Nepal's Political Crisis and Geopolitics

ROHIT KARKI

Nepal plunge into a political crisis with the dissolution of Parliament by Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli on December 20 and announcement of mid-term election for April 2021. This move was widely criticized by constitutional experts, politicians and other observers as 'unconstitutional', with large anti-government demonstrations erupted blaming the government move as disastrous for political stability. Even though the government decision has been challenged in the Supreme Court, it is quite likely that the court would legitimize the government decision, due to the extreme politicization of various institutions in Nepal, including judiciary. Political uncertainty looms large now, with deep suspicion of the elections being conducted in the stipulated timeframe. If the elections are not held on time, it might affect Nepal's constitutionalism and its nascent federal republican set up. Notably, not a single elected government has so far succeeded to complete its constitutionally mandated five-year term in past 30 years due to intra-party and inter-party fighting as primary reasons for Nepal's political instability. The current political crisis has also arisen out of conflicts existing within the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which was formed in 2018 with the merger of two largest communist organizations of Nepal. The Nepalese people voted the NCP to power in 2018 general elections for five-years to bring in much needed political stability, introduce good governance and ensure economic prosperity in the country. However, China played a pivotal role in the unification of the two parties with a larger goal of implementing its projects related to the Belt and Road Infrastructure (BRI). The recent high-level visit from China shows the importance that it attaches to preserve a strong communist party in Nepal by way of keeping the NCP united. Nevertheless, this was construed by many as a divergence from China's traditional non-interference policy in Nepal. For India, on the other hand, the dissolution of the parliament provided a re-entry point much earlier than expected to protect its core strategic interests. India has been clearly frustrated with the growing proximity between the NCP and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including their convergence on the core foreign and security policy issues at the national and regional levels. However, with the split in the NCP, India has quickly positioned itself, with the motive of establishing a right-wing coalition with the aim of reinstatement of the Hindu state in Nepal to preserve its core interests. Besides, the rising neo-monarchy support in Nepal has been further emboldened with consolidation of Hindutva agenda in India under the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The visit of the chief of India's intelligence external agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), followed by the



Chief of Indian Army in Nepal last month, provides growing convergence of interests between the two governments. The visit also helped to re-build trust and confidence between two governments, which hit an all-time low when border dispute erupted between two countries in the beginning of 2020. Overall, the competing convergence and divergences of geopolitical interests of Nepal's regional neighbors' and its ability to manage these relationships will determine the future roadmap for Nepal's domestic politics. Meanwhile, Nepal should aim at resolving the current political impasse through a domestic political consensus, rather than providing any space for regional actors, for a continued crisis might threaten the sustainability of its federal democratic constitutional framework.

Rohit Karki
Project Officer
DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
Switzerland