

Piotr KŁODKOWSKI

Tischner European University in Kraków, Poland

pklodkowski@wse.krakow.pl

GEOPOLITICS AND THE ISSUE OF THE BROKEN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NEPAL¹

ABSTRACT

The main objective of my article is to demonstrate the complex issues of geopolitics and national identity in South Asia. Both are interrelated with each other and a political myth on national identity may owe its final shape to geopolitical constraints. These in turn may set limits to social revolutions that intend to transform the society of which the national identity is a vital part. Nepal with its strategic location between India and China and with its revolutionary transformation process is a good illustration of that interrelation. The “clash of political ideas” – which is materialized in the ideological opposition of a revolutionary republic versus a traditional kingdom – is a relevant part of the text. It is noteworthy however that the “clash” should be interpreted in the context of geopolitical strategies initiated by the two Asian superpowers who have their own conflicting interests in Nepal. The domestic strife has its regional dimensions that could be classified as a part of the New Great Game of the 21st century being played out by Beijing and Delhi.

Keywords: geopolitics, political mythology, Nepalese Maoists, national identity, royal massacre

¹ The text was written before the catastrophic earthquake in Nepal in 2015.

It was not uncommon in the 19th and the 20th century to declare that geography significantly determines the destiny of a state and the political interplay of superpowers and empires (or at least the destiny of those states that were ambitious enough to make their own presence quite visible in the world order). The concepts by Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford John Mackinder, Karl Haushofer, Alexander Prokofiev Seversky or Saul Cohen, to name only but a few, have contributed over the years to the creation of various regional or global strategies with a higher or lower potential for practical implementation.² This may have had tragic or even barbarian implications, as it was the case with Haushofer's ideas interpreted by the followers of the "Nazi Geopolitik," but generally the philosophy of geopolitical studies has always had a growing number of takers, not all of them full of evil intentions. After the demise of the communist empire (that was long believed to last forever) and the rapid advancement of ultramodern technologies all the well-devised geopolitical concepts appeared to lose their appeal as the world (according to Thomas Friedman) was becoming really flat and globally interconnected so the theories conceived much earlier could be thought of as obsolete and therefore non-applicable. However, early in the 21st century, politicians and businesspeople alike realized that the world might be flat in some places but others would remain not flat at all, and even the number of these "flat areas" is likely to shrink due to dynamic changes and transformations that were not earlier anticipated.³ In other words, as Robert Kaplan puts it, we are ready to experience "The Revenge of Geography."⁴ Indeed, the global phenomena of technical homogenization, efficient communication and ever-expanding mobility may somehow reduce the constraints of classical geopolitics but even this reduction has its own limits. The philosophy of Realpolitik, deeply immersed in its own reality of geographical, historical, social and cultural facts, might go through the process of re-thinking but it is likely to stay where it was before. Probably with some modifications only.

It is definitely worth stating (despite how intellectually risky it may seem) that the debates on the recent interpretations of the changing concepts of political geography are more applicable to the selected regions of Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia (mostly post-Soviet States), and extended Middle East than to the areas of South Asia where they may have quite limited relevance. It is undeniable that the South-Asian countries have dramatically experienced social and political changes during the last twenty years, but unlike the post-Soviet states or a few Middle Eastern countries they have neither fully reshaped their borders and the political/ideological system, nor totally redefined strategic affiliations and their social revolutions have not led to extremely bloody domestic conflicts and ethnic or religious purges (Afghanistan being the only

² All the theories are usually presented in the classical textbooks on Political Geography. In Poland, for example, these can be found (as summaries of classic doctrines) in a popular academic textbook: Z. Rykiel, *Podstawy geografii politycznej*, Warszawa 2006.

³ See: T. Friedman, *The World Is Flat. A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, New York 2005.

⁴ See: R. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography. What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, New York 2013.

exception). In other words: all the classical ideas on the geopolitical dimensions and constraints of the region are as relevant now as they were twenty or forty years ago. Geography holds its grip tightly so the creativity of local statesmen, strategists or ideologues has its visible limits and those limits have the mitigating power of reducing the scale of potential revolutions and coups. It has also the potential to create, or at least to contribute to creating a concept of the ever-changing national identity, reproduced in the sphere of national symbolism and/or national metaphysics. As David H. Kaplan suggests:

*Geography is an intrinsic part of national identities. [...] Nationalism is an intrinsically geographical doctrine in that it seeks to conjoin a self-identified group of people evol "nation" atwithin a sovereign, bounded geographical area rine "state." Because national identity cannot really be conceived without the presence of a nationalist territorial ideology, national identities must always contend with their geographic manifestations. Spaces are bounded, they have texture, and they are imbued with meanings that represent different elements of the national identity.*⁵

It should be noted however, that the concept of national identity tends to change gradually in a longer perspective or revolutionarily in a much shorter time, and that change may occur within the same geographical space. Nevertheless, the extent and impact of the change is likely to be determined or limited by the geopolitical reality that is usually less prone to substantial modifications. The revolutionary movements could intend to recreate or to invent the "new national identity" as a result of their propagated ideology but all their ideological intentions should be operating within the given cultural and social framework, at least in the first phases of a planned revolution. If this condition is not met they will hardly be able to succeed in transforming both the national identity and ultimately the State. In South Asia it is Nepal that has been undergoing the process of the revolutionary change of its national identity hitherto based primarily on deeply-rooted religious beliefs, linguistic bonds and a common sense of cultural heritage and history. The ancient political mythology was expected to be replaced by its modern version, supposedly more socially appealing. The Maoist movement has had a very strong impact on that process which is closely linked with the issue of political and social stability not only in the domestic arena but in the whole region as well. The social and political unrest does usually have many causes and Nepal is no exception. But it must be stressed that the same causes do not necessarily produce the same results everywhere as every civilizational area has its own distinct cultural and political mechanisms to deal with a crisis situation.⁶

Nepal as a landlocked country neighbouring two superpowers which are frequently able to dominate or – more often – deeply influence the policies of every Kathmandu government, usually plays its own political games carefully so that both political "Big Brothers" would not get strongly disappointed, at least not at the same time and not

⁵ D.H. Kaplan, G.H. Herb, 'How Geography Shapes *National Identities*', *National Identities*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2011), at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2011.629424>>, 25 November 2014.

⁶ See: S.B. Singh, *Nepal, Struggle for Democracy*, New Delhi 2007.

because of the same reasons. This is not to say that Nepalese politicians are fully determined in their domestic and more so in their foreign activities (in fact they are not) but to emphasize that they always select either of the “external factors” in their calculations: the Indian or the Chinese one because both countries have plenty of competitive or even clashing interests in this part of Asia. In fact, Nepal has become another play-field for both Asian states where their international competition is quite fierce and will certainly intensify in the years to come, especially when Beijing will assert its rights in the “close neighbourhood” and Delhi will put up a strong resistance to Chinese plans for regional domination. Indeed, other global players have also their own strong say in Nepalese politics, namely the US, EU and Russia and these may be in conflict with Delhi’s or Beijing’s intentions and strategies. Nepal’s economic dependence on external funding plus its strategic location in Asia have already created a vast political “temptation space” for all the regional and global players who are involved in the Great Game of the 21st century. Unlike in the past, the Game is definitely more regional than global, although various players may perceive it differently.

THE “ROYAL MASSACRE” AND ITS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS. THE END OF THE MYTH OF HINDU MONARCHY?

Nepal, as almost every country in Asia, has a long list of “historical turning points” which shaped to a greater or lesser extent the past and present of the Himalayan state. None of them, however, could have been recently thought of as completely unimaginable, tragic and revolutionary as “the Royal Massacre” of 1 June 2001, frequently compared to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Mahendra Man Singh in his book *Forever Incomplete. The Story of Nepal* describes the scenes of the royal funeral which signifies the beginning of the end of the Nepalese monarchy:

*Three pyres burned fiercely that night while in the distance guns groaned mournfully at one-minute intervals cre” of 1 June 2001, frequently compared to ing’s intentions and strategies. Nepal’s economic dependence on external funding plus its strategic locess Shruti, dearest daughter of His Majesty was respectfully kept aside, as there was room for only three. No one during the thousands of years of the history of Nepal could ever have imagined that four royals would ever be brought to the ghats simultaneously.*⁷

Although the official report on the massacre has been often questioned and plenty of conspiracy theories have come up since June 2001, the “hard” facts cannot be easily disputed. During the traditional dinner-party on 1 June King Birendra, his spouse – queen Aishwarya and seven members of the royal family were killed, allegedly by the crown prince Dipendra who later took his own life. Four other royals were seriously wounded. According to the report, Dipendra, probably drunk and intoxicated with hashish, was armed heavily (with an H&K MP5, a Franchi SPAS-12 and an M16) and fired a single shot into the ceiling before turning the gun on his father, King Birendra.

⁷ M.M. Singh, *Forever Incomplete. The Story of Nepal*, Delhi 2013, p. 255.

The crown prince shot also one of his aunts and his uncle Dhirendra when he unsuccessfully tried to stop the assassin. The shooting continued but not all the persons present during the royal party were killed or seriously wounded. Prince Paras was reported to have suffered only slight injuries and managed to save at least three members of the royal family. The survivors (being in fact the only reliable eyewitnesses) were then able to reconstruct the details of the tragic event.⁸ After the assassination of King Birendra the crown prince Dipendra was subsequently declared king of Nepal when he was still in a coma but he never regained his consciousness and died on 4 June. He was succeeded by Birendra's brother, prince Gyanendra who had been away from Kathmandu on 1 June. It is important to note that Gyanendra was earlier crowned King in 1950 but he officially enjoyed the status of a monarch only for three months when his grandfather, father and elder brother had fled to India. Their political exile lasted only a few months. After their return Tribhuvan (Gyanendra's grandfather and king of Nepal since 1911) regained his throne. All in all, Gyanendra was to become the last king of the Shah dynasty and the last king of Nepal. The abolition of the Nepalese monarchy finally took place in 2008.

The official thus questionable version of the report and the subsequent series of events gave rise to various speculations and conspiracy theories. King Birendra was respected both at home and abroad where he was often regarded as the true guarantor of Nepalese stability in spite of the Maoist rebellion that started in the mid-1990s. He enjoyed much higher status in Nepal than other heads of state in their respective countries as he was traditionally considered to be an avatar (incarnation) of the god Vishnu and believed to have divine powers. The combination of huge popular support and the deeply-rooted belief in the concept of royal divinity made Birendra the undisputed leader who, in addition, possessed personal charisma and a strong character.⁹ His eldest son Dipendra, who turned out to be the king's assassin, did have popular support as well but his position in the royal hierarchy was naturally overshadowed by his father's status. Not surprisingly, the glorious image of the first family in Nepal produced by the state machinery was willingly accepted by the majority of the still very traditionalist population. Therefore, the royal patricide could not have been a phenomenon easily digested by the Nepalese psyche. The myth of divine dynasty had lasted for centuries and was not to disappear quickly. Even the staunch opponents of monarchy did not use the opportunity at that time to discredit the king and his son as both of them symbolized then the State. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known by his *nom de guerre* Prachan-

⁸ All the stories on producing the conspiracy theories, official versions of the assassination and the cultural background of the events are carefully investigated by: A. Willesee, M. Whittaker, *Love and Death in Kathmandu. A Strange Tale of Royal Murder*, London 2013. Although the title may imply a "tabloid story" both authors present a good example of investigative journalism. A few dozens of witnesses have been interrogated, many documents verified, official versions of the event analyzed. I, personally, also made a few attempts to verify the narrated facts. In my diplomatic capacity I met the last Prime Minister of the royal government, a few selected ministers of the same government and the leaders of the Maoist party. The conclusions of my discussions with the interlocutors can be found in the text.

⁹ See: F.G. Hutchins, *Democratizing Monarch. A Memoir of Nepal's King Birendra*, Kathmandu 2007.

da, the chairman of the Nepalese Maoist Party and later the prime minister of Nepal, made a public statement accusing the Indian Intelligence Agency RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) or the American CIA of planning the carnage.¹⁰ The promoters of other theories did not necessarily exclude the “foreign hand” but in the first place pointed out the obvious benefits gained by king Gyanendra himself who otherwise could not ascend the throne. Since the last king was not even in Kathmandu on that fatal day it was not possible to accuse him directly of any active role in the massacre but a few allegations did appear. His wife and two of his children attended the dinner-party and all of them survived the carnage while the Birendra’s closest family was totally annihilated. These facts produced the suspicion that Gyanendra might have been somehow involved in the royal killing, probably in secret collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies. As a consequence, more or less sensational versions of the tragic event came up but these were mainly the variations of the above narratives.

Although since June 2001 no plausible arguments against the official report have been presented and no convincing proofs found, the conspiracy theories are likely to circulate in the public domain for quite a long time.¹¹ The relevance of these theories lies not so much in their narrating substance but in their reflection of the religious psyche and the national identity. The aura of monarchy was seriously dented and the belief in the connection between the king and his divine powers undermined. It was then and still is a crucial social and political challenge resulting in not only the metaphysical but also very practical implications. Apparently, the Nepalese had the two options to choose: either the official version of the story was true and as a consequence the monarchy had lost its divine status so it was not worth defending it against the Maoists, or it was absolutely false so the fundamentals of the royal system of governance could be somehow saved and a monarch would be able to function in the society, albeit not in the same way as his predecessors. The political myth of Hindu monarchy had served the purpose of uniting the linguistically, ethnically and religiously diverse country since 1768, i.e. since the unification of Nepal by the Shah dynasty.

As Anna Siewierska-Chmaj suggests, “political authority” in mythical thinking has an ontological dimension, so to oppose the “political authority” is to oppose the world order and consequently to advocate the “social chaos.” Political mythology is nothing

¹⁰ According to *The Times of India*, see: ‘Apathy, Date Quirk Make Nepal Forget Royal Massacre,’ *The Times of India*, 1 June 2011, at <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Apathy-date-quirk-make-Nepal-forget-royal-massacre/articleshow/8678716.cms?referral=PM>>, 20 November 2014.

¹¹ One of the most publicized versions of the “royal murder” was recorded by BBC. The survivors openly accuse Prince Dipendra: *Survivors of last Friday’s royal massacre in Nepal have given the first public accounts of what happened, confirming that the then Crown Prince Dipendra was responsible* – ‘Nepal Survivors Blame Prince,’ BBC News, 7 June 2001, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1375097.stm>, 22 November 2014. Even the public statements continuously repeated in the national media could not fully convince a big number of the Nepalese. I spoke to the representatives of all the mainstream political parties (including Congress Party and CPN – United Marxist) between 2009-2014 and almost all of them doubted whether the official version could be fully trusted. I assume that the opinions by mainstream politicians only reflect the popular opinions that circulated in the society.

more than a parallel interpretation of “history in action,” and mythical perception, always full of values and emotions, promises the true participation in a series of events.¹² Branislav Stevanović in his publication *From Archaic to Modern (Political) Myth: The Causes, Functions and Consequences* stresses the “culturally genetic” linkage between the archaic dimension of a myth and its modern interpretation which in case of Nepal is still relevant.

*[...] Archaic myth cannot be learned, but adopted and lived, as the highest purpose and the biggest secret of all existence. Mythical perception of reality comes out of direct feeling of continuity of human and other life, as well as out of its links with the totality of existence. A myth speaks from the “essence of things,” it gives an overview and announces the global purport of both the universe and human life. The myth understands itself as a god’s word, inspiration, providence which purpose completely impregnates the man and determines the totality of the world and the life. “The truth” of myth oversteps any human boundaries, since it is superhuman, endless, “absolute truth.” Its role is to give a sense to the world, to offer the positions and values that are moral, anthropological and specifically human. According to its own structure, mythology tries to exclude inexplicable events and unsolvable issues, it explains the less understandable by means of the understandable, the unthinkable by the thinkable, the hardly solvable by the easily solvable. Therefore, it could not be reduced to satisfaction of primitive man’s curiosity; its primary function is to harmonize the community and, consequently, to prevent the situation in which chaos, incoherence, doubt and apathy can appear.*¹³

King Gyanendra was not capable of repairing the dented image of the monarchy. He never questioned the veracity of the report as that could undermine his claims to the throne, but his stance ultimately changed the image of all the royals who, in the eyes of both the policy-makers and common folk, became much more human and weak with almost no traces of divinity left. His attempts to strengthen the political position and the authority of a monarch did not finally yield the intended results. He dissolved the parliament in May 2002, then dismissed the Prime Minister Deuba and in 2005 appointed himself the chairman of the Council of Ministers, all of which was tantamount to the complete control of the state institutions and, as a result, to the suspension of the democratic system which had progressively been constructed since the 1990s. Although it was officially declared to be a temporary situation in order to efficiently suppress the Maoists insurgency it brought about a very strong reaction among all the political parties which acted almost unanimously against the royal regime. The Jana Andolan 2 Movement, started in 2006 by the Seven Party Alliance, received the strong support of the Maoist insurgents who were to gain at that time a huge popularity and had at their disposal the experienced and well-trained combat units ready to challenge the State in its weak incarnation of the only poorly-equipped police forces as the Royal

¹² A. Siewierska-Chmaj, ‘Mit polityczny jako fundament ideologii. Próba analizy’ in *Przekazy polityki*, Kraków 2009, p. 15.

¹³ B. Stefanović, ‘From Archaic to Modern (Political) Myth: The Causes, Functions and Consequences,’ *Facta Universitatis: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2008), at <<http://facta.unis.ni.ac.rs/pas/pas2008/pas2008-03.pdf>>, 22 November 2014.

Nepal Army refused to fight against the citizens of Nepal. The perspective of total political and economic chaos, plus the increasingly defunct state apparatus, and hence the feeling of powerlessness made the King relinquish power and restore the Parliament.

The roots of unrest could be traced to much earlier times and are closely linked with the complex structure of the Nepalese society. These are briefly and succinctly highlighted by an external observer, Henning Karcher, a UNDP Resident Representative who reported in 2003:

*While the conflict in Nepal has no doubt a political, ideological and even geo-political dimension its main root causes are social and economic, related to frustrated expectations that came with the advent of democracy, related to abject poverty that persists for a large percentage of the population, related to poor and inefficient delivery of social services in areas such as education and health, and related to inequality, exclusion and discrimination. A large percentage of the population of Nepal, in particular Dalits and members of [diverse] ethnic groups feel that they are politically and economically excluded, unable to contribute to decisions that affect their lives and unable to benefit from the economic advancement of the nation.*¹⁴

The revolutionary mood of the political parties got translated into the revolutionary decisions. The monarchy was perceived as a non-democratic institution to be blamed for all the failures of the State and its role as a national unifier in the long history of the country was then not taken into serious consideration. The restored Parliament declared Nepal a secular state, replaced “His Majesty’s Government” in Nepal with “Nepal Government” and separated the King from Parliament, no longer requiring his assent for any bill to become law. New epoch-making proposals had also more personal implications for the King because his income was to become taxable as it is the case for every ordinary citizen, unlike in the past. And in 2008 the Nepalese monarchy, which had been hitherto the only Hindu monarchy in the world, was finally abolished. The resolution for a “federal democratic republic” was the first action of the then newly established Constitutional Assembly and was carried overwhelmingly – 560 to just 4. King Gyanendra and his family were given 15 days to vacate the Narayanhity Palace in Kathmandu, the symbol of royal dignity and were reduced to the status of ordinary citizens. However, it must be emphasized that the private property of the royal family was not seized and – more importantly – unlike in many other parts of the world affected by political transformations, the King was allowed to stay alive and never became an official or even an unofficial prisoner of State. But this revolutionary decision, probably unthinkable only a decade ago, must have had a serious impact on the self-perception of the Nepalese population. Prakash A. Raj in his book *Crisis of Identity in Nepal* presents a few insightful comments:

This was to cause a profound change in the psyche of a country that had remained monarchical and Hindu for more than fifteen centuries, as the stone inscription dating back to the Lichhavi period in Changu Narayan in the Kathmandu Valley demonstrates. The tra-

¹⁴ Quoted in: P.A. Raj, *Maoists in the Land of Buddha. An Analytical Study of the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, Delhi 2004, p. 21 (*Nirala Series*).

dition of the Hindu monarchy extended beyond two millennia, as the Shakya sage [i.e. the Buddha – PK], the enlightened one who would start a new faith [Buddhism], was born in Lumbini in what is now Nepal as son of King Shuddhodhan. [...] The advent of democracy in 1990, which guaranteed freedom of expression, acted as a catalytic agent in this process. That an institution such as the monarchy, which was venerated, was subject to question by the masses and had to face such a crisis, is only one of the factors. From a religious point of view, many ethnic groups had found it advantageous to get converted to Hinduism, as the ruling class was Hindu and converting to Hinduism meant obtaining certain privileges. In the periodic censuses taken before and in 1991 by the Government, many originally non-Hindu ethnic groups were listed as Hindu because of their conversion.¹⁵

It is important to note that traditionally Nepal banned conversion from any religion unless, as it was stated rather vaguely, it was voluntary. Hinduism is generally considered a non-missionary religion so in practice this ban could affect only those who might be interested in conversion from Hinduism into Christianity or Islam. In spite of the fact that in the Draft Interim Constitution Nepal was made a “secular republic” the founders of the republican ideology decided to incorporate the ban on any “involuntary conversion.” In reality Nepal ceased to be the “Hindu monarchy” but it has retained the practical status of the “Hindu republic” and what is worth-noting, was never opposed by the Maoist leaders who also contributed to the final shape of the Interim Constitution. This decision might have far-reaching consequences because the link between the past and the future has not been cut off and those consequences are being carefully watched in India where the modern Hindu political renaissance has resurfaced along with the sweeping victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014. The conservative government of the NDA alliance is likely to support a lot of ancient religious traditions which have been long associated with the monarchy and the king himself in his divine avatar. And that could keep old political concepts in a good shape for many years to come.¹⁶

THE MAOIST INSURGENCY AND ITS IMPACT ON DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS. THE “CHINESE FACTOR”

It was the Maoist Party who contributed most to the final collapse of the monarchy in Nepal. It was the only political non-State entity that was able to use its ever-growing military force to fight directly or intimidate more or less successfully every Kathmandu government, including the ones during the post-monarchy period.

Its official name is the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist – *Maovadi*, in the Nepali language, UCPN) which was founded in 1994. Two years later it launched

¹⁵ Idem, *Crisis of Identity in Nepal*, Varanasi 2007, ‘Foreword’, p. 2.

¹⁶ NDA stands for National Democratic Alliance, a ruling coalition in India. In the Lok Sabha (the Lower Chamber of the Indian Parliament) it has the clear majority (334 mandates out of 543). BJP has a decisive role in the coalition; in fact BJP, after the biggest ever parliamentary victory in 2014, would be able to form a government without other allies.

the civil war which lasted ten years and cost the lives of 18-20 thousand people according to various sources. The number of internally displaced persons is estimated between 100 and 150 thousand.¹⁷ The declared aim of the Maoists was to overthrow the Shah dynasty and the ancient monarchic system and to establish a new State that was labeled a "People's Republic." Although this coveted political system was never clearly defined nor precisely described in public statements, in private or less formal conversations with foreign diplomats or media persons the Maoist leaders, especially Baburam Bhattarai admitted that they would accept the multiparty system of governance and would not promote the ideological leadership of one party, that is their own. These mitigating declarations were naturally doubted or simply rejected by members of other political parties which nonetheless were sometimes eager or – more often – forced under the changing circumstances to build temporary coalitions with the Maoists, especially after 2008, in order to draft an Interim Constitution or to form a new government. Even more controversial was their idea to divide the country along the ethnic lines which was officially promoted as ethnicity-based federalism. No wonder that in a country inhabited by hundreds of ethnic and linguistic communities this idea was criticized by proponents of various ideologies. If communism is supposed to be the socioeconomic system with no social classes based on any criteria such as ethnicity or religion, the Maoists' ethnicity-based federalism appeared to depict just the opposite of communism. In fact, it could be perceived, if successfully implemented, as a serious threat to the fundamental concept of national integrity and social cohesion.

Despite the name suggesting a close link with the ideology once fundamental in the modern history of China, the origins of the Party had almost nothing to do with the official Beijing's policy. Before the collapse of the monarchy China was interested in maintaining stability and in avoiding chaos in the neighbourhood rather than in promoting any form of revolution. Every king, especially Birendra, was highly respected by Beijing as he was regarded as a powerful stabilizing factor, not only in Nepal but in the whole region as well. The ideas of the Hindu monarchy with its autocratic tendencies and a monarch with his semi-divine status were definitely much closer to the Chinese political psyche than any local civic movement demanding democratic thus radical changes in the social and political structure of the country. The process of ideological transformation which started in the 1990s was therefore observed with suspicion and sometimes fear in China who could be afraid of similar outbursts of social wrath at home. In 2002, Wu Congwong, the Chinese ambassador to Nepal, made an official statement that [the] *Chinese government opposes terrorism in any form [and] upholds international cooperation to combat terrorism. In this context, we condemn the violence and terrorist acts unleashed by the anti-government outfits in Nepal.*¹⁸ It was then quite politically meaningful that the Chinese officials preferred to use the term "anti-government

¹⁷ See: P.A. Raj, *Maoists in the Land of Buddha...*, pp. 43-65. Although the reported number of casualties may vary, it hardly ever exceeds 20 thousand. See also: E. Douglas, 'On the Trail with Nepal's Maoists,' *National Geographic*, November 2005, at <<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/static-legacy/ngm/0511/feature3/>>.

¹⁸ The official statement published in *The Kathmandu Post*, 11 May 2002.

forces” and not “the Maoists” as the latter one was in this context considered a “misuse” of the name of the chairman Mao Zedong. Prakash A. Raj in his another publication, *Maoists in the Land of Buddha* (written before the Republic was declared and before the Maoists won the parliamentary elections) refers to the official visits of Chinese politicians and their opinions expressed in conversations with the royal government of Nepal:

When the Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited Nepal in May 2001, he is supposed to have said that Maoist insurgency had nothing to do with the present day China. It appears that there is a realization in China that the excesses committed during the days of the Cultural Revolution, initiated by Chairman Mao, [were] a mistake. [...] The Maoist leaders on the other hand, have complimentary things to say about Chairman Mao and the present day China in their statements and articles. The statement reportedly made by Prachanda offering a one month ceasefire expresses theses the y things to “encirclement” of China, [i.e.] about the possibility of establishment of [an] American military base in Nepal, similar to those in Central Asia and Afghanistan.¹⁹

The Chinese attitude towards the Maoists was gradually evolving. The political victory of the Leftist parties (including the United Marxist-Leninist Party) and the act of deposing the king Gyanendra made Beijing assume a much more realistic position vis-à-vis former “anti-government forces.” These were to become the real decision-makers while the idea of the “royal government” was to become a matter of the past. What is even more important in the geostrategic context, the substitution of the local political players did not affect the interpretation of traditional Chinese interests in South Asia. These were absolutely the same in the 1950s and in the beginning of the 21st century. According to (Jawaharlal Nehru’s university professor) Geeta Kochhar, Nepal was, and still is a southern gateway to Tibet and Tibet is seen by Beijing as a soft belly of China.²⁰ The pivotal moment came in 2008 with the Lhasa riots and Tibetan demands for independence. As the protests gained worldwide sympathy and popular support in India, every Chinese government since that time has been compelled to consider the domestic affairs of Nepal as almost its own internal security issue. This, in turn, should be analyzed in a historical context. The Chinese concern for their southern gate is closely linked with the much older idea of the “palm and five fingers” usually ascribed to Mao Zedong. He is said to have termed Tibet “the palm of the hand” and “the five fingers” stand for Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency until 1972, nowadays Arunachal Pradesh officially claimed by China) and Nepal. The control and security of Tibet (“the palm”) depends on the security and more or less intensified control over the “five fingers,” and that appears to be the only logical interpretation of Mao’s idea. Arunachal, Ladakh and Sikkim are the official parts of India, whereas Bhutan, although formally independent, is under a tight political and economic control of

¹⁹ P.A. Raj, *Maoists in the Land of Buddha*..., pp. 123-124.

²⁰ See also: G. Kochhar, ‘Nepal – China Closeness, What India Loses?’, *C3S Paper*, No. 1135, 24 April 2013, Chennai Centre for China Studies, at <<http://www.c3sindia.org/china-internal/3556>>, 26 November 2014.

New Delhi. As a result, Beijing has very limited opportunities to build up a security system along these “four fingers” and subsequently to prepare the ground for its further political expansion. The only realistic option left is therefore “the last finger,” i.e. Nepal, where the “Indian factor,” once decisive, seems to be losing steam, especially after 2008. Due to the fact that the Lhasa demonstrations coincided with the proclamation of the Republic in Nepal, the Chinese intensified their efforts to establish stronger formal relations or even an optimal rapport with the mainstream players, among them the Maoists whose support was deemed crucial in Beijing’s development of the efficient political and economic network in the Himalayan state. Prachanda, after becoming the first Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nepal, chose China as his first official foreign destination, and that was interpreted as an important political statement since he deviated from the tradition of every previous head of government who had always paid their first state visit to India. What the Maoist leader repeated several times on many occasions, was warmly received by the Chinese government because it was read as a declaration of a stable bilateral relationship being built on different levels. According to Xinhua Agency, Prachanda said, *the Chinese leadership has very scientifically synthesized the expectation of the people as a Chinese dream, [...] [and] this Chinese dream is a dream of the people of 21st century for all over the world* [including Nepal].²¹ In fact, he referred to a widely discussed slogan coined by the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, who promoted the concept of the “Chinese dream.” The Chinese presence in Nepal has been more and more visible since then and financial incentives have become the key tool in making all the necessary inroads in the Himalayan state. The Chinese dream is being recreated in its Nepalese avatar. In the financial year 2010-11, China pledged US\$35.48 million in aid to Nepal, a huge jump from the US\$140,000 in 2005-06 (during the same period Delhi pledged US\$92.55 million). While much of this aid usually goes into road building and hydro-electric power plants, according to a non-governmental organization “Saferworld,” a sizeable portion goes to Nepal’s army and police. In 2011, Beijing gave US\$19 million to the Nepalese army and several million to the country’s police force. China’s plans to strengthen its grip over Nepal and to secure the access to markets in South Asia are likely to materialize when it opens a high-altitude railway from Lhasa to Shigatse, Tibet’s second-largest city and the closest major town to the Nepalese border. Another vital element in the bilateral transport network is a long-mooted rail link from Shigatse to Gyirong, a trading post with Nepal, to be completed by 2020. Also, a road from Lhasa to Kathmandu, passing through the Nepalese district of Mustang, is being built.²²

The “Tibet factor” plays a significant role in the bilateral relations. Beijing is interested in minimizing the activities of the Tibetan diaspora in Nepal and making it

²¹ ‘Chinese Dream Will Be Beneficial to Nepal: Prachanda,’ *China Daily*, 28 May 2013, at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-05/28/content_16541293.htm>, 20 November 2014.

²² The figures quoted in: D. Gardner, ‘Power Play: China and India Jostle for Influence in Nepal,’ *Post Magazine*, 17 August 2014, at <<http://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1572819/caught-middle>>, 24 November 2014. See also: ‘Nepal,’ Saferworld, at <<http://www.saferworld.org.uk/where/nepal>>, 24 November 2014.

virtually impossible for the Dalai Lama to preach in the country. According to UNHCR there are more than 120 thousand refugees in Nepal, and Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees account for a majority of the displaced people.²³ The Nepalese monarchs, especially Tribhuvan, Mahendra and Birendra did not oppose the constant influx of the Tibetans into the country since the exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959 but attempted to control more or less their activities. In fact, Tibetan Buddhism has become an indispensable element of the Nepalese religious identity and the Dalai Lama's photos can be easily found in public places, mostly in the Kathmandu Valley. With the collapse of monarchy this relatively liberal attitude has definitely changed. The Maoists, acting as a key political player in Nepal for more than a decade, have never been disposed favourably towards a Tibetan minority, still perceived as the "anti-Chinese factor." Close monitoring of its activities, frequent detention of selected Tibetan local leaders and attempts to seal the refugee route from Tibet to Nepal and to apprehend those who managed to escape, have become, unlike in the royal past, a brand mark of the new Nepalese home policy. Dinah Gardner in his text *Power play: China and India jostle for influence in Nepal* highlights a shift in the Kathmandu's internal policy which is a consequence of the Beijing's rising political clout:

[...] *At a Tibetan settlement in the Nepalese city's southern suburb of Jawalakhel, an event to mark the Dalai Lama's 79th birthday is taking place. Events connected with the exiled spiritual leader, like most other public activities related to neighbouring Tibet, are restricted in Nepal on orders from Beijing, say human rights organisations.*

In April [2014], a Human Rights Watch report, Under China's Shadow, accused Beijing of pressuring Nepal to spy on Tibetans residing in the landlocked nation, and prevent them from staging anti-China protests. The report said surveillance cameras had been installed around the Boudhanath stupa – the main Tibetan area in Kathmandu – in 2011.

*Incorporated into the People's Republic of China in 1950, Tibet has been restive ever since, and the streets of its capital, Lhasa, and the main temples in the autonomous region are similarly covered by cameras, erected by the Chinese authorities. Nepal's increasing willingness to take such steps shows China's growing influence in the country, an influence that some see as posing a threat to India, which has traditionally held sway over its small northern neighbour.*²⁴

Almost all the political players in Nepal, including the Maoists, would expect Beijing to get more involved in a big number of infrastructure projects, financing the security forces and the military or developing the rural areas but there is also a common perception, crossing all domestic political boundaries, that a decision on financial involvement in an area of security has its own political cost which may be strongly opposed by Delhi. In 2011, the Hong Kong-based foundation – which is thought in Delhi

²³ See: J.B. Roberts II, E.A. Roberts (eds.), *Freeing Tibet. 50 Years of Struggle, Resilience, and Hope*, New Delhi 2011; Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile. The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama of Tibet*, London 2002.

²⁴ D. Gardner, 'Power Play: China and India...'

to have China's backing – had signed an agreement with UNIDO, the UN's industrial-development organisation, to invest US \$3 billion in Lumbini, a village in southern Nepal. Lumbini is traditionally regarded as the birthplace of the Buddha, which the project aimed to make an international "Mecca for Buddhists," with train links, an international airport, hotels and a Buddhist university. It is important to note that Lumbini is located close to the Indian border so unsurprisingly the official announcement made the government in Delhi express its concern about the potential implications for India's own security. That in turn may have had further diplomatic repercussions. Subsequently, the central government in Kathmandu and the local authorities responsible for the Lumbini district declared they had not been consulted about the scheme nor even heard of it. Finally the project was annulled because of "formal irregularities," as it was officially stated, and that move was interpreted as a successful India's intervention to balance China's growing influence in Nepal.²⁵

The Maoists were soon able to realize the potential threats of their initially preferred one-sided pro-Beijing policy, which could generate an immediate Indian counter-action. The officially-declared policy of equidistance towards both neighbours was therefore to become a new dogma for nearly all the Nepalese parties. Sohan Prasad Jha, representing an Indian think-tank, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, points out to this gradual change noticeable in Prachanda's decisions:

*After being the first PM of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Prachanda chose to visit China [...] Subsequently, the incident of sacking and then reinstating the former Chief of Army Staff, Rookmangud Katwal, soured relations with India, at its height. However, since then, Prachanda has realised that Nepal's geostrategic position is such that it requires the cooperation of both its northern as well as southern neighbour to spur its economic progress, and to maintain its sovereignty. The trilateral cooperation is a means to achieve that end.*²⁶

The conclusion the Maoists were capable of drawing was a realistic one; in fact, the one that was quite distant from their early ideological slogans. A revolution can destroy the *ancien régime*, can even reshape the national identity and the whole structure of a country but it is actually unable to change the geostrategic reality which is secured by two regional superpowers, not only by the preferred one, however much desirable it might appear for one party or another. Prachanda and his successors in a prime minister post have generally not deviated from that policy since then, despite their different international preferences. It comes as no surprise that the Kaplan's concept of the "Revenge of Geography" does work in the South-Asian context.

²⁵ According to 'At Bhudda's Birthplace,' *The Economist*, 20 August 2011, at <<http://www.economist.com/node/21526389>>, 11 November 2014. See also: Lafitte G., 'Nepal: the New Rainbow Nation?', Rukor, 6 December 2011, at <<http://rukor.org/lumbini-reborn-nepal-reborn-buddha-reborn/>>, 11 November 2014.

²⁶ S.P. Sha, 'Nepal: Deciphering Prachanda's "Trilateral" Strategy to Balance India and China,' IPCS, 21 May 2013, at <<http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/nepal-deciphering-prachandas-trilateral-strategy-to-balance-india-and-china-3943.html>>, 12 November 2014.

A PLAN TO REINSTATE THE HINDU MONARCHY IN NEPAL. “THE INDIAN FACTOR”

Nepal, unlike modern India, has been a sovereign state since its foundation in the 18th century. It was isolated politically and economically until 1951, i.e. under the rule of the Ranas, the hereditary prime ministers (1846-1951). This political isolation did not stop the process of importing the crucial ingredients of the Hindu civilization so the country's cultural, social and religious structure has been gradually “Indianized” and hence India's dominating influence on the Nepalese way of thinking and functioning in a social and metaphysical sphere. That has always had a political dimension, already evident in the 1950s when India openly sponsored the replacement of the Ranas with the Shah dynasty who regained the political power, with the assistance of the Nepali Congress Party, one of the pillars of the royal governments. It is no coincidence that the Nepali Congress Party resembled the Indian Congress Party that ruled independent India for more than fifty years. The termination of the Rana autocratic governments and India's support for the king Tribhuvan and his successors coincided with the Chinese invasion of Tibet and subsequently its complete incorporation. Delhi perceived Beijing's military intervention as a serious security threat to the Indian interests in the region, therefore it considered the constant support for the Nepalese Hindu monarchs as a necessary step to counterbalance the growing Chinese dominance in South Asia. The policy of the “open border” between both countries, cultural and religious affinities plus an economic dependence of Kathmandu from its southern neighbour (Indian rupee being in fact the second widely accepted currency) made the Indian clout a fact of every-day existence not only for the royal family, the army and bureaucracy but for an average citizen as well.

Even the Nepalese ideology of militant Maoism has more to do with India than China, at least in the practices of waging a guerilla warfare. At present, the frequent clashes between the Maoists (termed “Naxalites” in India) and the State are officially declared by Delhi to be the most serious domestic threat to the stability of the growing number of areas in the North and East of the country. In 2010, the former Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh publicly announced: *I have been saying for the last three years that Naxalism remains the biggest internal security challenge facing our country.* He also stressed there was no difference of opinion between the Central and the state governments on the issue of left-wing extremism.²⁷ Although the number of casualties related to the Maoists' warfare may vary in different reports, the most-quoted figures appearing in the Indian publications in 2013 and 2014 are more than 12 thousand killed, including security forces, civilians and insurgents. According to the BBC, more than 6,000 people have died during the rebels' 20-year fight

²⁷ See: ‘Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security: Manmohan,’ *The Hindu*, 24 May 2010, at <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/naxalism-biggest-threat-to-internal-security-manmohan/article436781.ece>>, 26 November 2014.

between 1990 and 2010 but more than 1200 casualties have been recorded between 2011-2014.²⁸

The origin of the Naxalite movement is traditionally traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist – CPI-M), that ultimately led to the formation of the radical Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal where the violent uprising started in a village Naxalbari, hence the name. An Indian social scientist, M.N. Panicker presents his own subjective vision of the political background of the movement and the main ideological reasons for its formation:

*West Bengal, ironically enough, provides the most conducive political climate for the Maoists [...]. Their struggles against a repressive state, controlled for over three decades by a coalition of Left forces helmed by the largest Communist Party, ought to compel them to reflect on how communist-left forces, which were once the undisputed principal representatives of a genuine class movement, have come to distort it beyond recognition. The degeneration of the CPI (M)-led LF (Left Front – PK), contrary to the popular belief shaped by the neo-liberal consensus, is not because of its failure to turn fully social democratic but precisely because it has abandoned the tortuous dirt-path of working-class struggle for the comfortable highway of social democracy. [...] That the Maoists too should call themselves the CPI (M) or over three decades by a coalition of Leftanny. But more eerie perhaps is the fact that their conception of the party as a state-form predisposes them to a social democratic approach to politics that virtually makes them a mirror-image of the original CPI (M). It's time the Maoists woke up and smelt the gunpowder.*²⁹

Practically every central and state government in India has been able to point out to the similarities between the Nepalese and Indian Maoist insurgencies: social and cultural determinants in both countries, the guerilla warfare in which the representatives of the State are mostly targeted, the ideological split from the national mainstream communist parties or the “old-fashioned” ideological language used in their public propaganda. The most striking difference concerns the participation in a democratic system in their respective countries; Nepalese Maoists finally accepted the idea of the multiparty democracy while their Indian comrades reject the idea uncompromisingly. Although the scale of collaboration between both Maoist parties is still a matter of debate (more precise investigations are needed to prove the regularity of mutual contacts) and the pragmatic approach of the Indian government towards Maoist prime ministers (i.e. Prachanda and Bhattarai) is a standard policy, it is quite understandable that the Indian political ruling class views the Nepalese Maoists and the Maoist ideology in general as a serious threat not only to regional stability but also to its own internal security. Maoism is commonly associated with the old Chinese revolutionary zeal despite Beijing's official *désintéressement* to promote or advocate its former ideology abroad.

²⁸ D.R. Prasai, 'Nepalese Monarchy Must Be Restored: The Most Convincing Identity of Nepal,' *Blitz*, 22 August 2013, at <<http://www.weeklyblitz.net/2013/08/nepalese-monarchy-must-be-restored-the-most-convincing-identity-of-nepal>>, 14 November 2014.

²⁹ M.N. Panicker, *Maoists Mayhem on Rise. States Failed to Coordinate*, Delhi 2012, p. 70.

Any Maoist-supported government would be therefore viewed in Delhi with suspicion, however all the negative emotions are usually not reflected in a diplomatic language. Prachanda's public accusations of Indian interference in the Nepalese domestic policy do not contribute to developing positive relations either.

The sweeping victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 elections and Narendra Modi becoming the prime minister changed the Indian expectations towards Nepal. Although the Hindu elements were hardly stressed in the pre-election campaign ("progress" and "economic development" being the key words) BJP and Modi personally are interested in promoting the "traditional Hindu values" which, as they believe and preach, should strengthen the modern pillars of the Indian society. The Hindu political philosophy cannot be officially promoted vis-à-vis Nepal, since it would be interpreted as an act of interference in its domestic affairs so the political message is usually conveyed through the media channels. In fact, there is no public government strategy to support the idea of the Hindu kingdom in Nepal but practical steps of the Indian right-wing parties attest to their faith in the religious and cultural power of monarchy. Akhilesh Pillalamari, an Indian political analyst, explains it very clearly:

The restoration of the Nepalese monarchy is certainly more likely today [2013 – even before the BJP was in power, PK] than would have seemed the case after 2008, due to the country's continued political chaos.

The BJP, which has its roots in Hindu nationalism, has always been more sympathetic towards the Nepalese monarchy than India's Congress Party. Major BJP figures such as Lal Krishna Advani and Rajnath Singh have lamented the abolition of Nepal's monarchy and advocated for its restoration. Nepal's former kings were the world's only reigning Hindu monarchs and Nepal the world's only Hindu state. India's previous government, under the Congress Party, was heavily involved in Nepal's shift to democracy, which is widely seen as having caused chaos there.

Since the abolition of Nepal's monarchy in 2008, Nepal has not been able to form a stable government or write a permanent constitution. [...]

Enter here increasing support for the restoration of the monarchy. India has significant influence within Nepal, and if actors feel as though India no longer advocates a democratic state or stands in the way of the restoration of the monarchy, this idea could gain currency. As I argued earlier, monarchies can serve a useful purpose in the present day in certain countries, and Nepal is one of them. Monarchies can often unite multiple ethnic groups, provide healing after long conflicts – as in Cambodia – or serve as neutral actors above politics, all of which would be useful in Nepal. Nepal, was after all, cobbled together in 1769 from numerous petty kingdoms by the erstwhile Shah Dynasty, which ruled the country's diverse peoples for almost all of its history until 2008. The Shah Dynasty was widely seen as a provider of regional stability in both Nepal and India as a symbol of unity within diversity that held Nepal together.³⁰

³⁰ See: D.R. Prasai, 'Nepalese Monarchy Must Be Restored...' See also: N. Mandhana, K. Pokharel, 'In Newly Secular Nepal, Votes for Hinduism,' *Wall Street Journal India Real Time Blog*, 18 November 2013, at <<http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/11/18/in-newly-secular-nepal-votes-for-hinduism/>>; Prasai D.R., 'Nepal towards a Hindu Rashtra (Nation-State) Again,' *Struggle for Hindu*

He also reminds his readers that monarchy has its own official promoter in Nepal, and that is the fourth largest party in Nepal's Assembly, the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) with ties to Hindu nationalist groups in India. He refers to the party's leader, Kamal Thapa, who argues there is some support among the leaders of Nepal's other major parties for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, though the restoration of a more traditional monarchy is unlikely.

The situation became even more comfortable for the royalists after the elections in Nepal in November 2013 when the Maoists lost to the Nepali Congress and their military units were disbanded as a result of earlier political agreements. Since the probability of another well-structured military revolt is almost non-existent the chances of bringing back the monarchy, thus reinventing the idea of Hindu kings in Nepal, may gain substantial popularity among the Nepalese who have been going through the process of identity crisis since 2001. And India is likely to play a significant role in the "royal games." According to Al-Jazeera's 2014 post-elections report:

Observers believe that an important challenge for the Modi government will be cultivating an ally in Nepal. There is no shortage of pro-Hindu organisations in Nepal, where 80 percent of people are Hindus and fundamentalist groups such as Shiva Sena Nepal that are linked to their Indian counterparts. That Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal, a pro-Hindu, pro-monarchy party seeks to be Modi's ally is no secret in Kathmandu. Kamal Thapa, its articulate chairman – who has been likened to Modi for his populist appeal – travelled to Gujarat to meet the BJP leader before he launched his election campaign. In a picture taken in Gujarat's capital, Gandhinagar, and later posted by Thapa on his Twitter account, the two men can be seen exchanging gifts – a photo-op that has clearly bolstered Thapa's standing among Nepalis.³¹

Although the promotion of Hindu political mythology in the political domain is understandable from the Indian perspective, the Chinese factor cannot be easily ignored. As it has been discussed earlier, Beijing prefers a very pragmatic approach towards its partners in Kathmandu so the support for Maoists was always conditional and depended on their political strength and regional influence. India's open endorsement of the re-instatement of Hindu monarchy could be perceived in Beijing as a serious threat to its "updated" interests in Nepal, therefore the Chinese potential support for Maoists might be seen as an act of counterbalancing the Indian influence which has been seriously reduced since 2008. That hypothetical support would not have any ideological overtones, however the Maoists could interpret or publicize it otherwise. In conclusion, one needs to state that if the "royal game" was to be played with Delhi's assistance, it would have not only domestic but regional repercussions in South Asia as well, because Beijing would feel obliged to become an active player each time the game is played.

Existence, 2 December 2013, at <<http://hinduexistence.org/2013/12/02/nepal-towards-a-hindu-rashtra-nation-state-again/>>; 'Saffron Spread,' *The Indian Express*, 7 April 2014, at <<http://indian-express.com/article/opinion/columns/saffron-spread/>>, 16 November 2014.

³¹ See: D. Adhikari, 'Will Modi's Win Impact India-Nepal Relations?,' Aljazeera, 21 May 2014, at <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/05/will-modi-win-impact-india-nepal-relations-201452113551160154.html>>, 27 November 2014.

POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY AND GEOPOLITICS – CONCLUDING REMARKS

Political myths die hard and geopolitics may in some way or another contribute to their resurrection. The mysterious assassination of the royal family in 2001 and the Maoist insurgency reshaped the State and its traditional identity based on Hindu values. The Nepalese Maoists, like their comrades in India, intend to revolutionize the social structure, to abolish old customs which – as they see them – petrify casteism and unjust distribution of wealth, and to overthrow the “old political guard” associated with the *ancien régime*. In Nepal the revolution has stopped or – better said – has been stopped half-way. Proximity of India and various cultural and religious links between both countries are natural obstacles to “social engineering” that is a universal dream of revolutionaries. Geopolitics in this context has revealed its power and set the limits of a revolution. Almost every radical transformation of well-grounded traditions, no matter how oppressive these may appear, is a challenging and risky task which ultimately may bring about chaos and social disorder in a country. Deconstructing the national identity (however vague and debatable this concept could be) without providing an attractive and realistic substitution usually leads to the emergence of strong linguistic, ethnic, tribal or religious sub-identities (this being a case in Nepal) which in turn is likely to destabilize and then disintegrate the State. Recreation of a national myth based on the ground realities and with a calculation of geopolitical conditions may serve the purpose of strengthening both the state apparatus and social cohesion. The general idea of Hindu monarchy in Nepal could appear as obsolete for some but for others it would be the only working and efficient model of governance. If that “royal experiment” was to be implemented again in history it would be definitely supervised actively by India and China. And that would be another chapter of the Asian “Great Game” of the 21st century.

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Piotr KŁODKOWSKI, Ph.D. is the Rector and Professor of the Tischner European College in Cracow. He specializes in political history of selected Asian states and international relations in South Asia. From 2009 to 2014 he served as Ambassador of Poland to India and Nepal.