

THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT ON THE DEFENCE STRATEGIES OF SMALL AND MEDIUM STATES

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The dynamic of regional and global changes implies the existence of strategies that allow the streamlining of the activity of defence and security structures. Depending on the risks, vulnerabilities and threats that must be approached militarily or non-militarily, the medium and small states have drafted strategic documents, taking into account the internal and external dimension of security. Their security depends on a great extent on external factors, the turbulences from the international system posing a serious challenge for a small state.

If small and medium states are placed in the vicinity of a great revisionist, undemocratic power, its security can be achieved only by creative strategies. The emphasis is therefore laid on the existence of flexible and powerful military capabilities, necessary to identify and counter the threats and on membership of alliances/coalitions of alliances.

Keywords: small and medium powers; alliances; strategic documents; integration; security; military capabilities;

INTRODUCTION

The world has never been safe for states considered to be small and medium powers because they cannot afford a high-intensity conflict with a great power, which is why they are forced to think about their defence strategy to ensure their security by using their material and human resources with maximum efficiency. The means and methods small and medium states use are varied, from diplomacy, bilateral, and multilateral relations to military alliances, or asking support from international organisations, as collective security bodies.

TYPES OF SECURITY STRATEGIES USED BY SMALL AND MEDIUM STATES

A small or medium state cannot play a decisive role in international relations and cannot change the rules of the world because, first of all, its quantitative characteristics, such as the small size of the territory, population, economy or the very limited military capabilities, do not allow this.

Political Science Professor Baldur Thorhallsson used six criteria that must be taken into account in the classification of a state in a certain category of power (2018, pp.17-34): (1) absolute size [population and territory]; (2) economic size [namely, GDP, market size, development success]; (3) sovereignty dimension [whether the state can maintain effective sovereignty on its territory], (4) political size [military and administrative capabilities and the degree of domestic cohesion, combined with the degree to which the state maintains a united external front]; (5) perceptual size [political discourse, self-identity]; and (6) preference size [ambitions and prioritisations of the governing elite]. Although it has an inward-looking, Thorhallsson's schematic framework is relevant to the analysis of the state's capacity and insecurity in implementing national security policy and strategy (Domingo-Almase, 2019).

The level of military capabilities as well as a strong economy are significant factors that define the challenges and limitations of small states, but insufficient to explain their foreign policies. Historical background, geographical position or social-political practices are also important in states' classification.

The medium states can be regional actors to be taken into account; for example, Denmark is a small NATO state, but a powerful actor in relation to the Baltic States. The strategic environment makes the security agendas of small states to be personalised, as they are located in different geographical areas with different

neighbours and face different problems. Depending on the effectiveness of decisions made by political factors, their territory size does not prevent small states from being active or influencing international relations, they can participate in military operations, such as Sweden, Finland and Denmark, or they can make important contributions to solving contemporary world issues, thus exerting a certain influence within international organisations (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, pp. 7-15).

The basic tools of a small state are foreign policy and diplomacy. Diplomacy is the first line of defence in international conflicts. Underdeveloped states often have to develop the most complex diplomatic repertoires to counter the movements of much larger states. As a rule, the “*guiding star*” of the foreign policies of small states has been defence, not attack, but there are of course exceptions, such as Israel and Cuba (Maniruzzaman, 1982).

States choose policies that best reflect their interests, either a more passive and neutral role or active engagement. Increasing influence does not always lead to an increase in security ratio. They need a peaceful international system and security guarantees from strong states or organisations. The common security and defence project was the idea of the great European states, but the goal of being well-positioned in the international system was the main reason that forced almost all small states to join. The difference between states that managed to survive and those that perished is that some small states survived because of their commitments, which led them to the achievement of their desired goal, that of preserving security.

Alliances can be bilateral or multilateral; they can include small and large powers. The advantage of the alliance is that of military support of the allies in case of need. There is a situation when a small state could obtain the protection of a great ally: when the first can serve the power interests of the latter. The best examples in this regard are Israel, protected by the USA, interested in the Middle East and also Cuba, protected by the Soviet Union, interested in the USA. Alliances usually bring together members with similar strategic interests and ideologies. Modern alliances such as NATO are highly institutionalised with a formal collective commitment to defend their member countries.

Joining alliances can also have disadvantages. For example, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 at the invitation of Babrak Kamal under the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourhood and Cooperation, signed in 1978. Also, in the framework of multilateral and bilateral treaties signed with the majority of its former colonies, France often brought about changes of government in these countries, by intervening in Cameroon, Congo, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, in Gabon in 1964, and the Central African Republic in 1967; thus, the alliance functioned as a double-edged sword.

Another problem would be that the great powers play a huge role in managing the risks in small states, as they provide them with additional resources, military capabilities and political support, but in exchange for protection, they can limit their freedom. There is another strategic option that states can use to increase their security: entering regional alliances. On the one hand, India has concluded defence treaties with its neighbours – Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh – to protect them from the influences of foreign powers, especially China. China, on the other hand, has entered into a non-aggression pact with two of its neighbours – Burma and Afghanistan – to prevent them from joining an alliance with India in the event of a Sino-Indian military confrontation. Also, the Arab states formed two successive alliances to fight Zionism and fight Israel.

In this concern, there are several strategies that small states use: they can align with the states that threaten them, voluntarily subordinating themselves to a great power to obtain more protection and public order, increased security and territorial integrity, or they can ally with other powers against a potential aggressor, to obtain higher levels of security. Alignment can stimulate the political regimes weakening or, on the contrary, increase their resilience; therefore, there are weaker states where internal instability motivates the political elite to align with stronger countries seeking to improve their internal stability (Vaicekauskaitė, *Ibid*).

Small and medium states can use strategic coverage when they do not want to support a party or a power, fearing that this could lead to higher security risks. This strategy falls between balancing and bandwagoning¹. A practical example of implementing such a strategy could be the case of Southeast Asian countries, which, due to the direct influence of the USA and China, prefer this security strategy option. This type of policy is about misalignment and has been used often by third world states.

Another strategy is neutrality in the event of a conflict. From a legal perspective, neutral states are required not to take part in wars, and not to be part of military alliances or to support militarily a state involved in that conflict. To respect neutrality, the geographical position counts because its neutral position would be strategically advantageous to the major powers or not prevent them from achieving their objectives. For this situation, one must see the case of Belgium, whose neutrality was violated by Germany in 1914 and 1940, to enter in France with troops, although the two powers have a common border.

¹ In international relations, bandwagoning occurs when a state aligns with a stronger, adversarial power and concedes that the stronger adversary-turned-partner disproportionately gains in the spoils they conquer together (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/bandwagoning>).

The disadvantage of the neutral state is that it should be ready to defend itself in the event of a violation of territorial integrity or sovereignty. Switzerland has chosen to remain neutral and formally to pursue this policy even today. Yet it has sought to be active in international affairs, supporting peace-building operations of security organizations and becoming a centre for associations working to manage a crisis in the world.

The third world states find Swiss-style neutrality particularly attractive. For example, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh and King Birendra of Nepal, all expressed a desire to turn their countries into the “*Switzerland of Asia*”. However, neutrality in the international community is easier to desire than to achieve (Ibid).

Small states need different capabilities to address the complexity of the security challenges they face. This requires collaboration with various actors and security providers to mitigate the risks. Beyond military alliances, there are strong international organisations: worldwide, the UN aims to maintain peace, being a guarantor of the security of small and medium states, at the regional level, for the Middle East and Africa there are the Organization of Islamic States, the African Union, etc.

BRIEF STUDY CASES – SMALL STATES SECURITY

If one analyses the example of the Baltic States can see that their security depend largely on external factors. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are located in a common operational environment, which faces a similar set of security threats and challenges. These challenges are largely related to Russia’s dominance in the region and its assertive growth actions. To survive, they used different tools and strategies.

After regaining independence, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia chose not to run out of alliances, seeking to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, namely NATO and the EU, to cooperate with the USA, while trying to intensify trilateral defence cooperation. (BALTBAT, BALTRON, BALTNET) (Baltic Defence Co-operation, 2014) and look for common solutions on how to strengthen their defence capabilities. After 2014, in the face of growing tensions in the region, the three Baltic States began to readjust their security policies, focusing on strengthening their national defence capabilities. For the small states of the Western Balkans, there is only one strategic choice, namely Euro-Atlantic integration.

A weak army and a corrupt bureaucracy make the Philippines small and vulnerable to internal and external threats. The Philippines are struggling to patrol their vast expanse of water due to a lack of equipment and resources generated by limited border security and lack of defence funding. Thus, in an apparent move

to compensate for this weakness, there are plans to strengthen cooperation and a peaceful approach with countries sharing common borders and maritime interests, to strengthen alliances, to develop new security agreements and to expand commitments with regional and international institutions. Security mentality and political orientation (e.g. nation-building, economic pragmatism, internally oriented armed forces, and institutional shelter), that are typical for a small state (Domingo-Almase, *Ibid*).

Third world nations (Egypt, India, Indonesia and Iran for example) have pursued an outward orientated “*active strategy*”, and an expansive foreign policy, aiming to assert their national identity and existence in the international arena. In this direction, Nasser used propaganda, Arab nationalism, subversion, and increased armed forces. As a result, Egypt’s prestige has grown in the international arena.

Indonesia under Sukarno pursued a “*policy of confrontation*” with Malaysia and the Indonesian armed forces “*liberated*” West Irian. Sukarno’s successors pursued a less aggressive foreign policy but did not miss the opportunity to annex East Timor. Still, in 1999, under UN pressure, Indonesia gave up Timor, which in 2002 became an independent state.

Nepal is an underdeveloped country occupying a dangerous geopolitical place between two giants, India and China. Its relations with India were contradictory: India invested in its economy but was also a refuge for Nepalese opposition leaders. Things began to change when Mahendra ascended the throne of Nepal in 1955 and brought the Chinese factor to the Himalayas for the first time, as a potential counterbalance to India, by appointing pro-Chinese or pro-Indian politicians as prime ministers considering political interests. He launched a new policy of “*non-alignment with equal friendship*” (meaning the end of the special relationship with India), being signed the first trade and aid agreement with China, implemented by an anti-Indian prime minister (Maniruzzaman, *Ibid*). However, eighteen months later, Mahendra replaced for a short time the pro-Chinese prime minister with another to protect India. But, the newly appointed pro-Indian went too close to India and the king dismissed him only three months after his appointment. The president took over the administration and added a new dimension to its balance by concluding an aid agreement with the Soviet Union. His measures proved their efficiency: in 1955, when he came to the throne, Nepal had diplomatic relations with only five countries and, by 1959, it had been recognised by 24 governments and admitted to the United Nations. In 1968, Nepal was elected in the Security Council as a non-permanent member.

In the Cold War era, Romania was part of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance but opposed supranational planning. It had the foreign trade oriented to the west and also had economic treaties with Mongolia, Cuba, China etc. Romania

followed the idea of a nation-state that had the right to decide on its foreign policy. While Moscow campaigned for the subordination of national interests to the interests of the communist community, Bucharest maintained an independent line from Moscow and had a more nuanced position vis-à-vis the member states of the Warsaw Pact (Stephen, 1984). Nicolae Ceaușescu maintained a good relationship with the USA, interested in the geopolitical settlement of Romania and with the Popular Republic of China, thus managing to avoid the USSR invasion in Romania in 1968.

In the morning of 21 August 1968, Soviet, Hungarian, Polish, East German and Bulgarian troops entered into Czechoslovakia at the USSR request. In the same day, in the afternoon, Nicolae Ceaușescu addressed the people gathered in front of the headquarters of the Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party blaming the invasion. When he opposed to an action decided by Moscow, the president hoped for the USSR rival states, China, USA and Yugoslavia, to support Romania. His expectations were justified as, on 23 August 1968, at the reception organised for the National Day in the Romanian Embassy in Beijing, the Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai affirmed Romania in fighting for its defence could count on the Chinese people support (Tomozei, 2016). On his turn, in response to the Romanian diplomat Corneliu Mănescu, US President Lyndon Johnson sent a message to the Soviets: “Do not let slip the dogs of war!” (Betea, 2009, p. 59). On 24 August, Ceausescu met with Tito in the locality near the Vârșeț border where Tito assured him that he could withdraw to Yugoslav territory at any time. It was also discussed the possibility to form an eventual common defence front against Moscow.

At the end of August 1968, Ceaușescu’s situation was complicated. According to the Intelligence Service data, 235,000 soldiers belonging to the Odessa, Lviv and Kyiv Commands had been deployed on Romania’s borders with the Soviet Union (Marcu, Ibid). Also, naval ships of the Soviet fleet were stationed near the mouths of the Danube and the Romanian Black Sea coast. In this context, Dean Rusk, the head of the USA State Department, handed a note to Anatoli Dorinin, the Soviet ambassador to Washington, asking him not to invade Romania, as the consequences would be unpredictable (Betea, Ibid., p. 60).

Measures were taken to resist a possible Soviet invasion: the Romanian Armed Forces were mobilised, the Patriotic Guards were established, the law on *Preparing Youth for the Defence of the Motherland* was voted, introducing the obligation to attend military training courses for all students, Also, on 23 August, Ceaușescu met with two high-ranking Czechoslovak activists to form a possible common defence front against Moscow. The security analysed how the invasion of Czechoslovakia had taken place to cancel the possibility of repeating such a scenario in Romania as well. Airports were placed under strict guard, and the number of Soviet tourists was closely

monitored. The refusal of the Romanian authorities to allow military operations on its territory made difficult a scenario similar to the one applied in Czechoslovakia (Watts, 2011, p. 379). Romania has continued the path of independence in foreign relations and it is often suggested that it could serve as a model of *modus vivendi* between a superpower and a lower power. Romania has obtained a substantial autonomy in foreign relations, was surrounded by communist states.

The role of small and medium states in international relations is unjustly little studied. However, according to certain experts in the field, the conclusion was reached that small states generally choose multilateralism for two reasons: as a way to influence and as a means to limit bigger states. A small state is capable of developing priorities and use the strategies of a coalition it is part of to build its image.

We cannot fail to notice that states able to reach their foreign policy objectives benefit from a well-thought and sometimes even courageous security strategy.

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