India and China's Tug of War over Nepal

Why in news?

\n\n

China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is planning to hold its first-ever joint military exercise with Nepal.

\n\n

What is the status of India-Nepal relations?

\n\n

\n
- India is the largest supplier of military hardware to the Nepali Army.
\n
- Since 1950, it has been a custom for the two countries to confer honors on each other’s army chiefs,
\n
- This signifies the close military-to-military ties between the two countries.
\n
- Chinese military assistance to Nepal has significantly increased in recent years.
\n
- But this is the first time that China has proposed a joint military exercise and Nepal accepted.
\n
- The development came as Nepal is proposing to change some provisions of the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty with India.
\n
- The treaty states that Nepal needs to inform or receive consent from India when it purchases military hardware from other countries.
\n
- Nepal wants to change such provisions and make independent decisions on security issues, including the purchase of military equipment.
\n

\n\n

How Chinese influence grew?

\n\n

\n
- For the long time, India enjoyed almost exclusive influence in Nepal.
\n
- But after the abolition of monarchy in 2008 China has increased their influence in Nepal, mainly on political matters.
\n
- Relationship of India and Nepal strained during India's interference in the Nepal's constitution making
\n
- After accusations of a blockade at the Nepal-India border, Nepal relied on China to meet its everyday essential needs.
\n
- The tensions between Nepal and India provided room for China to increase its influence in all areas of Nepal, including in politics.
\n
- Similarly, several joint Nepal-China infrastructure development projects, including the expansion of railways and road connectivity, gained momentum.
\n

\n\n

What is the new development?

\n\n

\n
- India sees the recent announcement of military exercise as China encroachment in India's backyard.
\n
- India wants to maintain Nepal as its "sphere of influence" while China wants to increase its influence.
\n
- India sees this as not only related to trade and commerce, but a part of China's larger strategy to encircle it in South Asia.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- There is no reason that India should worry about a Nepal-China military exercise.

\n
- China is not the only country conducting such drills with Nepal. e.g Nepal-U.S. military drill.
\n
- India has no right to say that Nepal cannot conduct military exercises with another partner.
\n
- Nepal has the sovereign right to make that decision.
\n
- India also has its own joint military exercise with China.
\n
- Even after NSG issue both countries conducted a 13-day joint military exercise in November 2016.
\n
- India’s own experience with China should reassure it that joint exercises are not an indicator of converging strategic interests.
\n
- It is unfortunate that Nepal’s government is quickly labeled as either pro-Indian or pro-Chinese.
\n
- Nepal should be allowed to build a cordial relationship with both of its neighbors to gain the maximum economic benefits.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Category: Mains | GS-II | India & its neighborhood

\n\n

Source: The Diplomat

\n\n

\n