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Sommario/riassunto	The three-way contest for control of Nepal-among King Gyanendra, a coalition of seven parties seeking democracy for the country, and the Maoists-ended with the king relinquishing power to the democrats in April 2006 after large scale popular demonstrations against him. King Gyanendra's inability to subdue the Maoist insurgency and his repression of pro-democratic elements in the country undermined his legitimacy and led to his fall from power. The United States sought to assist the government of Nepal in its struggle against the Maoist armed insurgency and has promoted the democratic development of Nepal. It has also sought to promote stability in Nepal to keep it from becoming a destabilizing element in the region. This shift of power from monarchy to democracy was followed in November 2006 by a peace agreement between the Maoists and the new government which led to the laying down of arms, a parliament that includes Maoists, and the scheduling of elections for a constituent assembly. The constituent assembly is to address the question of whether the king is to have a place in the future government of Nepal and, if so, to what extent. The constituent assembly is also expected to act on calls for Nepal to become a republic and redraw constituencies to more equitably represent the Nepali people, particularly in the Terai in southern Nepal,

which experienced much unrest in 2007. A landlocked Himalayan kingdom between India and China, Nepal ranks among the world's poorest countries. In 1990, following a democratization movement, it became a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarch. Although this led to a process of economic restructuring and market liberalization, the country's economic growth and reform effort was undercut by political instability and years of increasingly dire internal security challenges brought on by the civil war with the Maoists. Compounding the country's difficulties was the June 2001 tragedy in which ten members of the royal family, including King Birendra, were killed in an assassination-suicide, reportedly carried out by Crown Prince Dipendra. Nepal has a long way to go before its democratic gains can be effectively consolidated. The need to more fully integrate the Maoists into the political process and ensure that they, or any splinter groups, do not resort to the force of arms or coercion in the lead-up to the constituent assembly elections remains a key challenge. In addition, mounting political tension over Madhesi calls for greater representation in the political process will demand attention. The Madhesis are an indigenous ethnic group that inhabit the lowlands of Nepal who feel they have not been fairly represented. Some Madhesi demonstrations have turned violent. The need to develop the economy and bring prosperity to the people will remain whatever the outcome of the constituent assembly election.
