

„Velká hra“ v Asii: V Nepálu se odehrává nový boj mezi Čínou, USA a Indií

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Podlehne Nepál americké ofenzívě kouzla a způsobí čínský hněv, když Indie prohraje spiknutí?



SOUBOR FOTOGRAFIE. Nově zvolený nepálský premiér Pushpa Kamal Dahal, známý jako Prachanda, (C), zdraví své příznivce při odchodu z budovy parlamentu v Káthmándú 3. srpna 2016. © Sunil Pradhan/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Washington se ohýbá, aby odlákal nově vytvořenou komunistickou koaliční vládu Nepálu, která se dostala k moci na konci prosince, od svých dvou největších sousedů — Indie a Číny. Oba národy jsou uzavřeny ve „*velké hře*“ o malý himálajský národ, který se stal kolaterálem v této diplomatické fotbalové hře, kde se USA snaží prosadit jako třetí mocnost.

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[Zatímco Rusko slaví Den veteránů, zde je ukázka toho, jak země bojovala v různých obdobích své tisícileté historie](#)



tahanice amerických úředníků

Na začátku letošního roku čekalo nepálské diplomaty hodně práce. Náměstkyně amerického státního tajemníka pro politické záležitosti Victoria Nulandová navštívila Káthmándú ve dnech 29. až 30. ledna a o týden později, od 7. do 9. února, následovala Samantha Power, administrátorka americké agentury pro mezinárodní rozvoj (USAID).

Náměstek náměstka amerického ministra pro záležitosti jižní a střední Asie Afreen Akhter přijel do Káthmándú 13. února v údajně „nepatrné záležitosti“ .

Nepálští představitelé uvedli, že se očekává, že Káthmándú navštíví také vrchní ředitel Rady národní bezpečnosti USA pro jižní Asii, kontradmirál Eileen Laubacher.

Nedávno nepálská vláda zakázala návštěvu ředitele CIA Williama J Burnse, protože „*načasování cesty nebylo považováno za tak příznivé*“ . Ze Srí Lanky měl přiletět 15. února na 18hodinový pobyt v Káthmándú, nicméně vláda uvedla, že povolení k návštěvě musí být odepřeno s ohledem na nadcházející prezidentské volby 9. března.

Každý z amerických úředníků má svou práci nad hlavu, když se snaží zjistit politickou náladu v Káthmándú. Kroky Washingtonu budou mít určitě dopad na konfrontaci mezi Pekingem a Novým Dillí, která se odehrává v Himalájích.



Nepál odplouvá z Indie

Nepál, jedna ze 46 nejméně rozvinutých zemí (LDC) na světě, často využívá svůj geostrategický význam ke kalibraci své „ekvidistantní“ zahraniční politiky jako nárazníkový stát sevřený mezi asijské supervelmoci. Káthmándú má historické vazby s Novým Dillí – jako jediné někdejší hinduistické království na světě – na základě Smlouvy o míru a přátelství z roku 1950.

Bilaterální vztahy Nového Dillí s Kathamdu se však zhoršily kvůli dlouhodobým hraničním sporům a obviněním ze „šikanózní taktiky Velkého bratra“.

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„Poslední velký spisovatel Ruska“: Skandální příběh Eduarda Limonova – exilu KGB, než šokoval postsovětskou Moskvu



Nepál se odklonil od Indie. Bilaterální vztahy zažily nový chlad krátce poté, co zemi v roce 2015 zpustošilo strašlivé zemětřesení, které si vyžádalo přes 9000 obětí.

Patová situace začala poté, co Nové Dillí uvalilo „*trestající*“ čtyřměsíční ekonomickou blokádu, která vstoupila v platnost několik měsíců po zemětřesení. Omezení následovala po protestech proti nové ústavě země ze strany Madhesis, kteří jsou etnicky a sociálně blízcí Indům za hranicemi.

Jejich hlavní stížností byla diskriminace a nedostatek akceptace ze strany nepálského státu, který byl vždy hájemstvím hinduistů z vyšší kasty. Předpokládalo se, že lidé z kopců shlíželi na ty z Terai neboli jižních plání země. Madhesis, kteří tvoří asi 30 % z odhadovaných 30 milionů lidí v Nepálu, uvedli určitá opatření týkající se občanství, která by je podle jejich názoru neúměrně ovlivnila kvůli přeshraničním sňatkům s Indií.

Nepálská politika Indie byla z velké části viděna skrze Madhesiho prizma. Ale taková krátkozraká sousedská strategie často vedla k eskalaci napětí mezi obyvateli nížin a horalů, kteří tam v posledních desetiletích migrovali.

Káthmándú v diplomatickém souboji vystupňovalo napětí zveřejněním nové mapy, která vyhrotila sporné hraniční spory v roce 2020. Káthmándú si fakticky nárokovalo Kalapani, Limpiyadhura a Lipulekh, což je část indického hornatého státu Uttarakhand, jako součást své suverénní území. Nové Dillí se zarazilo a označilo mapu za „*umělou a nepřijatelnou*“.

Ukázalo se, že toto zhoršení je pro Indii ještě bolestivější v kontextu trojúhelníkových vztahů, kde se Čína objevila jako slon v místnosti.



SOUBOR FOTOGRAFIE. Nepálští aktivisté protestující proti Indii ukazují papíry napsané s jejich odvoláním, když je zadržuje policie před indickou ambasádou v Kathmandu, Nepál, čtvrtek 10. prosince 2015. © AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha

China 'checkmates' India

China, Nepal's northern neighbor, is cashing in on India's weakening grip over Kathmandu. Beijing has been raining cash on Nepal for massive infrastructure development in the mountainous nation, tackling both inaccessible terrain and an economy which is heavily dependent on remittances and tourism.

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Beijing has been suggesting to Kathmandu that the Himalayas may not be a barrier for rail-based trade with the rest of Asia or Europe, or even maritime trade through the South China

Sea. The landlocked country is now actively considering alternatives to India's sea ports such as Kolkata and Visakhapatnam, eyeing instead China's sea and dry ports such as Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang Lanzhou, Lhasa, and Xigatse, respectively, which will be more accessible once road and rail links are established under Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

India needs to deepen trade facilitation for Nepal to keep the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) relevant as a maritime sub-regional grouping.

But that policy move has hit a roadblock, because Beijing has always considered Nepal as the soft underbelly of southern Tibet and has been consistently looking to ramp up its trade engagement with Kathmandu.

Data shows that China in 1995 accounted for a negligible 0.7% of Kathmandu's trade and the remaining 99.03% was with India. Almost three decades on, the corresponding figure shows that Nepal's trade with India has fallen to around 64%.

China has become the new India for Nepal.

FILE PHOTO. Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi shake hand each other after exchange MoU in Kathmandu, Nepal on Monday, September 09, 2019. © Narayan Maharjan/NurPhoto via Getty Images

In 2019, China accounted for around 40% of new foreign direct investments (FDIs) in Nepal, against India's 30%.

Besides, from the mid-1990s, the Chinese Communist Party has been pledging \$11.65 million per year to Nepal under an economic and technical cooperation program to implement infrastructure

development projects.

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But now Beijing is generously loosening its purse strings for massive infrastructure projects in the country, estimated to amount to \$15 billion.

An impoverished Nepal has no option but to curry favor with China, even at the risk of becoming another Sri Lanka.

Nepal, a 'flawed' democracy

The nation is in the throes of a massive exodus of its youth bulge due to lack of economic opportunities. GDP is around \$30 billion and has further dwindled since the Covid-19 pandemic, amid heightened political instability since the abolition of the monarchy in 2008.

On average, 3,000 young people leave the country daily either on work or student visas, and most are unlikely to return.

Remittances of over \$9 billion and around 25% of GDP, and tourism at over \$2 billion and an estimated 7% of GDP, are the major revenue sources, besides foreign aid, which tops \$2 billion annually.

Nepal's tryst with a "flawed" democracy began in 1990. Following a popular uprising the country became a constitutional monarchy.

There have been 28 prime ministers since 1990 and several of them, including Girija Prasad Koirala, Surya Bahadur Thapa, Deuba and now Prachanda (real name Pushpa Kamal Dahal), have occupied the office multiple times in a game of musical chairs. None have completed the five-year term since 1990.

FILE PHOTO. A woman casts her vote during the general election in Kathmandu, Nepal, Sunday, Nov. 20, 2022. © AP Photo/Niranjana Shrestha

Significantly, New Delhi was caught out by Prachanda becoming PM for a third time, having backed his opponent Deuba to assume office for a record sixth time, after his Nepali Congress party emerged as the largest after federal elections last year.

Can New Delhi fix its oversight?

India is trying to address its Nepal oversight while China appears to be winning hands down in a new “Great Game.”

Earlier this month, India’s Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra and Nepal’s Prime Minister Prachanda discussed a raft of bilateral issues, including energy, trade and connectivity in Kathmandu.

Kwatra, who had served as Indian envoy to Nepal, is familiar with the country’s fickle political landscape. He held wide-ranging talks with a cross-section of Nepal’s politicians from various parties during his two-day visit that concluded on Tuesday.

The meetings were held close on the heels of high-level US delegation visits to Nepal.

FILE PHOTO. Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra speak towards media as after Covishield COVID-19 vaccine arrive from Air India at Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal on Thursday, January 21, 2021. © Narayan Maharjan/NurPhoto via Getty Images

The US gaze

Nepal is also key to the US putting a spanner in the works of China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

During her recent visit to Nepal, Victoria Nuland was entrusted with political and diplomatic engagement while Samantha Power emphasized economic cooperation and partnership in key areas, where Kathmandu is in dire need of assistance.

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Afreen Akhter's trip laid out the contours of troubled regional issues, where India and China are at odds over Beijing's occupation of Tibet in 1959 and its bid to make Kathmandu dance to its tune.

The US wants to emerge as a force to reckon with, having looked at Nepal primarily through the prism of aid. However, Washington is shifting gears and trying to win over Kathmandu, which has been showing a more pronounced pro-Beijing tilt, and could further embrace China under Prachanda's dyed-in-the-wool Communist ideology.

Nuland announced that Washington would invest more than \$1 billion in clean energy, electrification, and small businesses led by women and under-represented communities in Nepal over the next five years. Power, too, highlighted US largesse, such as a \$58.5-million grant to strengthen "*inclusive democracy and support civil society organizations*" and extended an invitation from US President Joe Biden to participate in the Summit for Democracy in March.

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The visits assume significance because they directly impact US-Nepal relations, including the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a \$500-million grant for infrastructure development, which was endorsed by Kathmandu last year amid intense debate. Subsequent ratification by Nepal's parliament also upset China.

Initially, Prachanda, then a key Opposition figure, appeared to be in two minds over the MCC, but later backed the initiative.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu had turned up the heat on Kathmandu ahead of the ratification, even threatening to ‘revisit’ bilateral ties, if Nepal reneged on ratifying the MCC, which the Washington sees as its move to counter Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The US is even more keen to woo Nepal after Kathmandu rejected the State Partnership Program (SPP), an exchange program between the US National Guard and foreign militaries.

Amid a changing world order, Kathmandu is a critical jigsaw piece in Washington’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, which has raised China’s hackles.

The high-level US visits to Nepal have become routine. However, China is apprehensive that a proactive Washington could be a part of a strategy to destabilize Asia’s biggest economy.

FILE PHOTO. Nepal's former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, left, reacts as newly elected prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, right, takes oath during a ceremony at the President House in Kathmandu, Nepal, Monday, Dec. 26, 2022. © AP Photo/Niranjana Shrestha

Interestingly, Deuba was the last Nepalese prime minister to visit the US, in 2002. However, despite Prachanda’s anticipated trip to Washington, his first official foreign visit will be to India, expected after the election of Nepal’s new president and vice-president on March 9 and 19, respectively.

Fresh turmoil in Nepal’s politics

In a clear “*breach of understanding*,” Prachanda ditched coalition partner the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN (UML)) over its choice of presidential candidate. In a meeting presided over by former prime minister KP Oli, the CPN (UML) decided to back party vice-chairman Subhas Nembang in the upcoming poll.

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However, Nepal’s eight political parties, including Prachanda’s Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC), back Ram Chandra Poudel for the country's top job. Poudel, 78, is favourite to succeed incumbent Bidya Devi Bhandari as the next president because of the overwhelming support he is likely to receive from across the eight parties, the majority of which are backed by New Delhi and eschew Beijing.

However Prachanda’s U-turn over the backing of the presidential candidate may lead to the CPN (UML) withdrawing support from the federal government and the ruling coalition after the election.

Prachanda, with a deft touch of opportunist politics that has been his hallmark throughout a chequered career, had agreed to restore the NC-led electoral alliance including the CPN (Maoist Center), CPN (Unified Socialist), Socialist Party of Nepal and other fringe parties. Such a coalition would be connected with New Delhi gaining a temporary edge in decision-making as Beijing plots its next move to play kingmaker, while the US haplessly watches from the sidelines.

What should Kathmandu do?

Can Nepal strike a balance between India and China? Or should it choose a bear hug with the US and incur China’s wrath while maintaining cordial ties with India, which is still a lifeline for most of its trade and transit?

US Ambassador to Nepal, Dean R Thompson, laid out a possible roadmap for Kathmandu's foreign policy last month and rejected allegations of US interference in Nepal's internal affairs.

Dean Richard Thompson, the United States ambassador to Nepal. ©
U.S. EMBASSY IN NEPAL

Thompson, who assumed tenure last October, said, "*Nepal should be able to make its own (foreign policy) decisions,*" stressing that "*the country's location has made it geopolitically important.*"

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However, he rejected claims that the various political and financial projects are a preamble for the arrival of American troops in Nepal.

The envoy also claimed that Washington did not view Kathmandu through New Delhi's lens, to keep Beijing at bay.

But the diplomatic assertions must be borne out by how Prachanda has been trying to strike a diplomatic balancing act amid a dwindling state exchequer, political instability and popular disenchantment with "*opportunist*" politicians.

For the moment, it appears to be advantageous to India. But in the unfolding 'Great Game,' China is likely to have the last word as Washington tries to decode the rough and tumble of Nepali politics, where alliances have lost their relevance and cast doubt over a nation's integrity and test of character.

Thus, the current state of affairs has been created by rank opportunism by a motley crew of wily politicians with an insatiable hunger to cling to power.

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Vlastnosti

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