

Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–1816)

(Also known as the Gorkha War)

The Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–1816) was fought between the British East India Company (EIC) and the Kingdom of Nepal (Gorkha Kingdom). It ended with the Treaty of Sugauli (1816), which significantly reduced Nepal's territory and expanded British control in the Himalayan region.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Rise of the Gorkhas

- In 1768, the Gorkhas captured Kathmandu.
- They consolidated power under a strong military leadership.
- Attempted expansion northwards but were checked by China.
- Subsequently expanded west and south toward Bengal and Awadh.

This expansion brought them into direct conflict with the British East India Company.

British Interest in Nepal

- Nepal was economically significant (rice, timber, oil seeds, gold, dyes).
- Strategically important as a buffer between India and Tibet/China.
- The British aimed to secure the Himalayan frontier and trade routes.

In 1801, Governor-General Wellesley compelled Nepal to accept a British Resident under the Subsidiary Alliance policy.

However, the Resident withdrew in 1803 due to hostility.

By 1814, tensions escalated due to:

- Frontier disputes
- Expansionist ambitions
- Fear of Nepal–Sikh alliance

II. CAUSES OF THE WAR

1. Expansionist Policy
 - Both Nepal and the British pursued territorial expansion.
2. Border Disputes
 - Frequent conflicts along the 1,100 km frontier.
 - Disputes over the Butwal and Terai region.

3. British Frontier Policy
 - The British wanted a secure Himalayan buffer state.
 - Did not want a strong Nepal controlling the western hills.
4. Strategic Concerns
 - Fear of Nepal aligning with Sikhs.
 - British desire to control hill states up to the Sutlej.

III. COURSE OF THE WAR

Outbreak

In May 1814, Gorkhas attacked police posts at Butwal. Governor-General Lord Hastings launched a full-scale war in October 1814.

Military Strength

Gorkha Army:

- 5,000–8,000 troops
- Advantage of mountainous terrain
- Strong hill forts

British Army:

- Larger force
- Superior artillery and logistics
- Faced terrain challenges initially

Important Battles

1. Battle of Jitgadh – British defeat.
2. Siege of Jaitak – General Gillespie killed.
3. Battles of Butwal, Almora, Malaon – British victories.
4. Battle of Makwanpur (1816) – Decisive British victory under Ochterlony.

Ochterlony's road-building strategy enabled the movement of heavy artillery, proving decisive.

End of War

British superior resources and sustained campaigning forced Nepal to seek peace.

The war concluded with the Treaty of Sugauli in March 1816.

IV. TREATY OF SUGAULI (1816)

Highly favourable to the British.

Key Provisions

- Nepal accepted a British Resident at Kathmandu.
- Ceded Garhwal and Kumaon.
- Relinquished claims over the Terai region.
- Withdrew from Sikkim.
- Western boundary fixed at the River Kali.

The British frontier extended to the Himalayan foothills.

V. CONSEQUENCES

Territorial Changes

The British gained:

- Garhwal
- Kumaon
- Terai forests
- Sutlej hill states
- Hill stations (Simla, Mussoorie, Nainital, etc.)

Political Consequences

- Nepal is treated as sovereign but closely supervised.
- No foreign diplomatic missions allowed except British.
- Nepal became a buffer state.

Military Consequences

The British began recruiting Gurkhas.

- Around 5,000 Nepali men entered British service in 1815.
- Gurkhas became the backbone of the British Indian Army.
- Nepal remained neutral during the Revolt of 1857.