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Geopolitics of landlocked states in South Asia: a comparative analysis of Afghanistan and Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Foreign policies of landlocked states have been a topic of interest for scholarship on international relations but the landlocked states in South Asia have received negligible attention. Due to their geographical realities, South Asian landlocked states that include Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, depend on their neighbours for trade with the outside world. A range of factors place landlocked states in an unequal relationship with their coastal neighbours. While these factors include the superiority of coastal neighbours in terms of economy, population size, and military strength, we argue that their landlockedness plays a crucial role. To further investigate the role of landlockedness, this study compares the foreign policy decisions that guide India-Nepal and Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. Based on the assessment of historical, economic and geopolitical factors, we argue that India and Pakistan exploit their landlocked

neighbours to achieve their national interests. Frustrated by the treatment of their coastal neighbours and the presence of new trade opportunities have compelled Afghanistan to use its closeness with India to counter over-dependence on Pakistan and Nepal has enhanced cooperation with China to overcome its reliance on India, thereby creating a new geopolitical dynamic within South Asia.

KEYWORDS:

- Landlocked states
- geopolitics
- Afghanistan
- Nepal
- India
- Pakistan

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Stuti Bhatnagar is an adjunct fellow at the University of Adelaide, and a Sessional Academic with UNSW. With a PhD in politics and international relations, she specialises in Indian foreign policy and South Asian politics. Her forthcoming book is India’s Pakistan Policy: How Think Tanks Are Shaping Foreign Relations, (Routledge India).

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Notes

1 Several Indian religious and cultural institutions including the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre run by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, the Patanjali Yoga Centre run by Swami Ramdev of India operate in Nepal indicating strong cultural ties.

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