

India's Vaccine Halt, China's Advance, and Nepal's Diplomatic Recalibration: A Pragmatic Shift

Mr. Haider Murtaza Nulwala

MSc Student, Microbiology, Kishinchand Chellaram College, HSNC University

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed vaccines into instruments of geopolitical leverage, exposing the fragility of reliance on single suppliers. India's Vaccine Maitri initiative initially consolidated New Delhi's image as a humanitarian leader, but the abrupt suspension of exports in March 2021 destabilised regional immunisation and eroded credibility. Nepal, historically tethered to India, confronted a strategic vacuum that compelled diversification. China's rapid deployment of Sinopharm doses, embedded within the Health Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative, reframed Beijing as a reliable interlocutor and deepened its entanglement with Kathmandu. This paper employs discourse analysis of policy documents, media narratives, and scholarship to show how India's reputational turbulence, China's opportunistic reliability, and Nepal's adaptive pragmatism converged to redefine South Asia's balance, positioning reliability and timeliness as decisive determinants of soft-power efficacy.

Keywords: vaccine diplomacy, soft power, Health Silk Road, India–Nepal relations, Belt and Road Initiative, small-state foreign policy, geopolitical reliability, COVID-19 diplomacy, South Asia, agency in asymmetric geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic reconstituted vaccines into instruments of statecraft, transforming humanitarian aid into a currency of geopolitical leverage. India's Vaccine Maitri initiative, launched in January 2021, sought to fuse manufacturing capacity with normative leadership, positioning New Delhi as a humanitarian actor in the Global South.¹ Within weeks, millions of doses had been dispatched across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, consolidating India's image as the "pharmacy of the world."²

Yet by March 2021, as the Delta variant overwhelmed Indian cities, exports were abruptly suspended to prioritise domestic demand.³ This rupture destabilised immunisation trajectories in neighbouring states and exposed the fragility of reliance on a single supplier.⁴ For Nepal, historically tethered to India through cultural and treaty-based ties, the halt was not merely a logistical disruption but a strategic vacuum. Half a million Nepalis awaiting their second Covishield dose faced uncertainty, compelling Kathmandu to recalibrate its external orientation.⁵

China's rapid deployment of Sinopharm doses reframed Beijing as a reliable interlocutor, embedding vaccine flows within the broader architecture of the Health Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative.⁶ This opportunistic reliability deepened economic-diplomatic entanglement with Nepal, contrasting sharply with India's reputational turbulence. The episode unfolded against an already strained backdrop of India–

Nepal relations, marked by the 2015 blockade and 2020 border disputes, which had sensitised Nepal's political class to the risks of overreliance.⁷

LITERATURE REVIEW

India's Vaccine Maitri and the Limits of Soft Power

India's Vaccine Maitri initiative was initially celebrated as an extension of its "Neighbourhood First" policy, projecting New Delhi as a humanitarian leader in the Global South.¹ Scholars emphasised India's manufacturing prowess and moral leadership, framing vaccine exports as a form of soft power.² However, critiques argue that India's diplomacy outpaced its infrastructure, promising more doses than its supply chains could sustain.³ Analyses of soft power in crisis contexts highlight that credibility depends less on symbolic gestures than on continuity and reliability.⁴

China's Health Silk Road Diplomacy

China's vaccine diplomacy has been analysed as part of its broader Health Silk Road strategy, linking health aid to infrastructure and trade under the Belt and Road Initiative.⁵ Scholars note that Beijing's speed and consistency contrasted sharply with India's unpredictability, reinforcing its image as a reliable partner.⁶ Studies of Chinese aid in Southeast Asia and Africa similarly show that timeliness often outweighs debates over efficacy.⁷ The integration of vaccine flows with duty-free trade access and infrastructure projects illustrates how China embeds health diplomacy within long-term economic entanglements.⁸

Nepal's Small-State Pragmatism

Nepal's foreign policy recalibration during the pandemic exemplifies small-state agency in asymmetric geopolitics. Policy researchers argue that vaccine delays deepened pre-existing strains in India–Nepal relations, including the 2015 blockade and 2020 border disputes.⁹ Comparative studies of small states highlight hedging and diversification as survival strategies, enabling autonomy without formal alignment.¹⁰ Nepal's engagement with China, India, COVAX, and international donors reflects this pattern of multivector diplomacy.¹¹ Scholars of Himalayan geopolitics emphasise that neutrality has become Nepal's new alignment, a pragmatic adaptation to systemic crises.¹²

Reliability and Timeliness as Determinants of Power

Across the literature, a recurring theme is the centrality of reliability and timeliness in health diplomacy. Studies of humanitarian aid in crisis contexts argue that credibility is measured not by rhetoric but by the ability to deliver under duress.¹³ Analyses of vaccine diplomacy in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia reinforce this finding: states that delivered quickly, even with contested efficacy, gained reputational advantage.¹⁴ For small states, systemic crises become opportunities to renegotiate asymmetrical relationships, leveraging great-power competition to maximise options.¹⁵

METHODOLOGY

Analytical Framework This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis framework to interrogate the intersection of vaccine diplomacy and small-state foreign policy adaptation. Discourse analysis is particularly suited to examining how narratives of reliability, vulnerability, and agency are constructed in policy documents, media coverage, and scholarly debates, allowing the researcher to trace how humanitarian aid was reframed as geopolitical currency during the pandemic.¹⁶

Case Selection Nepal is selected as the focal case due to its structural position between India and China, its historical dependence on Indian supply chains, and its rapid diversification during the vaccine crisis.

Case study methodology enables contextualised analysis of small-state agency in asymmetric geopolitics while preserving empirical specificity.¹⁷ The Nepal case is situated within comparative scholarship on small states in South Asia and beyond, enabling theoretical generalisation while retaining empirical depth.¹⁸

Sources and Data The empirical material for this research is drawn from triangulated sources. Policy documents include India's Ministry of External Affairs statements on Vaccine Maitri, WHO's COVAX supply data, and Belt and Road Initiative reports, which together provide insight into the official framing of vaccine diplomacy. Media narratives from *The Hindu*, *Kathmandu Post*, and *Xinhua News* capture public sentiment and diplomatic discourse, while secondary scholarship offers theoretical grounding in soft power, small-state diplomacy, and reliability as a determinant of influence.¹⁹

Theoretical Anchors The analysis is guided by three theoretical traditions. First, soft power theory emphasises credibility and normative leadership as determinants of influence.²⁰ Second, small-state diplomacy literature highlights hedging and diversification as survival strategies in asymmetric contexts.²¹ Third, institutionalist perspectives on reliability and timeliness underscore their role as emergent determinants of power in crisis diplomacy.²²

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

India's Vaccine Diplomacy and Its Limits India's Vaccine Maitri initiative initially projected New Delhi as a humanitarian leader in South Asia and beyond. The early shipments of Covishield doses to Nepal were framed as an extension of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, reinforcing cultural and treaty-based ties and consolidating India's image as the "pharmacy of the world."²³ However, the abrupt suspension of exports in March 2021 revealed the fragility of this soft-power projection. What had been celebrated as solidarity was reinterpreted as vulnerability, as half a million Nepalis awaiting their second dose faced uncertainty.²⁴ The results demonstrate that India's credibility was undermined not by intent but by its inability to sustain continuity under domestic crisis. This reputational turbulence weakened India's normative leadership and opened space for alternative suppliers.

China's Reliability and Strategic Advance China's rapid deployment of Sinopharm doses to Nepal reframed Beijing as a reliable interlocutor. Within weeks of India's suspension, Chinese aircraft delivered vaccines, embedding health aid within the broader architecture of the Health Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative.²⁵ The consistency of Chinese provision contrasted sharply with India's unpredictability, appealing to both public sentiment and political pragmatism. The results show that reliability, when demonstrated under systemic crisis, becomes a determinant of influence more powerful than efficacy debates. China's opportunistic reliability converted a health emergency into a geopolitical opening, deepening Nepal's economic-diplomatic entanglement and reinforcing Beijing's long-term narrative of dependable partnership.²⁶

Nepal's Pragmatic Diversification Nepal's response was neither passive nor ideological but pragmatic. The vaccine crisis accelerated diversification, with Kathmandu engaging China, India, COVAX, and international donors simultaneously. Neutrality became the new alignment, reflecting a hedging strategy characteristic of small states in asymmetric geopolitics.²⁷ The results highlight that Nepal leveraged systemic crisis to renegotiate asymmetrical relationships, refusing to bandwagon with either India or China exclusively. By asserting agency through multivector diplomacy, Nepal transformed dependency into negotiation, positioning itself as a case study in how small states convert vulnerability into strategic autonomy.²⁸

Regional Trust and Strategic Balance The vaccine halt unfolded against a backdrop of strained India–Nepal relations, including the 2015 blockade and 2020 border disputes.²⁹ These prior disruptions had already sensitised Nepal’s political class to the risks of overreliance on India. The suspension reopened questions of trust, reinforcing perceptions of unpredictability in Indian diplomacy. The results indicate that reputational damage in crisis diplomacy is cumulative: each disruption compounds prior grievances, making recovery more difficult. India’s later resumption of exports and participation in COVAX partially restored credibility, but the reputational dent lingered, reminding policymakers that humanitarian diplomacy must rest on resilient supply chains rather than sentiment.³⁰

Synthesis of Results

Taken together, the results demonstrate that India’s reputational turbulence, China’s opportunistic reliability, and Nepal’s adaptive pragmatism converged to redefine South Asia’s diplomatic balance. Reliability and timeliness emerged as decisive determinants of soft-power efficacy, while small states leveraged systemic crises to renegotiate asymmetrical relationships and assert agency within contested geopolitical spaces.³¹

DISCUSSION

Reliability as the Currency of Soft Power The findings demonstrate that reliability and timeliness, rather than intent or capacity alone, are decisive determinants of soft-power efficacy. India’s Vaccine Maitri embodied humanitarian ambition but faltered when domestic crisis forced suspension, revealing the fragility of credibility under duress. China’s opportunistic reliability, by contrast, reframed Beijing as a dependable partner, illustrating that continuity of provision can outweigh debates over efficacy. This dynamic advances soft-power theory by shifting emphasis from attraction through values to attraction through trust, suggesting that credibility in crisis diplomacy is measured by performance under pressure.³²

Small-State Agency in Asymmetric Geopolitics Nepal’s recalibration illustrates how small states leverage systemic crises to renegotiate asymmetrical relationships. By diversifying vaccine sources and refusing to bandwagon with either India or China exclusively, Nepal asserted agency through hedging and multivector diplomacy. This case contributes to small-state literature by showing that vulnerability can be converted into negotiation, and that neutrality can function as alignment in contexts of great-power competition.³³ The pandemic thus becomes a lens through which to understand small-state pragmatism: crises are not merely threats but opportunities to expand strategic options and renegotiate dependency.³⁴

Regional Trust and Strategic Balance The vaccine halt compounded pre-existing strains in India–Nepal relations, reinforcing perceptions of unpredictability in Indian diplomacy. Trust, once eroded, proved difficult to restore even after exports resumed. This cumulative reputational damage underscores that humanitarian diplomacy must rest on resilient supply chains rather than sentiment. For South Asia, the episode redefined strategic balance: India’s normative leadership was weakened, China’s reliability was amplified, and Nepal’s agency was strengthened.³⁵ Constructively, this suggests that regional order is not only shaped by material capabilities but also by perceptions of credibility and continuity in crisis response.³⁶

Global Implications for Health Diplomacy Beyond South Asia, the Nepal case contributes to global debates on health diplomacy. Comparative studies in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia show similar patterns: states that delivered vaccines quickly, even with contested efficacy, gained reputational advantage.³⁷ The Nepal case reinforces this finding, illustrating that timeliness and reliability are universal determinants of influence in health diplomacy. Constructively, this advances theory by positioning “trust

under duress” as a metric of power in the Global South, suggesting that humanitarian aid must be institutionalised to ensure continuity in future crises.³⁸

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how India’s reputational turbulence, China’s opportunistic reliability, and Nepal’s adaptive pragmatism converged to redefine South Asia’s diplomatic balance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrate that reliability and timeliness, rather than intent or capacity alone, are decisive determinants of soft-power efficacy. India’s Vaccine Maitri initiative embodied humanitarian ambition but faltered when domestic crisis forced suspension, eroding credibility and exposing the fragility of dependence. China’s rapid and consistent provision of Sinopharm doses reframed Beijing as a reliable interlocutor, embedding health aid within the broader architecture of the Health Silk Road.³⁹ Nepal’s pragmatic diversification illustrated small-state agency, showing how systemic crises can be leveraged to renegotiate asymmetrical relationships and assert autonomy through multivector diplomacy.⁴⁰

The contribution of this paper lies in advancing soft-power theory by reframing credibility under duress as the true currency of influence in global health diplomacy. It also enriches small-state literature by demonstrating that neutrality can function as alignment, and that vulnerability can be converted into negotiation. For policymakers, the Nepal case underscores the importance of institutionalising continuity in humanitarian aid, ensuring that supply chains are resilient enough to sustain credibility in future crises.⁴¹ At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. The analysis is focused on a single case, which, while illustrative, cannot capture the full diversity of small-state responses across the Global South. Future research should extend this framework to comparative studies in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, where similar dynamics of reliability and opportunistic diplomacy have unfolded.⁴²

Ultimately, the Nepal case demonstrates that systemic crises are not merely disruptions but opportunities to reshape regional order. In South Asia, the pandemic redefined trust, recalibrated alignments, and revealed that credibility in humanitarian diplomacy rests not on sentiment but on the capacity to deliver under pressure. This insight carries enduring relevance for the study of international relations, reminding scholars and policymakers alike that in moments of crisis, reliability becomes power.⁴³

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ministry of External Affairs, *Vaccine Maitri: Delivering Vaccines to the World* (Government of India, 2021).
2. M. Khan and K. Dhama, “Vaccine Maitri: India’s Soft Power Diplomacy,” ORF Occasional Paper No. 294 (2021); R. Singh, P. Mehta, and V. Rao, “India’s Global Health Strategy Post-COVID,” *Contemporary South Asia* 31, no. 1 (2023): 1–19.
3. “India Halts Vaccine Exports Amid COVID Surge,” *The Hindu*, March 25, 2021.
4. R. Banerji, “India’s Vaccine Diplomacy Faltered Amid COVID Surge,” *The Hindu*, April 25, 2021.
5. S. Maskey and R. Pandey, “Nepal’s Vaccine Crisis and Foreign Policy Choices,” *South Asia Journal* 15, no. 2 (2021): 89–104.
6. D. Baruah, “China’s Health Silk Road: A Pandemic Strategy,” *Carnegie India Report* (2021); R. Tanwar, “The Health Silk Road and China’s Strategic Gains,” *Asian Strategic Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 98–117.

7. A. Giri, "Nepal Starts Vaccination with Indian Doses," Kathmandu Post, January 27, 2021; Institute of Chinese Studies, *India–Nepal Relations in the Shadow of COVID-19*, Policy Brief (2021).
8. Ministry of External Affairs, *Vaccine Maitri: Delivering Vaccines to the World* (Government of India, 2021); M. Khan and K. Dhama, "Vaccine Maitri: India's Soft Power Diplomacy," ORF Occasional Paper No. 294 (2021); R. Singh, P. Mehta, and V. Rao, "India's Global Health Strategy Post-COVID," *Contemporary South Asia* 31, no. 1 (2023): 1–19.
9. R. Banerji, "India's Vaccine Diplomacy Falts Amid COVID Surge," *The Hindu*, April 25, 2021; "India Halts Vaccine Exports Amid COVID Surge," *The Hindu*, March 25, 2021.
10. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); A. Singh and S. Raj, "Soft Power in Crisis: India's Vaccine Diplomacy," *Journal of International Relations* 40, no. 3 (2022): 210–229.
11. D. Baruah, "China's Health Silk Road: A Pandemic Strategy," *Carnegie India Report* (2021); R. Tanwar, "The Health Silk Road and China's Strategic Gains," *Asian Strategic Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 98–117.
12. Yanzhong Huang, "China's Vaccine Diplomacy in the Global South," *Council on Foreign Relations Brief* (2021); D. Zhang, "Vaccine Diplomacy and China's Global Image," *Journal of Contemporary China* 31, no. 133 (2022): 1–18.
13. H. Liu, "China's COVID-19 Aid to Africa: A Soft Power Strategy," *African Affairs* 120, no. 480 (2021): 563–582; Y. Wang, "China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Affairs* 53, no. 1 (2022): 34–50.
14. Belt and Road Portal, *Health Silk Road: Progress and Prospects* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 2023); L. Zhou, "China's Vaccine Diplomacy and the Belt and Road," *Asia Global Papers* 2022, no. 4.
15. S. Maskey and R. Pandey, "Nepal's Vaccine Crisis and Foreign Policy Choices," *South Asia Journal* 15, no. 2 (2021): 89–104; A. Giri, "Nepal Starts Vaccination with Indian Doses," Kathmandu Post, January 27, 2021.
16. Baldur Thorhallsson, *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2018); A. Chong, "Hedging in International Relations: Small States in the Asia-Pacific," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 378–395.
17. World Health Organization, *COVAX Vaccine Deliveries to Nepal* (2021); Institute of Chinese Studies, *India–Nepal Relations in the Shadow of COVID-19*, Policy Brief (2021).
18. B. Baral, "Nepal's Foreign Policy in the Pandemic Era," *South Asian Survey* 29, no. 1 (2022): 33–49; A. Acharya, "Small States and Strategic Autonomy in South Asia," *Journal of Asian Affairs* 54, no. 2 (2023): 145–162.
19. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.
20. P. Riggiozzi, "Latin America's Vaccine Diplomacy: Between China and the West," *Global Policy* 12, no. 4 (2021): 456–468; I. Kickbusch, "Vaccine Diplomacy and Global Health Governance," *Global Health Journal* 6, no. 1 (2022): 12–20.
21. David A. Baldwin, *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

22. Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Routledge, 2010); Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (London: Sage, 2016).
23. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
24. Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018); Baldur Thorhallsson, *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2018).
25. Ministry of External Affairs, *Vaccine Maitri: Delivering Vaccines to the World* (Government of India, 2021); World Health Organization, *COVAX Vaccine Deliveries to Nepal* (2021); Belt and Road Portal, *Health Silk Road: Progress and Prospects* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 2023); R. Banerji, "India's Vaccine Diplomacy Faltering Amid COVID Surge," *The Hindu*, April 25, 2021; A. Giri, "Nepal Starts Vaccination with Indian Doses," *Kathmandu Post*, January 27, 2021; "China Sends Vaccine Aid to Nepal," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 2, 2021; D. Baruah, "China's Health Silk Road: A Pandemic Strategy," *Carnegie India Report* (2021); R. Tanwar, "The Health Silk Road and China's Strategic Gains," *Asian Strategic Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 98–117.
26. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); A. Singh and S. Raj, "Soft Power in Crisis: India's Vaccine Diplomacy," *Journal of International Relations* 40, no. 3 (2022): 210–229.
27. A. Chong, "Hedging in International Relations: Small States in the Asia-Pacific," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 378–395.
28. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.
29. Ministry of External Affairs, *Vaccine Maitri: Delivering Vaccines to the World* (Government of India, 2021); M. Khan and K. Dhama, "Vaccine Maitri: India's Soft Power Diplomacy," *ORF Occasional Paper No. 294* (2021); R. Singh, P. Mehta, and V. Rao, "India's Global Health Strategy Post-COVID," *Contemporary South Asia* 31, no. 1 (2023): 1–19.
30. R. Banerji, "India's Vaccine Diplomacy Faltering Amid COVID Surge," *The Hindu*, April 25, 2021; S. Maskey and R. Pandey, "Nepal's Vaccine Crisis and Foreign Policy Choices," *South Asia Journal* 15, no. 2 (2021): 89–104.
31. D. Baruah, "China's Health Silk Road: A Pandemic Strategy," *Carnegie India Report* (2021); R. Tanwar, "The Health Silk Road and China's Strategic Gains," *Asian Strategic Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 98–117; "China Sends Vaccine Aid to Nepal," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 2, 2021.
32. D. Zhang, "Vaccine Diplomacy and China's Global Image," *Journal of Contemporary China* 31, no. 133 (2022): 1–18; H. Liu, "China's COVID-19 Aid to Africa: A Soft Power Strategy," *African Affairs* 120, no. 480 (2021): 563–582.
33. Baldur Thorhallsson, *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2018); A. Chong, "Hedging in International Relations: Small States in the Asia-Pacific," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 378–395.
34. A. Acharya, "Small States and Strategic Autonomy in South Asia," *Journal of Asian Affairs* 54, no. 2 (2023): 145–162; B. Baral, "Nepal's Foreign Policy in the Pandemic Era," *South Asian Survey* 29, no. 1 (2022): 33–49.

35. Institute of Chinese Studies, *India–Nepal Relations in the Shadow of COVID-19*, Policy Brief (2021); A. Giri, “Nepal Starts Vaccination with Indian Doses,” Kathmandu Post, January 27, 2021.
36. A. Singh and S. Raj, “Soft Power in Crisis: India’s Vaccine Diplomacy,” *Journal of International Relations* 40, no. 3 (2022): 210–229; R. Gupta, “India’s Vaccine Diplomacy: Promise and Pitfalls,” *International Affairs Review* 101, no. 1 (2025): 77–94.
37. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917; P. Ruggirozzi, “Latin America’s Vaccine Diplomacy: Between China and the West,” *Global Policy* 12, no. 4 (2021): 456–468.
38. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); A. Singh and S. Raj, “Soft Power in Crisis: India’s Vaccine Diplomacy,” *Journal of International Relations* 40, no. 3 (2022): 210–229.
39. Baldur Thorhallsson, *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland’s External Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2018).
40. A. Chong, “Hedging in International Relations: Small States in the Asia-Pacific,” *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 378–395; A. Acharya, “Small States and Strategic Autonomy in South Asia,” *Journal of Asian Affairs* 54, no. 2 (2023): 145–162.
41. Institute of Chinese Studies, *India–Nepal Relations in the Shadow of COVID-19*, Policy Brief (2021).
42. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.
43. P. Ruggirozzi, “Latin America’s Vaccine Diplomacy: Between China and the West,” *Global Policy* 12, no. 4 (2021): 456–468; I. Kickbusch, “Vaccine Diplomacy and Global Health Governance,” *Global Health Journal* 6, no. 1 (2022): 12–20; Ilona Kickbusch and Mihály Kökény, *Global Health Diplomacy: Concepts, Issues, Actors, Instruments, Fora and Cases* (Springer Briefs in Public Health, 2013).
44. A. Acharya, “Strategic Hedging in South Asia: Nepal’s Foreign Policy Choices,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 18, no. 2 (2022): 201–219.
45. D. Adhikari, “Nepal’s Vaccine Gamble,” *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2021.
46. S. Ahmed, “India’s COVID-19 Diplomacy: Between Soft Power and Strategic Interests,” *South Asia Monitor* (2021).
47. K. Bajpai, “India’s Regional Diplomacy in the Pandemic Era,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 17, no. 1 (2022): 45–60.
48. L. R. Baral, “Nepal’s Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change,” *Nepal Foreign Policy Review* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1–20.
49. C. D. Bhatta, “Vaccine Politics and Nepal’s Strategic Dilemma,” *The Record Nepal*, July 15, 2021.
50. K. Bhattarai, “Nepal’s Vaccine Diplomacy: Between India and China,” *Nepali Times*, August 3, 2021.
51. S. Chaturvedi, *Development Diplomacy and India’s Global Role*, RIS Discussion Paper no. 267 (2021).
52. D. R. Chaudhury, “India’s Vaccine Diplomacy: A Strategic Overview,” *Economic Times*, February 10, 2021.
53. D. R. Dahal, *Nepal’s Foreign Policy in the COVID Era* (Nepal Institute for Policy Studies, 2021).

54. S. Ganguly, "India's Strategic Dilemma in South Asia," *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 3 (2021): 112–125.
55. P. Gautam, "Nepal's Vaccine Strategy: Lessons from the Pandemic," *South Asia Journal* 16, no. 1 (2021): 55–70.
56. Y. Ghimire, "Nepal's Vaccine Diplomacy: A Balancing Act," *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2021.
57. Z. Haider, "China's Vaccine Diplomacy in South Asia," *Reuters*, May 5, 2021.
58. P. Jha, "India's Vaccine Diplomacy: Between Altruism and Strategy," *The Wire*, March 30, 2021.
59. B. Joshi, "Nepal's Foreign Policy Realignment," *Journal of Himalayan Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 88–104.
60. A. Karki, "Nepal's Vaccine Procurement Challenges," *Republica*, April 15, 2021.
61. A. Kumar, "India's Vaccine Diplomacy: A Soft Power Strategy," *ORF Online*, February 18, 2021