



## India and China's Tug of War over Nepal

### Why in news?

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

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### What is the status of India-Nepal relations?

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

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

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## **What is the new development?**

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  - India sees the recent announcement of military exercise as China encroachment in India's backyard.
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    - India wants to maintain Nepal as its "sphere of influence" while China wants to increase its influence.
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      - 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.

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## **What should be done?**

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

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