of foreign policy behavior, assumes that firstly states are the main actors in the international system. Rational thinking and the goal of survival, and further the possibility to maximize their own power cause powerful states in the world system to influence the foreign policy of weak states (Moon, 1983; Dabhade & Pant, 2004). In an environment of anarchy, strong actors use their power to get regional and international influence. Weak states' behavior is shaped by security risks, external influence, material resources and most important their own survival (Kassab, 2015; Beach, 2012). Because of their position and their lack of capabilities, Kassab argues that weak states “must give up some of their foreign policy autonomy to gain developmentally” (Kassab, 2015:15). In a realist world weak states are the most vulnerable and must ensure the right behavior and strategies to survive.

According to several investigated studies and scholars, the behavior of weak states can be described by different concepts. I will start by mentioning approaches that can be counted into structural realist approaches and will end by liberal theories.

The *bargaining model* is a concept that considers the decision-making of a state as relatively autonomous, however influence by major powers is gained through “reward and punishment actions” (Moon, 1983:317). Thereby, strong actors ensure cooperation

and influence. "Threats and promises condition the weaker nation to alter foreign policy behavior toward the preferences of the dominant nation" (Moon, 1983:317). Thus, influence is affecting, besides other spheres, very specifically and abruptly the decision-making and the foreign policy behavior of the weak state. Contrary to the bargaining model is the concept of the *dependency relationship*, arguing that influence by major powers is not occurring during the process of decision-making of a weak state but long before. The concept "[...] stresses the long-term character of the influence and the indirect path by which it occurs. By regarding the decisionmaking process as imbedded in a social/political structure which itself is distorted by the dependency relationship, this structural perspective implies that the crucial point of influence occurs [...]" (Moon, 1983:315) before the decision making (Moon, 1983). A state is historically dependent on a stronger power, and the general decision-making and the foreign policy behavior is directly influenced and even 'controlled' by the more powerful actor.

Another controversial dichotomy are the concepts of *bandwagoning and balancing of power*. Bandwagoning describes the strategy of a state to alliance itself with the stronger power in the regional or international system to be 'on the winning side', and to secure its survival (Reeves, 2014; Kassab, 2015). Elman suggests that weak states as well as small states are likely to bandwagon with a great power as a strategy (Elman, 1995). "Bandwagoning is likely to be a preferred alliance strategy when the threatening great power is geographically proximate and has a strong offensive capacity as well as when alternative great power allies are unavailable" (Elman, 1995:177). The contrary concept is the balance of power, hence, to keep close relations with the weaker side or weaker actors to balance the power in the regional or international system. Realists argue that "balancing checks the advancements of a growing power by actively creating a defensive alliance" (Kassab, 2015:33). Scholars like Walt however argue that balancing is not a behavior that can be employed by weak states due to their lack of material resources. Long-term survival can more likely be guaranteed through bandwagoning, while the balancing of power is too much of a gamble (Walt, 1987; Reeves, 2014). Bandwagoning as well as the balancing of power are both concepts that are also employed by small states in the international system. Therefore, they will not be presented again in the following part on small states.

Various factors, for instance historical experiences of a weak state, can cause a state to *maintain a neutral position* and employ a passive strategy. Instead of choosing between

balancing or bandwagoning, the actor remains neutral and at best keeps up relations to all actors in the system (Moon, 1983). This behavior can be described by the approach of defensive structural realism. States are concerned with maintaining their position in the international system and focus on ensuring their survival and the protection of the state's autonomy (Beach, 2012:40). Due to powerful actors in the world system and states that rather follow the approach of offensive structural realism, it is often difficult to keep the position neutral and keep oneself out of trouble and power play (Kassab, 2015; Moon, 1983). Actors that can be describes by the approach of offensive structural realist behavior seek to maximize their power, see cooperation and relationships as temporary, and further their position in the international system as they perceive it as endangered and insecure at all time (Beach, 2012:41f.).

Bilateralism, regional integration and multilateralism

More questioned by structural realists and countable to liberal theories is the behavior of weak states to *focus on bilateral relations and engage themselves in regional and international multilateral institutions and organizations*. This behavior is also being employed by the small states. Weak states as well as small states try to increase their agency and influence in the international system by building coalitions with both other weak or small states and major powers. While weak and small states alone arguably have no power at all, interconnected weak states have more power collectively. The engagement in the United Nations (UN), regional organizations and dialogue with other international actors further ensures the recognition of a weak or small state and helps by integrating the state into the international system to guarantee its integrity (Kassab, 2015; Keohane, 1969).

The engagement in regional and international organizations and institutions can be explained by liberal theories like neoliberal institutionalism or multilateralism, and the thought to create peace through closer relations among states (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013). Neoliberal institutionalism claims that states establish institutions to maximize cooperation and utility. Within those institutions, states tackle common issues collectively and thereby produce a process of integration that in turn advances peace (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013:118). Multilateralism refers to the concept that a state participates in international institutions and organizations, which gives particularly weak or small states the possibility to influence greater powers and the international system, or to ally with

other actors to become a larger interest group. Keohane defined multilateralism as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states" (Keohane, 1990:731). Further, Kahler argued that multilateralism is the "opposition [to] bilateral discriminatory arrangements that were believed to enhance the leverage of the powerful over the weak and to increase international conflict" (Kahler, 1992:681). Multilateralism can be described as the 'Lilliputian strategy'. Arguably, even weak and small states can gain power over another state or stimulate the interests of any actor through multilateralism, since they normally do not have the resources and forum to do so on their own. The UN can be used as a 'power instrument' by weak and small states to both gain power and push own interests forward. International organizations like the UN or the World Trade Organization (WTO) are of multilateral nature (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013; Keohane, 1990).

The UN as a forum for weak and small states has given those actors a greater prominence and certainly a little more power. Arguably, it is not the decision of the state leader, but the rational decision of a weak or small state to be part of international organizations and institutions, because those will promote their security and further prevent big states from actions against them (Keohane, 1969). Weak and small states realize even though "[...] they may be able to do little together, they can do virtually nothing separately" (Keohane, 1969:296). The integration into the international system and the affiliation with international organizations is important, however further cooperation and more importantly multilateral alliances and agreements, and cooperation with several different actors bilaterally are crucial for weak and small states, since they bring forth the biggest benefits when it comes to security and political influence.

Bilateral relationships are beneficial, and certainly also with great powers, nevertheless Rothstein phrases that "[a]n alliance with a single Great Power ought to be chosen only if all the other alternatives are proscribed, and if the Small Powers fear an imminent attack and even then only in hopes of improving their deterrent stance" (Keohane, 1969:301). Labs argues that weak states rather join bilateral relationships than focusing on multilateral cooperation. He notes that bilateral relations are better to guarantee the security of a state (Labs, 1992:390), and further "weak states have extremely limited foreign policy aims and prefer to keep a low profile in world affairs" (Reeves, 2014:257). Maintaining and expanding bilateral relations to both immediate and

international actors ensures the integrity and survival of a weak and small state and is therefore important. Urpelainen rejects the assumption of Labs by arguing that weak states do not seek for deep bilateral cooperation, especially not with an actor that is more powerful. The inequality of power between both actors easily leads to both dependency and exploitation and is thus not recommended (Urpelainen, 2010).

Concluding, weak and small states should be careful in choosing their partners, however they should make sure to extend their relationships bilaterally and engage in regional and international frameworks to guarantee their own integrity and visibility.

The foreign policy of small states

A stable government, expertise as strategy and international integration

Even though a small state is situated in a realist world and is focused on its own survival, as Hey argues in her article, domestic factors and individual decision-making tend to be more important for the foreign policy of a small state than structural factors (Hey, 2003). Even though small states have, like weak states, a higher level of external threats in comparison to great powers and less options to act fast and agile, differentially to weak states the domestic level pressures and national interests must be more relevant to explain foreign policy choices of small states (Elman, 1995:175-176). While weak states have less agency and suffer from structural and geographic factors as well as domestic instability and weakness, small states might be small in terms of size and possibly rather weak in terms of agency, however they have a stable state apparatus at their disposal. Because small states have less time and less agency in situations of stress, they cannot risk mistakes or false friends. Thus, it is the duty of a statesman to make wise decisions and be aware of external forces and constraints (Elman, 1995:176). According to Ingebritsen, good leadership and a vision and strategy can reduce structural constraints and mitigate the consequences of the geographical location, smallness and scarcity (Ingebritsen et al., 2006:8). This option is often not available for weak states. Examples for the mitigation of structural constraints are the specialization in specific areas, the creation of an expertise, or the engagement in international organizations and institutions. Last is also employed by weak states and was already mentioned earlier. Instead of focusing on neorealist measures like capabilities and resources, small states can use institutions and international organizations to develop multilateral diplomacy and enter negotiations and alliances with other small and great actors. Further they

engage, like weak states, in bilateral relationships with immediate neighbors and international actors. According to Neumann and Gstöhl and extensively discussed in connection with weak states, small states likewise have the option to influence the system and the structure of global politics by attending in international agreements. This, at the same time, makes them become more recognized by greater actors and insures their survival (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006; Keohane, 1969).

The Seychelles are a good example of a small state that maximized its power and reputation in the international system domestically through a smart domestic and foreign policy, good diplomacy and the creation of an expertise. Even though the Seychelles are a fairly small state, the country is not trapped in an asymmetric relationship, dependent on other actors, or in search for protection by a great power, much more the country reached international recognition through capacity building and a smart political strategy (Bueger & Wivel, 2018). According to Bueger and Wivel, small states must use their geographic location as a strength, develop their capabilities in form of knowledge and expertise in a specific field, cooperate and collaborate with international organizations and institutions, and lastly follow a smart political strategy (Bueger & Wivel, 2018). In this case, the Seychelles increased their international reputation by developing their expertise in maritime security and blue economy agendas for the protection of the oceans. Through their attitude and common values with major powers, they are now accepted in the international forum and possess a leadership role when it comes to anti-piracy programs and ocean protection (Bueger & Wivel, 2018). Interest-driven policies and solutions for international issues that are recognized by major powers show the smart foreign policy behavior of the Seychelles and the importance of domestic decision-making, rather than the accepting of an immovable structural position.

Since many concepts and strategies of small states overlap with strategies of weak states, I will not mention them again at this point. Important is that one can see and understand the differences between both and more importantly the different behavior and strategies, which is often caused by different state dynamics and contexts.

Theoretical Framework and Argument

After presenting various concepts and approaches to explain the foreign policy behavior and strategies of both weak states and small states, I now present my theoretical framework and argument which intend to the answer my research question of *how we*

may explain Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy. I want to focus specifically on following concepts from the literature review. The environment and structure the state is finding itself in and therefore the relational approach, bilateral relations that might be rooted in historical dependency relationships, the strategy of neutral position keeping, and regional integration as well as multilateralism.

As I mentioned and presented, the concepts and definitions of weak and small states partly overlap. Since my focus in the analysis is going to be the case of Nepal, arguably concepts from both camps, concepts regarding the foreign policy of weak and small states, are applicable. One cannot simply assume that Nepal is a weak or a small state, therefore my assessment on characterizing Nepal will prelude my analysis.

I argue that it is important to understand and consider the differences and the similarities between the foreign policy of weak and small states to attain a good case study on a state that might be characterized by both positions and their concepts. Therefore, my literature review and my theoretical framework consider both camps and their concepts as important. I argue that if we consider Nepal only as a small state, one will leave out the weaknesses the country is facing in terms of political stability, economic development and more. However, if we define Nepal as a weak state, one will leave out the possibility to use concepts that explain the countries behavior and strategy not only to integrate themselves internationally, but to develop an expertise or domestic skills in a certain field. Therefore, concepts from both camps can be useful and were presented in the literature review. To understand and explain the foreign policy behavior and strategies of weak and small states in general, but also by looking on the case of Nepal, it is important to focus on following reactive and proactive factors. The separation into reactive and proactive factors was chosen to create more clarity and a structure. Reactive factors are factors Nepal cannot directly influence; thus, factors Nepal must passively accept. Proactive factors however are factors Nepal is actively and directly influencing. The proactive factors are therefore a specific behavior and strategies Nepal is employing.

Reactive Factors:

- Geography
- Dependency Relationship

Proactive Factors:

- Neutral position keeping

- Multifaceted cooperation

Firstly, what is the geographical environment the country is finding itself in? How is the relational approach affecting the Nepalese state and its foreign policy? I argue that the international system can be described by a structural realist point of view. States greatest motivation is their own survival, and further they must expect threats of any type from external powers at any time. Hence, system level factors shape the foreign policy behavior and strategy of a state (Beach, 2012:31ff.). Certainly, domestic factors and individual decision-making are not to be underestimated, however in a variety of cases I examined one could always observe the link and strong influence of the system level. Additionally, the realist system and asymmetric relations within the regional context complicate the ability to act and influences the foreign policy of a weak and small state.

Secondly, all the mentioned concepts that try to explain foreign policy behavior and strategies of weak and small states are, arguably, to some extent, right and conclusive. However, I argue that the 'decision' for a concept or strategy strongly depends on structural circumstances and different factors like the size of a state, the geographical location (for instance the fact that a country is landlocked), historical factors, and most importantly its neighbor countries, and more specifically their standing in the international system and the relations to those actors. I intend to test the concept of dependency relationship on the case of Nepal, thus the influence and control by external actors, namely India and China, that is not a current process but historically rooted (Moon, 1983). This is not simply implicating dependency but also a strong bilateral relationship with those actors.

Thirdly, I argue balancing as well as bandwagoning is not a preferred option for a weak or small state. Much more the state's interest is to keep its position neutral and preserves good relations with all actors. To avert the danger of actors that are seeking to maximize their power, and to maintain its own position in the international system, weak and small states are required to have good bilateral relations with other states and especially with their immediate neighbors, and must always keep neutrality (Kassab, 2015; Beach, 2012:41; Lab, 1992).

Fourthly and lastly, liberal approaches like regional integration and multilateralism are both concepts that can explain the strategy of a weak or small state like Nepal to integrate itself into the system, get recognized by other actors of the regional and international

system and lastly to guarantee their own survival. Weak and small actors do not only attempt to integrate themselves in one regional or international organization, rather they cooperate and engage in multiple regional and international organizations. The more international partners a weak or small state has, the more security it has (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013; Sampson & Woolcock, 2003). This refers to the security of the state and its survival, but certainly also to economic security, the assurance of foreign support and development aid, and more. By using its foreign policy to enter new relationships, a weak or small state can mitigate the effect of regional structure and external influence on its foreign policy and its ability to act (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006).

Weak and small states do not have an easy standing in the international system; however, their survival shows that a smart foreign policy and an appropriate strategy enables the states not only to survive, but also engage themselves in the international system. Nepal as well as other weak and small states employ different strategies to do so. Using the demonstrated concepts, one can answer the research question and explain Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy.

Method

How has the research been conducted?

The research strategy to gain knowledge over the foreign policy of a state, no matter if it is a weak state, a small state, or a great power, is mostly either case or theory-centric. The case-centric research requires to create a plausible explanation using concepts as the framework for your analysis. Theory-centric research "is upon analyzing causal relationships between variables, using theories as explanatory tools" (Beach, 2012:220). After examining the literature and research on weak states as well as small states, one can say that research is often conducted through case studies. Because every case seems to be unique and every case offers the possibility to use one or several of the mentioned concepts, case studies and the testing of concepts and strategies is widely used in this field. As I presented shortly through the case of the Seychelles, weak states as well as small states tend to have completely different structural root positions, which makes it hard to compare cases to each other. This does not mean that the presented concepts are wrong, it just shows how diverse the factors and conditions are, and thus how different foreign policy behavior and strategies can be.

While case studies are the main focus of the research, data is obtained by observing domestic factors, focusing on societal factors like domestic and social institutions, looking at the government structure of a state, but also by analyzing idiosyncratic factors like the behavior of individuals and policy makers (Reeves, 2014). By looking at external factors and the relations to other actors in the international system one can include systemic variables to the analysis (Reeves, 2014).

Research data in form of interviews and foreign policy reports

The foreign policy of great states, small states, as well as weak states can be explained, understood, and analyzed by using various methods. The research can vary in many ways, for instance in its research method, being inductive or deductive, or simply by employing quantitative or qualitative methods. My research is going to be case-centric, which means there are three indicators I will focus on. First, to understand the foreign policy behavior or strategy of a weak and small state like Nepal one must explain which factors, for instance system or state level factors, are important to analyze the case. Second, one must make use of conceptual categories to explain the empirical data. Third, one must present factors that are worth examining and including into the assessment (Beach, 2012:219). Since I already presented my argument, my theoretical framework, and factors as well as important actors earlier, I will continue more specifically with my method to collect and analyze the data.

As a first part of my analysis, I am using qualitative data in form of interviews. Qualitative data is research data that, according to Halperin and Heath, “tends to be based on the discursive analysis of more loosely coded information for just a few cases” (Halperin & Heath, 2017:6). Further, the data is not like quantitative data numerical but rather appears in words, objects, pictures or observations (Halperin & Heath, 2017). Coming back to my chosen data collection, the advantage of using interviews as form of data is that it can be used both in order to collect data and information, but also to probe data and concepts I already discovered. Further, interviews can be a good source for specialized information. According to Halperin and Heath, interviews arguably prioritize validity (Halperin & Heath, 2017), which in turn allow me to gain specific information and in-depth knowledge. More specifically, I use semi-structured interviews, which enables me to both direct the interview better and provide a greater flexibility (Halperin & Heath, 2017). I argue that flexibility can be a major factor during an interview because I do not

only obtain knowledge, but also leave the option to probe deeper and ask follow-up questions. Since not all my interview partners were available due to the difficulty of time and space, and further complications due to the recent outbreak of the Corona virus, I conducted one e-mail interview with an expert that is rather structured than semi- or unstructured. I chose interviews because I am “confident that the data that [I] collect through this means will provide a convincing test of [my] hypothesis” (Halperin & Heath, 2017:308).

My interview partners range from experts of Nepalese foreign policy, professors of the Kathmandu University with a specialization on foreign affairs and diplomacy to two ‘official interviews’ with two affiliates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal. These interviewees worked or still work as advisor of the foreign ministry and the foreign minister himself and are part of task forces employed by the ministry. To make the interview data as comprehensive as possible, I strived to include a female interviewee in my thesis. I was able to include the interview with a woman in my thesis; however, the interview data is still strongly dependent on statements by male interviewees, which might result in a slight male bias.

By sending all the participants an introduction of my research field as well as providing the research question and important extracts of the literature, I assured that all participants are prepared, and the collected answers are as reliable as possible. Further, I focus on empirical questions to mitigate confusions with theoretical concepts.

For me as a researcher it is difficult to get in touch with experts, professors or officials that are thousands of kilometers away from the place I study. Therefore, it was important for me to travel to Nepal to conduct my research in form of a field project. By the help of a ‘gatekeeper’ I was able to network fast and through ‘snowballing’ I obtained several contacts and possible participants for my interviews. Researcher from abroad might not be seen as very trustful people in the first place, especially if they study the foreign policy of your country, however by being presented and recommended by my gatekeeper and interviewees, I was able to enlarge my network and contacts in a short period of time and thus successfully conducted my interviews and my research (Halperin & Heath, 2017).

Nepal’s foreign policy was studied by many scholars, and especially from scholars from the region. To answer my research question, I could rely on knowledge and research from books and articles, and thus on those scholars. The choice to make interviews however emerged due to the desire to get information from both people that obtained their

knowledge and expertise through those books and education in the field, and people who are experienced in the field due to their work for the foreign ministry or associated jobs. Knowledge from articles and books is always a good foundation, however especially regarding the topic of Nepalese foreign policy, the personal view and experience might be interesting and enlightening. Professors of foreign affairs and diplomacy with a focus on Nepal's foreign policy are good interview partners to connect the case with my theoretical knowledge and my chosen concepts, while experts, officials and arguably also journalists provide experiences and background information besides the theoretical knowledge. This differentiation and comprehensive knowledge are vital guidelines for the interviews and the answering of my research question.

To further back the data I collect during the interview sessions, I examine the foreign policy reports of Nepal. Nepal published only four official reports in their history, namely the reports between 2016 and 2019. I focus on patterns and similarities, but most importantly on changes and tendencies that are visible throughout the reports. The advantage of foreign policy reports is that it is data provided by the state. Even though one can argue that the information in foreign policy reports is embellished and subjective, one can compare the information of the reports to other, independent documents and articles concerned with Nepalese foreign policy. Further, I can compare statements of my interview partners with the foreign policy reports to find correlations and discrepancies. To come back to my argument, the foreign policy reports can provide data that confirms Nepal's strategy to keep a neutral position between both neighbors India and China. I thus analyze specifically the sections in the report that are concerned with neighboring countries. Additionally, those sections are informative when it comes to strong historical entanglements that are vice versa important for the testing of a historical rooted dependency that is controlling Nepalese foreign policy. Further, sections and paragraphs on multiple bilateral relations with states in the international system and the active engagement in regional and international organizations and institutions like the UN exhibit the presumption of bilateralism, regional integration and multilateralism as a strategy or behavior of Nepal. The interviews on the other hand demonstrate why and how Nepal is proceeding and what their specific intention is when it comes to that strategy.

Going away from qualitative data, I further increase the validity of my work by using quantitative data, namely by 'turning language into numbers'. Quantitative research

“tends to be based on the statistical analysis of carefully coded information for many cases or observations” (Halperin & Heath, 2017:6). It uses a numerical system to measure variables and is often presented in form of tables, graphs and figures (Halperin & Heath, 2017). I argue that I do not have enough interviews to give grounds for a quantitative content analysis of my interviews, however I looked for specific words in the foreign policy reports of Nepal. As I argued in my literature review, weak as well as small states utilize among other behaviors liberal approaches like multilateralism as a strategy to integrate themselves into the international system and secure their position. Furthermore, they use bilateral relations to ensure not only good relations with the neighbor countries but also to receive support in various forms. The excessive use of liberal codes and words like ‘cooperation’, ‘relationship’ or ‘(bilateral) relations’ indicate and even confirm a certain tendency or strategy the Nepalese government is employing. Further, a great number of bilateral visits and agreements mentioned in the report further strengthen my argument. By focusing on the reports of the last four years, one can clearly recognize changes and thus produce and sustain assumptions.

To test the hypothesis that Nepal’s foreign policy might be influenced by external actors, more precisely by India and China, I fall back on the data from the interviews and statements by experts. Further I relied on quantitative measures, namely numbers concerning the trade, foreign aid, foreign direct investment, and more from both countries over the last decades. High figures could prove the dependency of the Nepalese economy and further Nepalese development prospects on India and China. This conversely could prove strong influence and power by both actors over Nepal and favors the hypothesis of a structural factor that might influence political decisions and thus the foreign policy. Strong foreign direct investment and development aid could arguably be a strategy of India or China to gain more influence and fulfil objectives. This can be explained by the theory of offensive structural realism. To support this argument, one can use the interviews and statistics on the mentioned sectors to guarantee relevance and validity.

Analysis

Defining Nepal as a weak and small state

Before I start with the analysis of Nepalese foreign policy, their behavior and their strategy, I must ensure that the concepts of my literature review fit on the country profile

of Nepal. On the first look Nepal seems relatively weak and small, but can we define Nepal as a weak and small state? Of course, this is to some extent in the discretion of the person you ask. The first question of my interview, namely if Nepal is a small or weak state and why (not), was answered very differently, however I argue there is a clear reasoning of why one has to define Nepal both as a weak and small state.

Nepal can be described as weak or small state by looking at several figures and numbers. According to Bhatta, Nepal survived in the international system and kept its independency and must therefore be characterized as civilizational state rather than weak or small state. Further, its size and population are not that small if we compare it to the international standard (Bhatta, 2020). Accurately, Nepal was never colonized and kept full independency in the past. Moreover, it has a population of 28.087.871 citizens (2018) and is moving vaguely between place 48 and 50 of 193 UN member states in the list of sovereign states by population (World Bank, 2020; UN World Population, 2020; Rana, 1971). Nepal's size in terms of geographical area is 147.181 km², which is place 96 out of 258 (including city-states like Monaco) and thus not very small in the international comparison (CIA, 2020).

If we look on the capacity and traditional security figures like military, like other scholars did before, Nepal might be weak, however it is the fifth largest troop contributor to the UN peacekeeping forces (Sunil, 2020; FPR, 2019:83). The military force of the country itself however is rather weak (Shiva, 2020).

According to Bhattarai, Nepal counts to one of the least developed countries and is landlocked by India and China and is therefore rather weak than small (Bhattarai, 2020; CIA, 2020; Khadka, 1998). Contrary, Khadga argues that the country was never a failed state, was never dependent on foreign direct engagement or anything similar. It is underdeveloped, but not weak (Khadga, 2020).

Various scholars and interviewees defined Nepal either as a weak state, a small state, or neither of those, however I argue most of those statements were missing one decisive variable. One cannot see and identify Nepal as a weak or small state by looking on the country and its statistics alone, rather one must look at the bigger picture. I suggest that Nepal's foreign policy can only be explained by taking the relational approach into consideration, and further support it with concepts which were presented in the section of weak states. Nepal is located between the two giants India and China. More important than the size or population of the country is the geographical situation, the structure

Nepal is finding itself in. If we look at Nepal in terms of its location and its regional arena, it is 'sandwiched' between two major powers of the international system. Nepal might have a population of 28.087.871 people and is not small compared to other states on the globe, but its population is 48.02 times smaller than India's population, and 50,82 times smaller than China's (UN World Population, 2020). Geographically, India is 22,33 times, and China 65,20 times bigger than Nepal (Worldometers, 2020). This makes Nepal a small state. If we look at traditional security figures and thus at the defense budget, China spends around 627 times more, and India at least 166 times more on military than Nepal. Lastly, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), China's GDP is approximately 468 times stronger than Nepal's. India's GDP is approximately 93 times stronger (World Bank, 2020; World Bank MB, 2020). Of course, all these figures are much higher than Nepal's, but one should not forget that Nepal is landlocked by these two states, without access to sea and without any border towards a third, less powerful state. This is illustrated by the following figure.



Figure 1: Geography: Nepal being landlocked by two major powers, China and India. (The source of this map is in the bibliography under 'Figure 1').

The point I am making here is, Nepal cannot be understood or analyzed by looking at the country itself, rather one must consider its geographical situation and thus its neighbors as well. Therefore, if we define Nepal or explain its domestic or foreign policy, India and China must be taken into consideration. The reason why we must define Nepal as weak and small is simply the size and power asymmetry the country is exposed to. In

the case of Nepal, weakness and smallness emerge through the geographical arena the country is finding itself in rather than through sheer size, population, or capacity.

The reactive factors of Nepal's foreign policy

Geography and landlockedness

In order to explain Nepal's foreign policy, I decided to separate the analysis into reactive and proactive factors. Geography is one of the reactive factors. Nepal's geographical location does not only affect the definition of Nepal as being weak and small, but also has great influence in terms of the shaping of its foreign policy. In the past, Nepal had to be careful in dealing with China, India, and British India, and even today the state must be careful with its actions (Bhatta, 2020). Nepal's foreign policy behavior is arguably very much limited to the geographical arena, which in turn led to a complex in the past that was 'imprinted' in Nepal's 'mindset'. Nepal is not only much weaker and smaller than their immediate neighbors, moreover Khadga argues that dealing with them makes Nepal feel inferior (Khadga, 2020).

Geography is, according to the answers of my interviewees, one of the, if not, the most important factor or determinate of Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy. The landlockedness, and especially open borders towards India are causing security concerns up to direct security threats (Adhikari, 2020). Even though interviewees like Dahal and Sunil acknowledge influence in several spheres and geographic factors that are favoring those, they do not see Nepal as a prisoner of geography. Technology, connectivity and especially trade help to mitigate geographical factors and lift Nepal into a new surrounding of international actors (Dahal, 2020; Sunil, 2020).

Technology and connectivity with other actors outside the regional arena is an important factor to mitigate structural and certainly also geographical factors, as I will focus on in a bit, however Nepal still is heavily handicapped by its landlockedness, by its inability to access the sea, and by neighbors that take advantage of that impotence (Khadga, 2020). Tiwari labeled Nepal's position as a 'flashpoint'. Nepal is geographically captured between not only two powerful neighbors, but two different, partly rivaling civilizations. Especially India's way of thinking connected with the geographical situation put Nepal in an unpleasant position. "[...] [You] can have a big neighbor in the surrounding, but the big neighbor may not always have that type of attitude [...]" (Tiwari, 2020:9). India's 'hegemonic tendency' and thus realist behavior makes Nepal a prisoner

of geography, and certainly influences its foreign policy. This brings us to the next point, namely historical dependency from their immediate neighbors India and China.

Historical dependency?

As I discussed earlier, Nepal is a relatively weak and small country. This is not only visible in its size in the regional context, but also its military capacity or its economic prosperity. Especially economically Nepal is heavily dependent on its immediate neighbors and specifically on India. This can be seen by looking on Nepal's imports and exports. While the country obtained nearly 100 percent of its imports from India in the 1950s, the imports from India still make up 63 percent, while China makes up twelve percent (2017) (Rana, 1971; OEC, 2017). In numbers, imports from India and China combined are worth 7.24 billion dollars out of 9.56 billion dollars in total. Moreover, 54 percent of the exports from Nepal arrived in India in 2017 (OEC, 2017). These figures show that Nepal is economically heavily dependent on India and partly China, and in terms of FDI and foreign aid India and China are also the top contributors (FPR, 2017). But does that mean that Nepal is politically dependent on India or China? Is Nepal's foreign policy directly influenced or even 'controlled' by external interests through a dependency relationship that is historically rooted?

To kickstart with a quick answer, all interviewees are convinced that Nepal's foreign policy is guided by national interests and decision-making is stirred by the Nepalese government to serve and fulfil those national interests. This might not have been like that forever, but the "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty" and "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" are the first two points presented on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 2020).

Geopolitical factors irrefutably influence the foreign policy behavior of Nepal, however external interests do not interfere or control decision-making (Dahal, 2020; Khadga, 2020; Bhattarai, 2020). The international structure and political decisions by others might be more important for Nepal's foreign policy than specific national interests, but that does not mean that somebody is making decisions for the country (Tiwari, 2020).

Weak and small states are susceptible to external influence and are less immune against external influence, however that does only mean that the foreign policy of the country is guided by geographical factors. Economic dependency on India is certain, however that does not implicate a dependency relationship. Contrary to the assumption

in the literature review suggesting the possibility that weak and small states might 'sell' their foreign policy decisions to a greater actor, Bhatta argues that dependency is normal for Nepal in its geographic situation. "We have a cultural dependency, we have an economic dependency, we have a political relationship as well" (Bhatta, 2020:8). Dependency on India is certain, however not politically.

The border blockade of 2015, that was the third blockade executed by India, was seen by some scholars as the prove of Nepal's dependency and further its weak positioning against India. The blockade led to the scarcity of resources in Nepal. It was triggered by decisions Nepal made before, and more specifically by the adoption of a new constitution in September of the same year (Diplomat, 2015). The blockade in 2015 and earlier blockades can be explained by the concept of reward and punishment and is a universal strategy of hegemonic powers to coerce (Dahal, 2020). However, if we look at the blockade and Nepal's reaction to it, it is more the prove of Nepal being politically independent and self-determined. Nepal kept its constitution and its position during the blockade, and further steadfastness in difficult times (Bhattarai, 2020; Khatri, 2020).

Bhattarai explains the situation by saying:

"Anything they say, we take it as an expression of friendship and goodwill. But we tell them bluntly. [...] Neighbors have their own interests here; they have own concerns. Fine. Anything they say we will take as an expression of friendship and goodwill. But it is not their business to tell us the way they want us to work. You know, we have our own course. We decide for ourselves and we believe that we have that capacity to judge what is best for our interest and we do not need to refer, you know, this decision making process, to any of our neighbors and for that matter to any of our friends and the international community. They should let us decide our internal affairs on our own."

Bhattarai, 2020:7

The bargaining action and 'sticks and carrots' by India failed in 2015 and did not affect Nepal's decision to stick with the new constitution, however a historical rooted dependency relationship and the influence in internal affairs would have foreclose any constitution that is contrary to India's position in the first place.

Concluding, India's strategic thinking is affecting Nepal's foreign policy without any doubts. India is a "900-pound gorilla in the room" (Tiwari, 2020:4), and China is getting

more powerful as well (Tiwari, 2020). Dependency relationship is true for many spheres, including economic dependency and cultural dependency, however the foreign policy of Nepal and decision-making remains sovereign and independent. A historically rooted dependency relationship as presented in the literature review that is affecting and controlling the foreign policy of Nepal cannot be proved, and is, considering the events of the blockade and Nepal's response to it, rather not applicable to the case of Nepal. Since the international system is of realist nature, states seek to maximize their power. India and China certainly use many channels to influence Nepal, however that does not mean it controls the country or its foreign policy.

The proactive behavior and strategy of Nepal

Strategical bilateral relations with the immediate neighbors

Even though there might not be a dependency relationship that controls the foreign policy decision-making of Nepal, my interviews as well as the foreign policy reports show that the bilateral relations with India and China are 'special' and for several interviewees beside geography the most important factor of Nepal's foreign policy. While both the geography and dependency must be seen rather as factors that force Nepal to react, this section of the paper focuses on proactive behavior, thus behavior Nepal employs actively and strategically, even though it is geographically compulsive.

Because the relations to India are far more than just economically based, but of course also because Nepal is dependent on trade with India, the relations to the country are more important according to the participants of my interviews. As the blockade showed, India-Nepal relations are not always positive, but certainly they should be (Tiwari, 2020; Sunil, 2020; Bhatta, 2020). After the blockade relations have normalized again (FPR, 2016). The latest foreign policy report published in 2019 labeled the engagement with India as 'top priority' of Nepalese foreign policy for the successful development of the country (FPR, 2019).

Especially after the incident of the blockade, the relations and exchange between Nepal and China increased (FPR, 2016; FPR, 2018). China is considered as another option for Nepal, however the relations to India will not be affected by that (Adhikari, 2020; Khadga, 2020). China must be an option to decrease the dependency from India. All reports published after 2015 urge the importance of further deepening of relations with the immediate neighbors, and especially China stands out having multiple new agreements

and projects with Nepal. Further, China became the biggest FDI contributor of Nepal in 2018 and is its major development partner, and maintained this position until today (FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019).

Even though the relations between Nepal and their immediate neighbors have shifted in recent years, important is that the behavior towards the neighbors does not shift too much or change completely. Bhattarai explicates that “[...] we have to have their trust for our survival” (Bhattarai, 2020:9), and this is the most important goal of a state and its foreign policy (Bhattarai, 2020). The engagement and good relations with both neighbors are the top priority in every foreign policy report, and further they are “extensive, deep and multifaceted encompassing a broad spectrum of political, economic, social and cultural spheres” (FPR, 2016:6). Bilateral meetings and agreements with India and China show Nepal’s priority in bilateral relations with both neighbors, and even more recent reports prove further deepening of relations between those three (FPR, 2016; FPR, 2019).

In conclusion, the reports state similarly that “we [Nepal] continued to make significant advances in our friendly relations with both immediate neighbors, India and China. Equality, mutual trust, respect and benefit were the key principles guiding our relationships. In particular, our efforts were directed towards expanding and diversifying the economic cooperation and commercial relations with focus on trade, investment, tourism and connectivity” (FPR, 2018:26). Especially for weak and small states like Nepal good bilateral relations are important, since bilateral agreements with India and China in the case of Nepal secure its development and finally its survival. Further, international law is a very loose moral commitment that does not automatically ensure security (Khadga, 2020; Khatri, 2020). Since Nepal has no other direct regional option beside India and China, it must ensure that bilateral relations with both are successful. Even though deep cooperation with stronger actors can lead to dependency and exploitation as Urpelainen argued, Nepal has no other option (Urpelainen, 2010).

Neutral Position Keeping

Besides bilateralism, weak and small states employ other foreign policy strategies to secure their survival in the international system. In the literature review I presented various concepts; however, one of my concluding arguments was that a neutral position keeping is the best strategy for weak and small states and thus also for Nepal.

According to Dahal the geopolitical position of Nepal between India and China creates some sort of security dilemma. Thus, maintaining a neutral position without losing the consciousness of justice in international relations is crucial for the country (Dahal, 2020). Non-alignment at a global and regional level as well as the peaceful solution of disputes and conflicts is the only possible strategy for a country like Nepal and further embedded principles in their constitution (Bhattarai, 2020; MOFA, 2020). As Hey argued, weak and small states choose a neutral position since they rely on major powers to some extent and rather cooperate to avoid conflict and military disputes (Hey, 2003). This durable position is visible by looking at Nepal's position during conflicts between India and China in the 1960s, more recent disputes between the countries, or the conflict between India and Pakistan involving China in the Kashmir conflict. Nepal continuously kept its neutral position towards all actors, despite its personal and bilateral relation to each involved state (Adhikari, 2020; Khadga, 2020). According to Sunil, balancing one actor or bandwagoning might be a dangerous strategy for Nepal and therefore rather concerning than securing (Sunil, 2020).

Even though Bhatta argues that non-alignment is part of Nepal's general foreign policy position, and Nepal must keep the right balance of neutrality between India and China, full neutrality for actors like Nepal is not possible forever. Bhatta points out the different relation between Nepal and India, which are closer and more comprehensive than relations with China (Bhatta, 2020). But does that mean Nepal is not neutral? Nepal was often accused of playing the India or the China card in the past, however bandwagoning does not help countries like Nepal (Bhatta, 2020; Bhattarai, 2020). The country might have employed the strategy of bandwagoning in the past and political leaders certainly take it into account while discussing Nepal's strategical behavior, however as I argued in my literature review already, weak and small states do not have the capacity to do so, and currently Nepal does not employ such behavior. The balancing concept could be described as the behavior employed by Nepal by looking at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), where the countries including Nepal were accused by India to form an alliance to balance the power. SAARC is a good example to understand the concept of power balancing, and India's concerns are perspicuous, however the blockade of 2015 showed that Nepal has no power against India and should therefore focus on bilateral relations with the state instead of 'regional alliances' (Tiwari, 2020; Bhatta, 2020). As Walt

argued, the balancing of power would be more of a gamble than smart strategic behavior of weak and small states, and the same goes for Nepal (Walt, 1987).

Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy is, according to my interviews, to keep a neutral position. As I argued in my literature review, every other concept would not secure Nepal's national interests and certainly not its security. Nepal must have good relations with both India and China and is advised to keep its position in this triangle neutral. Policies that are based on offensive realist assumptions about international structures employed by the immediate neighbors might impede this position keeping, however that is due to an environment the country cannot escape from. Neutral position keeping is of course not meant to be important considering Nepal's immediate neighbors only, however especially among them a neutral position keeping is vital.

Thinking outside the regional box and creating visibility

During my research and while conducting interviews and examining the foreign policy reports, I discovered that bilateral relations outside the regional box Nepal is finding itself in are similarly to 'regional bilateralism' an important strategy of Nepalese foreign policy. Liberal tendencies, counting bilateral relations, regional integration and multilateralism, are arguably employed by Nepal to mitigate geographic factors and the power structures in the international system.

According to Bhatta, bilateral relations and cooperation with countries in Europe, Asia or America must be steady extended. This behavior is important since "the visibility is the most important factor for states like Nepal" (Bhatta, 2020:11). This was also mentioned in my literature review, namely that international integration and bilateral cooperation is important for weak as well as small states to ensure their survival, recognition and simply their visibility.

The visibility played a crucial role for Nepal for more than 200 years. Historically, Nepal employed bilateralism as strategy already in the 19th century. It was the first country of South Asia to establish formal diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom in 1816 (Khadga, 2020; EON, 2020). According to Khadga bilateral relations were and are a must, and they must be further developed and extended (Khadga, 2020).

Besides the visibility factor, again the immediate neighbors play a crucial role in this behavior. As Bhattarai states, the "diversification of diplomatic relations, diversification of economic relations is very important for us because we have two neighbors. There is a

saying in Africa, you know, that if two elephants fight it is the grass that suffers and again, if two elephants make love, it is again the grass that suffers. We have huge neighbors. [...] We cannot remain unaffected” (Bhattarai, 2020:4). The relations to India and China must remain friendly and cooperative. However, to further secure the survival and well-being of the state, Nepal must extend its relations with partners in the world. As weak and small state, the collaboration with others can strengthen the own power, increase the capacity, and further make other states participate in own agendas and projects (Keohane, 1969; Kassab, 2015). It is about the outbreaking of the regional box, the own survival with two powerful neighbors, and the strategy of “trying to be seen and heard” (Adhikari, 2020:2).

The interviews provide further statements about the importance of bilateral relations with other actors, however another good foundation and source here are the foreign policy reports of Nepal. All four reports mention the importance of expansion and strengthening of bilateral relations, especially with the United States and Europe, to secure for instance Nepal’s development. The focus lies on political, economic and humanitarian reasons (FPR, 2016:31). The partnership with other countries is visible through a good understanding and mutual respect, high-level visits, the signing of agreements, and holding of bilateral meetings with multiple countries (FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). Quantitatively, a comparison of all four reports and the evaluation of my results show a clear tendency. By looking only at the bilateral relations, Nepal extended its relations from 147 in 2017, to 161 in 2018 and 166 in 2019. In only two years the country established 19 new diplomatic relations, among others with states like Togo, Rwanda or Madagascar. Additionally, by looking at bilateral meetings and consultation mechanisms, signed, concluded, and acceded agreements and incoming as well as outgoing high-level visits, one can see a clear tendency between 2016 and 2019. In all four columns in the table below the numbers increase, proving that Nepal follows a bilateral strategy, aiming to engage with as many other states as possible (FPR, 2016; FPR, 2017; FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019).

Further, to demonstrate the importance of bilateral relations for Nepal’s foreign policy, I counted phrases that indicate a liberal and specifically bilateral orientation or theme, for example words like ‘relationship’, ‘visit’, or ‘agreement’. While doing this I made sure that I exclude phrases with negative meanings, phrases like ‘bad bilateral relations’. Further I added up words from the same root, for instance ‘agreement’ and ‘agree’. Whereas the word ‘bilateral’ was mentioned 86 times in 2016, it was mentioned 221 times in the

foreign policy report published in 2019. All phrases I chose to look at show similar results. The phrase 'visit' was mentioned more than 100 times more often in the report published in 2019, climbing from 169 (2016) to 271. While meeting (201 times in 2016), agree/agreement (116 times in 2016) and cooperation/cooperative (205 times in 2016) was already mentioned quite often in the report of 2016, the numbers increased to 276 (meeting), 166 (agree/agreement) and 272 (cooperation/cooperative) in 2019. In the meantime, all three had an 'all time high' in 2018 reaching 352 (meeting), 200 (agree/agreement) and 388 (cooperation/cooperative) mentionings (FPR, 2016; FPR, 2017; FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). This coincides with the rapid extension of bilateral relations between 2017 and 2018.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Diplomatic relations with other states in total	-	147	161	166
Bilateral meetings and consultation mechanisms	-	-	27	65
Signed/concluded/acceded agreements	-	24	38	44
High-level visits (incoming and outgoing)	6 (2015-16)	5	19	27
Bilateral	86	149	205	221
Relation/Relationship	182	205	327	207
Cordial, friendly, excellent, close	103	124	132	103
Visit	169	221	288	271
Meeting	201	219	352	276
Agree/agreement	116	133	200	166
Cooperation/cooperative	205	244	388	272
Conference	62	52	62	59
Diplomacy/Diplomatic	35	162	130	84
Negotiation	15	7	21	24
Engage/engagement	43	81	98	55

Table 1: This table portrays in the first four lines the amount of diplomatic relations, bilateral meetings, agreements and high-level visits, and from line five the quantity of phrases with 'liberal orientations' in the reports published in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Beside phrases that indicate a bilateral orientation, the foreign policy reports and bilateral relations itself mainly focus on economic diplomacy. Hereby the focus lies on the promotion of trade, the boosting of tourism, the attraction of investment and more. Further, cooperation guarantees the development of infrastructure, agriculture, education and energy (FPR, 2017). Nepal employs a strategy of economic diplomacy to ensure security and development. All four analyzed foreign policy reports comprehensively mention economic diplomacy as center of engagement and clearly as strategy of Nepal's foreign policy (FPR, 2019:98; FPR, 2017). Economic diplomacy programs and events in Nepal and partner countries like Belgium, Brazil, Australia are carried out to specifically encourage the tourism sector, foreign investments and trade, technology transfer, development cooperation and foreign employment (FPR, 2018:36&127). According to the report of 2018, the country implemented 195 programs in Nepal and abroad, while they had less than 100 in the year before (FPR, 2018:36; FPR, 2017:87). Main goal of this is, according to the reports, to "raise positive awareness about Nepal" (FPR, 2016:52). Therefore, arguably this strategy can be added to behavior that enhances visibility.

According to the statements of my interviewees, bilateral relations themselves mainly focus on economic diplomacy. Those relations are important for Nepal to get assistance in form of foreign aid or FDI (Adhikari, 2020). While survival was the main concern for many decades, now economic diplomacy is important to enhance trade in the country (Khadga, 2020). The Nepalese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, states that economic diplomacy is one of the main goals and challenges for Nepal. Foreign aid and FDI is essential for the country and thus not only a national interest but also an important strategy of Nepalese foreign policy (AIDIA, 2019). However, this strategy counts for bilateral relations as well as for multinational cooperation (AIDIA, 2019), which brings us to the last two implications of Nepalese foreign policy behavior and strategy, namely regional integration and multilateralism.

Regional integration

Beside bilateral relations with immediate and distant actors, and strategies like the neutral position keeping which is triggered by geographical circumstances as the case of Nepal shows, weak and small states further endeavor to integrate themselves in regional as well as multilateral frameworks to ensure their own survival and improve their

security (Kassab, 2015; Keohane, 1969). The analysis of Nepalese foreign policy reports and my interviews prove that Nepal employs both strategies.

Even though Nepal is a small country compared to other actors in the region, the country integrated itself into several regional frameworks operating in the area. The two main international/intergovernmental organizations here are the SAARC and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Nepal is founding member of SAARC and was chairman of it between 2014 and 2017, and chairmen of BIMSTEC between 2014 and 2018 (FPR, 2016). Nepal is an active member of both, the secretary of SAARC is based in Kathmandu, and further the agenda of SAARC and BIMSTEC is promoted to ensure deep regional cooperation (FPR, 2016). But why exactly is Nepal so active in those frameworks? Of course, as the foreign policy reports state, the promotion of mutual interests, economic integration for regional progress and prosperity are crucial factors. However, those frameworks arguably are more importantly a forum to create sovereignty for weak and small states. According to Dahal, they are important “pool efforts to increase their viability, increase collective self-reliance and promote wellbeing of citizens and states” (Dahal, 2020:4). Further, for countries like Nepal, SAARC and BIMSTEC provide the opportunity to share a position or opinion on certain topics, to either get seen and heard, or simply because one cannot articulate an issue bilaterally (Bhattarai, 2020). Especially because weak and small states like Nepal need those forums to attain a voice and possibly some agency, the recent lack of consensus among SAARC members and the standstill of the planned summit in 2018 is interpreted as concern by the foreign ministry (FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). According to the report of 2018, “regional cooperation is not a choice but a necessity to achieve collective self-reliance and prosperity which are prerequisites for lasting peace and stability in the region” (FPR, 2018:105). The high priority of Nepalese foreign policy correlating with regional frameworks shows that it is not only important for Nepal due to economic prospects like facilitated trade, but certainly also strategically to ensure peace and integrity. Difficulties and disputes among member states like the conflict between India and Pakistan puts Nepal in a unpleasant situation, not only because the regional frameworks are unable to act, but also because Nepal has to keep a neutral position and, at the same time, strive to support both, possibly competing regional organizations (Bhatta, 2020). SAARC and BIMSTEC are both important regional frameworks for a weak and small state like Nepal to increase its agency, facilitate visibility and ensure integrity. Especially in the regional

area those frameworks are important for weak and small states since they function as a platform for regional negotiation, economic prosperity and ultimately peace.

The international forum and multilateralism

Additional ventilation and to further promote foreign policy objectives, weak and small states integrate themselves in multilateral frameworks. According to Keohane and Kassab, integration into the international system leads to recognition, the opportunity to promote own interests in an international forum, security and survival for small and weak states (Keohane, 1969; Kassab, 2015). The multilateral approach, or the Lilliputian strategy as mentioned in the literature review, is the last aspect of Nepal's foreign policy strategy.

Nepal is a member of the UN since 1955 and a large troop contributor in peacekeeping forces since 1958 (UN Data, 2020; Bhattarai, 2020; Khadga, 2020), part of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) since 1961 (Bhatta; 2020; TRN, 2020), and according to interviewees as well as the foreign policy reports fully committed to multilateralism including the international principles, international law and other moral minded ideals (Tiwari, 2020; Khadga; 2020; Bhattarai; 2020; Khatri, 2020; FPR; 2016; FPR, 2017; FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). But is this a strategy that is actively employed by Nepal or simply an effect of changing international structures?

According to all interviewees, the integration into the international system and the participation in international organizations and specifically the UN is strategically motivated and fulfils certain matters. Beside considerations that serve Nepal's development and prosperity, namely the participation in international organizations to enhance the development, democracy, human rights, peace, or technical and economic assistance (Dahal, 2020), most interviewees consider other factors as more urgent. All interviewees make use of phrases like 'recognition' and 'security'. The membership of the UN strengthens the sovereignty through international recognition and ensures security because increased relations with actors through multilateral frameworks decreases the regional weakness of Nepal (Dahal, 2020; Bhatta, 2020). Due to its geographic location and occasional bilateral issues with the neighbor countries, Nepal is best advised to remain relevant in international politics. Therefore, its strategy is to focus on regional and international frameworks to express its national interests (Khadga, 2020; Dahal, 2020). According to Khatri, who worked as an advisor of the foreign ministry for many years,

Nepal uses multilateralism to project its own image abroad and to attain one of the most important things for countries like Nepal, namely presence (Khatri, 2020). Hence, Nepal is very active in the UN and was part of the security council twice (1969 & 1988) (Khatri, 2020; UN-PMN, 2020). Further, the country is proud being the fifth largest troop contributor of the UN peacekeeping operations with more than 5000 soldiers, which further creates recognition and avails presence in the international matters (FPR, 2019:83).

The integration into multilateral forums like the UN is strategically motivated, but does it only serve for recognition and security or is the country creating agency and power by that? Is Nepal using the UN as a 'power instrument'?

Even though Bhatta argued that major and superpowers in the international system are instrumentalizing the UN and other international organizations to secure their position in the system, all the other interviewees argued the opposite (Bhatta, 2020). Especially experienced interviewees with affiliation to the foreign ministry argue against Bhatta. As a weak and small state, Nepal not only engages in the UN, but it also joins little interest groups, for instance the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC) or Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC). By working together, those weaker countries promote common interests and highlight specific issues (Khatri, 2020; Bhattarai, 2020). Nepal alone will not be heard due to its position in the international system, however by working together and being active in those organizations Nepal can show presence and protect and promote its interests (Adhikari, 2020).

Nepal is very active both in the UN and in all subgroups the country is joining, which is beside the interviews also visible in the foreign policy reports. According to the report of 2016, "engagement with the United Nations and other multilateral institutions and processes remained inspired by the firm belief that challenges of global scale could only be addressed through greater and more effective multilateral partnership. Strong faith in multilateralism with United Nations as the pivot of global affairs guided our vision and activities in multilateral diplomacy" (FPR, 2016:4). Further, Nepal is active in all activities and processes, and a "responsible member of international community" (FPR, 2016:73). Being active means foremost that engagement is substantial, especially in peacekeeping, during meetings and agreements like the Paris Agreement or the Convention against Biological Weapons, and in subgroups like the LDC and LLDC. But also, by taking important positions like 1969 and 1988 the position in the security council, and also

minor positions like the recent vice presidency of the UN General Assembly for the 71st session representing the Asia Pacific Group (UN-PMN, 2020; FPR, 2017:21). By putting effort in the elections to international organizations, “Nepal continued its drive to enhance visibility and leadership in multilateral institutions” (FPR, 2019:91).

The faith in the UN and its Charter, and thus in norms of multilateralism, is stated in every report and point six of Nepal’s basic principles of foreign policy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including points like mutual respect, territorial integrity, non-aggression and non-interference, cooperation for mutual benefit and value of world peace (MOFA, 2020; FPR; 2016; FPR, 2017; FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). Therefore, recent developments and issues are continuously noticed with concerns, especially in the reports of 2018 and 2019. Isolationist politics of major powers, populism caused by large migration flows and issues of the WTO endanger the basic idea of multilateralism and thus the legitimization of organizations like the UN (FPR, 2018; FPR, 2019). Problems an international organization is facing are likewise issues Nepal is facing, because those frameworks provide a weak and small state recognition, security and ensure their integrity and survival.

Quantitatively, a content analysis focusing on phrases that can be linked to liberal codes and approaches like multilateralism and international integration shows only small, but not insignificant evidence. As the table below shows, almost all phrases increased in numbers. Especially interesting are the phrases ‘UN’/’United Nations’, ‘Peace’ and ‘Multilateralism’. Those phrases were used more than twice as much in the report of 2019 in comparison to the reports of 2016.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Multilateralism	26	37	59	61
Regional	92	72	149	126
UN/United Nations	52	105	119	165
International	127	129	131	146
Integration	19	26	36	22
Peace (excluding 'Peacekeeping')	73	107	106	200
Peacekeeping	8	12	20	12
LDC/Least developed country	20	22	32	31
LLDC/Landlocked developing country	10	15	28	13

Table 2: This table shows the wordcount of every given word in the left column. The year stands for each year of publication of a referred foreign policy report.

The numbers do not show a tremendous increase in every column towards the year 2019, however they show a clear tendency. Almost all figures are increasing over the years from 2016 to 2019. This proves that not only multilateralism is an important approach of Nepalese foreign policy, but also that the country is continuously counting on multilateral frameworks and especially the UN.

Nepal wants to be both secure and prosperous, and therefore must show that it exists (Adhikari, 2020; Tiwari, 2020). The multilateral approach and engagement in the UN are not only employed by weak and small states like Nepal, however for Nepal this behavior might be more important than for other actors. This is mainly due to its geographic location and the power and behavior of its neighbors. Both the foreign policy reports and my interviews proved that multilateralism is among the strategies of Nepalese foreign policy. This multilateral strategy reaches from interests like development and prosperity to recognition and security. Presence in the international system provides visibility, security, and further agency by joining other weak and small states in interest groups to promote own issues and interests.

Conclusion

IR and its scholars focused on the foreign policy of weak and small states for several decades. The foreign policy behavior and strategy of a weak and small state can differ due to different implications or contexts the state is finding itself in. Therefore, this case study on Nepal focused on several presented concepts to construct a theoretical framework to answer the question of *how we may explain Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy being a landlocked, weak, and small state in the international system.*

I argued that Nepal is finding itself in a world that can be explained by structural realist approaches, being exposed to two powerful neighbors. While the relational approach explained Nepal's foreign policy focus on the asymmetric interaction with India and China, the testing of the concept of a historically rooted dependency relationship that is directly influencing and controlling the foreign policy of the country was adverse. However, both my interviews and the examination of the foreign policy reports of the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 proved that Nepal is keeping a neutral position between its two neighbors and internationally, and further steadily increases the foreign relations and diplomatic channels with other countries on the globe. Additionally, Nepal's foreign policy focuses on the integration into regional frameworks like SAARC or BIMSTEC to get further ventilation and a platform to solve problems and enable comprehensive negotiation. Further, bilateral relations, regional integration and multilateralism is not only theoretically a strategy employed specifically by weak and small states to increase presence and visibility and to ensure integrity and survival but is in fact used by Nepal to mitigate geographic and power structural constraints. Nepal has no option but to carry out decision-making processes based on liberal values, while its neighbor's behavior and arguably every state on the globe, no matter if its strong or weak, small or big, utilizes either realist values or liberalism that is masked in realism. Due to their weakness and smallness, states like Nepal arguably must employ liberal foreign policy strategies to ensure its integrity.

Even though concepts employed by weak and small states as well as challenges those actors are facing were already discussed in the field of IR, this paper explained the foreign policy of a unique case. Nepal's foreign policy behavior and strategy is undoubtedly special and can arguably be described as 'Nepali exceptionalism'.

My research paper did not refer to earlier academic research on Nepalese foreign policy too much, but rather utilized interviews and foreign policy reports as foundation

of my analysis. Thereby I provided theoretical knowledge, expertise, and personal experiences to my assessment. The engagement with people on site and networking with a gatekeeper made the research more comprehensive and most importantly currently relevant.

According to the latest foreign policy report, Nepalese foreign policy objectives are the protection and promotion of national interests, the contribution to realize a prosperous Nepal, the promotion of values civilization, culture and identity, ensuring safety, dignity and security for Nepalese people abroad, the amity with all and enmity with none, and lastly the UN charter (FPR, 2019:IV). This paper discovered and explained which behavior and strategy Nepal is employing to guarantee and secure its objectives and ultimately its integrity and survival.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Information letter

The information letters can be requested from the author. Please contact me via e-mail under paulbiehl@online.de.

Appendix 2

Informed consent

The informed consent documents can be requested from the author. Please contact me via e-mail under paulbiehl@online.de.

Appendix 3

Interview questions

Interview Questions of the Bachelor Thesis conducted by Paul Biehl

Small states – Foreign Policy:

- Would you define Nepal as a small/weak state?
➔ What would your main argument be? (Size, population, resources, relationships)
- Knowledge, Skills, Expertise to get recognized? Can you think of an expertise/skill the country Nepal is trying to develop a 'leadership role' in? (Nepal – promotion of values and beliefs or economic/development diplomacy for instance?)
- What would you consider to be Nepal's capability when it comes to international relations and specifically their foreign policy?
- Would you consider a liberal theory as the Nepalese approach of foreign policy (strategy/behavior)? (Regionalism, Multilateralism) Or can you think of any other that fits better and that is not presented in the literature review?
- How is Nepal integrating themselves into the regional and international system? (UN; IGO's?) Is it a phenomenon of globalization/changing international structures or a voluntary/strategic process?

- How would you explain their interest in the UN and international organizations? Why are they doing that? (to mitigate structural/geographic factors?)
- Is the UN a 'power instrument' for small states like Nepal? Why (not)?
- Understanding of Nepal's Foreign Policy: Are domestic factors (level of analysis) more important or the international level of analysis (international system structure)?
- How is Nepal's geographic situation influencing their foreign policy?
- Multilateral diplomacy or bilateral cooperation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both concepts regarding the case of Nepal and which concept guarantees Nepal more security?
- What is the importance of high-level visits? (FPR)

Weak states – Foreign Policy

- Statement: Actors in the international system like Nepal (small, relatively weak, landlocked) are policy takers and must obey the bigger states or small actors in the international system can form alliances and integrate themselves into the world system to attain a voice. What would you answer to that (and in relation to Nepal)?
- Statement: Small and weak states must give some of their foreign policy autonomy away to stronger actors to secure survival and gain developmentally. What would you answer to that (and in relation to Nepal)? Additional quote: "While great powers may establish the structure of the international system, weak states and their systemic vulnerability play a very important role as an intervening variable. Even though weak states operate in terms of gathering economic development, they do so by selling their foreign policy autonomy on systemically imperative issues. This is vital to great powers, especially those who desire to shape the international system" (Kassab, 2015:119) – (Thinking of India and China as neighbors with interests and influence).
- Statement: Foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, in weak countries like Nepal it is the other way around. What would you answer to that (and in relation to Nepal)?
- How would you describe the importance of regional organization (BIMSTEC, SAARC, etc.) for small and weak states? Are they important?

- Concepts (Literature Review):
 - Bargaining
 - Dependency relationship (Historically rooted dependency that is affecting Nepalese foreign policy?)
 - Bandwagoning
 - Balancing of power
 - Neutral position keeping
 - Offensive and defensive structural realism
 - Regional and multilateral integration
 - Bilateral relationships
 - 'Trilateralism' (Rana)
- ➔ Which of the concepts would you consider as Nepal's approach? (more than one concept can be applicable)

Relations with China and India (Interests and Influence)

- Is Nepalese foreign policy driven by national interests or external interests?
- How would you describe Nepal's neighbor countries behavior by using a political theory (Realism, Liberalism, etc.)?
- Would you confirm the existence of structural power by neighbor states over Nepal and over its foreign policy and decision making? Why (not)? (sanctions 2015, bargain by India – Urpelainen & Sharma)
- Statement: India has influence on the Nepalese foreign policy due to historical rooted circumstances and very strong relations since 1950 and the treaty of friendship. What are your thoughts?
- Is Nepal 'dependent' on India or China? How? In which areas? (Most importantly is Nepal politically dependent?)
- How is Nepal's foreign policy counteracting influence and interests of its neighbors?
- Reward and Punishment? Sticks and Carrots? Does this evaluate Nepal's relations with its neighbors? Why (not)?
- Which factors play a role in Nepal's foreign policy towards India? (History, Trade, Aid, etc.?)

- Which factors play a role in Nepal's foreign policy towards China? (History, Trade, Aid, etc.?) Win-Win since China has the money and Nepal seeks for development?
- Would you say the relations between the countries has changed/shifted in the last five years? Why? And what does that mean for Nepalese foreign policy?
- Is a deep cooperation between Nepal and India/China positive or negative for the country? (politically, economically, etc.)
- What would you say are recent achievements of Nepal's foreign policy?
- ***How may we explain Nepal's foreign policy, their behavior and strategy? What are the implications? What are the most important factors to consider?***

Appendix 4

Interview transcriptions

The interview transcriptions can be requested from the author. Please contact him via e-mail under paulbiehl@online.de