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THE INSECURITY OF SMALL STATES

Scores of new states attained independence in the years following World War II. The retreat from empire by heretofore powerful European countries provided vast number of peoples with opportunities for self-rule. Imperial overseers did not relinquish control willingly, however, and some of the more tragic tales of the post-war era describe the enormous efforts required to oust alien rulers. But even in those cases where the colonial powers "graciously" transferred authority to indigenous folk, the dispensation frequently left in its wake local and regional discontent¹. This paper is concerned with that dimension of the security dilemma that small states create for themselves when they challenge their neighbouring counterparts, or when they cannot manage internal dissidence. Generally speaking small states have either misinterpreted the purpose of self-determination or failed to comprehend the changed environment created by imperial European withdrawal.

Former colonial peoples publicize their common goal in separating from distant overlords. They enthusiastically welcome each new sovereign member to their ranks. Nevertheless, they have considerable difficulty in adjusting to a world that includes their near neighbours. Despite conventional wisdom, the security of small states is threatened more by other new and/or small states, not the great powers. Indeed, the fear generated by big power machinations is a secondary not a primary problem for the small states.

1. Rupert Emerson, *From Empire To Nation*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 272.

Small states are also a menace to themselves. Internal cleavages, as well as dissatisfaction with ruling personalities, and/or political and administrative institutions, guarantees instability and negates efforts promoting national unity². The resulting disordered condition is an invitation to other states to meddle in their affairs. Moreover, the frequency with which governments of small states, or opposition to those governments, seek or obtain outside support underlines the fragile character of their independence and intensifies rather than reduces their insecurity. The Soviet Union has been especially sensitive to small state fears. Moscow perceives small powers, particularly those in the third world, as immature remnants of an older world. Social forces are at work, according to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and the current crop of states are destined to be superseded by more contemporary configurations representing "advanced theory"³.

The Soviets have long postured themselves in the vanguard of a new world, and they have left little doubt that brave new world involves the disappearance of a state system fashioned by European imperialism and anchored on stratified economic classes. Soviet efforts at embracing the west Europeans in a new security arrangement immediately following World War II targeted that vision of a new world order. Moscow tried to utilize the same strategy in Asia. In neither case, however, has it been materially successful. In the European case, as will be noted below, it could not isolate the United States. The west Europeans preferred the security proffered by Washington to that pledged by the Kremlin. But the decision is still out in Asia. Rivalries among and between regional states, and violent discontent at home, could still induce the Asian states to accept the Soviet version of an Asian collective security arrangement. Some of the reasons for this view are noted below.

2. Karl Deutsch and William Foltz, eds., *Nation-Building*, New York : Atherton, 1963, p. 46.
3. T.P. Whitney, ed., *The Communist, Blueprint for the Future*, New York : Dutton, 1962, p. 32.

Small State Environments

It is often overlooked how many small states, having gained independence from a larger, often remote power, invariably seek protection from that same power, or another equally formidable but otherwise distant actor. Small states are frequently less than congenial neighbours. More likely, they resent one another, denigrate each other's performance, or covet each other's possessions. Small states give an impression of incompleteness. Colonial dispensations do not ipso facto confer viability or stability. Nor do they imply an acceptable endowment, either territorially or demographically. Moreover, competing, often aggressive ideologies complicate the problem of neighbouring states living harmoniously side by side. Accommodation and cooperation receive lip-service, especially in international fora, but small states seldom practice what they preach. The hypocrisy in their language and behaviour adds significantly to the tension gripping the contemporary world. The mayhem committed by small states on themselves or against one another merely intensifies the scramble for power and advantage.

Small states have it within their power to keep would-be manipulative major actors from their door, but their inability to reconcile

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divergent moral and material claims with one another leaves them vulnerable to new forms of colonial dependency⁴. Organizations like the Non-Aligned Movement aim at separating the newly independent nations from the older, more powerful antagonists in the East-West configuration. The NAM's failure, however, is demonstrated by its members' inability to practice neutrality or resolve peculiar rivalries.

4. See, Claude Ake, *A Theory of Political Integration*, Homewood, Illinois : Dorsey, 1967.

The United Nations also is unable to guarantee the security of small states. A mirror image of the international environment, the UN reflects the conflicts that divide the world, it has yet to prove it can resolve them. UN emergency forces have served with courage and determination in numerous critical regions but they cannot contend with warring parties that wish to sustain violence. UN resolutions have pointed a finger of responsibility at belligerent parties, but seldom have these gestures brought compliance from those against whom they are directed. Moreover, the partisan character of many UN efforts has negated the moral and neutral character of the organization, as well as betrayed special interest.

There is in fact little recourse for small states seeking security and it could prove useful to observe how contemporary European states have attempted to deal with the problem.

The European Experience

Few if any lessons were learned by nineteenth century Europeans who failing to resolve rival claims or control scandalous ambitions precipitated in the twentieth century calamities that either destroyed or drastically reduced their vaunted pre-eminence. In the first half of the twentieth century, Germany twice precipitated conflicts that could not be contained in central Europe, and which quickly escalated into unprecedented world wars. Germany's defeat in both encounters and the repercussions of worldwide conflict rearranged global power structures. Classic powerbrokers were reduced to lesser roles, or lost their capacity to sway international events. Even victorious states such as Britain and France were forced to come to grips with new destinies in 1945. Their retreat from empire illustrated their weakened state, as well as an end to their worldwide quest. More concerned with preserving the motherland and rebuilding their shattered economies, these once great powers reluctantly acknowledged their lower, somewhat feeble station relative to the

vaunted superpowers. Major influence had gravitated toward the United States on the one side, and the Soviet Union on the other.

The bipolar character of the post-World War II world drove weaker countries to seek security in the shadow of the superpowers. Alliances were forged in Europe and NATO and the Warsaw Pact states divided along a celebrated and threatening Iron Curtain, with each bloc gesturing their intention to preserve national integrity through collective defence. With negotiations moving toward the inclusion of West Germany in the western alliance, Moscow sensed the need to augment its defence posture and at a Foreign Ministers meeting of the Four Great Powers (U.S., USSR, Britain and France) on February 10, 1957, the Soviets proposed a general conference on the security of Europe⁵. Moscow had been unsuccessful in gaining an agreement on a neutralized Germany and thus urged the withdrawal of all occupation troops from the country. In return for such a pledge the Soviets offered to enter into a 50-year treaty of collective security with all the European states. This offer was rejected by the western nations because it did not include the United States. The Soviet Union extended the same invitation to the west Europeans in 1955, 1957 and 1958, but as with the initial rejection these two were turned aside. The west Europeans signalled Moscow that any security arrangement had to include their primary ally.

The Warsaw Pact called for another European security conference in June 1968. And although this time the west Europeans seemed interested in such a meeting, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia put the question on hold. Soviet persistence was remarkable, however, and on March, 17, 1969 another overture was made to the western states. The inclusion of the United States in the conference engendered serious study by the NATO governments, and

5. Much of the material for this section is drawn from : *Historical Issues*, U.S. Department of State, "The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe", October 1986.

when the government of Finland offered to host a European security conference deliberations began in earnest.

The NATO governments called for improved conditions between East and West Germany. They also acknowledged Chancellor Willy Brandt's efforts at *Ostpolitik* and West Germany's intention to open a more peaceful chapter in its relations with the Soviet Union. Therefore, when the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union signed a treaty in August 1970 committing each side to "regard the frontiers of all States in Europe as inviolable" it heralded a new environment for the conduct of security affairs.

Notably, the improved relationship between East and West Germany was made possible by West Germany's acknowledgement of East German sovereignty. The continuing presence of Soviet forces in East Germany was juxtaposed with U.S. troop presence in West Germany. The Halstein Doctrine was made null and void by the exercise and the way was cleared to sticky but manageable relations between otherwise hostile states. West Germany's recognition of the Oder-Neisse line which repositioned Poland in central Europe after World War II also set the stage for a Big Four agreement on Berlin in 1971. Known as the Quadripartite Agreement, it relieved the threat of war that had hung over Berlin since the days of the Moscow fashioned Berlin blockade of 1948.

Representatives of all the European countries (Albania being the only exception) met in Helsinki in November 1972. The U.S. and Canada were also invited. This Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was divided into three groups, one representing NATO, another the Warsaw Pact states, and a third, the Non-Aligned countries. The agenda agreed upon at Helsinki was picked up in a meeting convened in Geneva. There then followed two years of deliberations, and in April 1974 the first concrete development of the conference was achieved when 35 nations agreed to the principle of inviolability of frontiers. The conference's major achievement,

however, was the Helsinki Final Act of August 1, 1975. With the largest assemblage of heads of state present since the 1815 Congress of Vienna, 35 nations adopted a statement of principles endorsing human rights at home and abroad. The Accords also reaffirmed the inviolability of national territory and specified that changes in frontiers were possible only on concurrence of the parties and in strict accordance with international law. Economic cooperation was stressed and transfers of technology were forecast. The agreement also noted the importance of scholarly interaction, and stressed the need to attain new levels of cultural exchange and intercourse. Finally, the Helsinki Act deemed it essential that the way be open for the free flow of information, ideas, and people, the latter being highly specific on the matter of reunification of families caught between ideological camps.

In 1978 there was a follow-up conference in Belgrade but it foundered on the question of human rights when the United States argued that the Soviet Union and its allies were not observing the terms of the earlier agreement. A conference in Montreux later in 1978 was a bit more successful because it defined procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Another conference in Valletta in 1977 examined economic and scientific cooperation among the Mediterranean states. In 1980 a scientific forum was convened in Hamburg which facilitated exchanges between scholars and scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain. That same year another follow-up conference was held in Madrid which continued for three years. It ended in September 1983 with the signing of a document citing the deteriorating international condition and the even more pressing need for security. The conferees cited the failure of detente and the concomitant increase in incidents of terrorism, although the two issues were treated separately.

A meeting on the peaceful settlement of disputes followed in April 1984. This session sought to pick up where the Montreux conference of 1978 left off. But again the discussions were without significant results. Another assembly of Mediterranean countries

convened in Venice in October 1984, following up the earlier Malta conference. It too only extended the conversations already entered into. Delegates from each side of the Iron Curtain met in Ottawa in May 1985, with the respective blocs charging one another with human rights violations. Little aside from propaganda emerged from the meeting.

The most significant conference of 1984 was the January Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe which was sited in Stockholm. The meeting examined the dimensions of the military/political situation in Europe and the need to verify disarmament agreements. The conference asserted the importance of building confidence between the parties, without which it was argued there could be no genuine security.

The 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act was celebrated in July 1985. The speeches of the delegates addressed the importance of the event, but they also underlined an inability to close the gap between ideologically opposed countries. The conference reiterated the need to continue the quest for "peace and freedom" but the only decision was to hold still another meeting. The Conference on Security and Cooperation's Cultural Forum met in a Warsaw Pact state for the first time (Hungary) in November 1985, but there was no concluding document from its deliberations. Undaunted, another group of conferees met in Bern, in April 1986, and although this session also failed to produce an official agreement, some participants believed the meeting had enhanced the possibility of more human contacts, i.e., the reuniting of divided families, easier emigration, etc. Indeed, the Soviet Union released from custody a number of long-confined political dissidents and several very prominent ones were permitted to leave the country in the last half of 1986.

Security, however, was still an elusive issue. The long serving Stockholm conference on Security-Building Measures did, however, adopt a final document on September 19, 1986. Arduous negotiations had proven somewhat successful. Given the Soviet Union's earlier

arrangement to allow unofficial nuclear monitoring stations on its territory, the final document created verifiable mechanisms for the notification and observation of significant military activities in Europe. The agreement for the first time allowed a participating state to establish inspection stations on Soviet territory for the purpose of observing Soviet military activity. The overall objective of the agreement was a more open military environment in Europe, but a November 1986 follow-up conference in Vienna failed to energize the programme. In spite of all efforts, security remained a wish and an aspiration; but the participants engaging in these conferences insisted that the frequency of their meetings was nevertheless a positive exercise, and they were determined to continue their work.

The Security of Non-European States

The Non-European states are also familiar with periodic conferences that aim at promoting better relations and cooperation. The performances of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of American States (OAS); the Organization of African Unity (OAU); the Arab League, and the more recent South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) address high purpose and elevate expectations, but such organizations have yet to show they can make their members more secure. Moreover, these organizations constantly face challenges to their integrity by their own member states who insist on bringing regional rivalries into the organizations. None of these organizations are capable of dealing with antagonistic members, and just as NATO cannot mediate the dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus, so too these organizations find themselves burdened and encumbered by deep-seeded, long standing rivalries.

Security is not attained through the building of regional organizations. Like the United Nations, these smaller, more selective arrangements mirror-image historic squabbles. Associations of states do not transcend the primordial conflicts of their constituents.

International organizations continue to play subordinate roles to the individual states, and decisions are seldom made on the basis of total community. There is little sustained harmony of interest and that which does prevail is generally single-issue oriented. But even the intensity of the single-issue, i.e., Arab support of the Palestinian cause, cannot guarantee collective action over time, or concerted

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action in reducing intra-state Arab grievances. The west Europeans display considerable interest in their mutual defence, but the common challenge has not caused them to ignore, let alone mute, national concerns. The non-Europeans are even less inclined toward cooperative endeavour, and their problems with one another are still in an incubus period. Conflicts between India and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, Morocco and Polisario, Libya and Chad, Ethiopia and Somalia, and Vietnam and Kampuchea are one side of a tragic story. The internationalized civil strife in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka is another.

Superpower actions such as that of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the United States in Central America, and earlier in Indochina, weaken the security of all states, especially that of the small states. Moreover, internal warfare as in Mozambique or Angola, or violent discontent as in South Africa, the Sudan, Egypt or Pakistan, can only add to small state instability.

Governments of small states are particularly sensitive to their vulnerabilities. Almost exclusively authoritarian in character and structure, persistent crisis provides justification for their strong-arm tactics and their reluctance to share responsibility with those of their citizens representing another calling or philosophy. Rigidity is a

consequence of protracted conflict and the martial arts are given priority over social change and economic achievement. Legitimacy suffers in such circumstances, and the right to govern is superseded by the efficiency of government. The impersonality of government decision-making can also be described as indifference to citizen demands for justice and equity. The resulting power structure therefore rests on a foundation of fear, reinforced by arbitrary rules and dictatorial judgements. Such conditions cannot promote national unity, nor can inchoate states successfully build meaningful regional communities.

Observing the fragile character of the states on their southern periphery, the Soviets are determined to press their advantage. The only stable state in the area, the Soviet Union believes that small state futures are linked to the security of the Soviet heartland. In 1972 Leonid Brezhnev spoke of the need to develop an Asian collective security pact. Addressing the 15th Congress of Soviet Trade Unions, he declared the need for Asian countries to repudiate the 'use of

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force...., to respect the sovereignty and inviolability of frontiers, non-interference in internal affairs, and broad development of economic and other cooperation on the basis of complete equality and mutual benefit. We advocate and shall continue to advocate such collective security in Asia and are ready to cooperate with all countries to make this idea a reality"⁶. The Soviet offer was similar to that adopted for Europe. A major difference, however, was the distance of the United States from the Asian arena. Therefore, Moscow's criticism of

6. Lawrence Ziring and C.I.E. Kim, *The Asian Political Dictionary*, Santa Barbara, Cal., ABC-CLIO, 1985, p. 363.

the United States was more aggressive in Asia than in Europe. The Kremlin spoke of U. S. imperialism and accused Washington of building "closed regional military-political groups." It cautioned the newly independent countries not to be trapped by the "bitter legacy" of colonialism that could only perpetuate their "economic backwardness, mutual distrust and suspicion, tribalism, and prejudice." The Soviets insisted they were more conversant with the peoples of Asia than the Americans who were thousands of miles away from the region. The Soviets also supported the convening of the International Conference for Security and Cooperation in Asia (Bangladesh, 1973), and the World Congress of Peace Forces which Moscow hosted in October that year.

The Soviet Union's greatest diplomatic achievement in Asia, however, was not the acceptance of a Moscow-dominated Asian Security System, but its 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with India. Similar treaties were later entered into with Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Vietnam. But the much publicized Asian Security System still remains to be operationalized. It apparently will remain on hold pending a solution of the Afghanistan war, but it is doubtful if the proposal has lost any of its momentum as a consequence of that conflict.

The insecurity of small states is therefore perpetuated, not relieved. Insecurity is useful to those who call themselves protectors of society. It sustains their role, firms their grip, and assures the perpetuation of political forms emphasizing power and control. The security of small states begins with themselves and their capacity to meld cooperative and accommodative societies. Rather than the larger states, i.e., the superpowers, the course of world history might well be shaped by the smaller nations. Unfortunately, they are neither equipped nor prepared to assume that responsibility. It is more likely that the small states will face even greater threats to their security in the last decade of the twentieth century.