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DO SMALL STATES BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY FROM BIG STATES? A CRITIQUE OF MAURICE EAST'S ALTERNATIVE MODEL

INTRODUCTION

Despite the belief that small states are peripheries of the periphery, viewed in terms of centre-periphery frame of international politics, they are not without political significance in the present day multipolar and interdependent world. First, they add up arithmetically as a force in the democratic forum of the United Nations and other bodies. Second, in specific geo-political and subsystemic frame in which they are located, they possess geostrategic values often irrespective of their size. They represent a meaningful category of foreign policy actors in the international system. Although the meaningfulness of small states is sometimes recognized, it is yet not fully explored. Commenting on the status of international relations research in the mid 1970s, Kenneth Waltz deplored that "nothing seems to accumulate, not even criticism."¹ "Studies of the Third World foreign policies are in an even worse state and can still be called the underdeveloped study of the underdeveloped countries,"² moaned Bahgat Korany in the 1980s.

1 Waltz Kenneth, "Theory of International Relations", in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, (eds) *Handbook of Political Science*, VIII, pp. 1-2, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975.

2 Bahgat Korany, "The Take-Off of the Third World Studies?" in *World Politics* Vol. XXXV, April 1983, p.465.

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Existing literature on the foreign policy of small states contains generalized observations about the "problems, prospects and dynamics whereby small states ward off, procure from or somehow manage to cope with their external environment." Studies in the area might be characterized by their excessive concern with what constituted the 'smallness' of a state. The assessment of smallness in terms of population, GNP or defence expenditure involved making arbitrary cut offs. The use of such parameters yielded little significance as to the characteristic behaviour of the small states.³ While these studies were helpful in some ways, they did not lead one further. Such studies were concerned with describing, at a more superficial level, the 'what' of state behaviour. The 'why' and 'how' remained unexamined. Consequently, they suffered from the lack of depth of analysis and understanding. Some believe that 'although the "why" questions are fundamentally most important of all they cannot be answered without establishing beforehand exactly what phenomena need to be explained'.⁴ Some studies, however, sought a deeper level of understanding by posing such question as — do small states behave differently from the big states?

One such study focusing small state behaviour was conducted by Maurice A. East in his piece titled, "Size and Foreign Policy Behaviour: A Test of Two Model".⁵ East asserted that small states and large states behave differently. If East's position is accepted then his study might provide some alternative ground for the study of small state behaviour. We may then begin to look at small state behaviour specifically from the perspective of the small states. This article examines his claims. The first section of the article provides an overview of the two models, i.e., the conventional model and the alternative model, as proposed by him. The second section assesses the theoretical consistencies of the alternative model. The third section examines the interpretation of data provided to support his claims and the final section draws on the conclusion.

3 Paul Sharp, *Irish Foreign Policy and the European Community*, Dartmouth, England, p. 22.

4 Christopher, Hill, "Theories of Foreign Policy Making for the Developing Countries", in Christopher Clapham, ed. *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, pp. 1-2.

5 Maurice A. East, "Size and Foreign Policy Behaviour: A Test of two Model", *World Politics*, Vol. 25, 1972/73.

I. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONVENTIONAL AND THE ALTERNATIVE MODELS

The author abstracted the conventional model of small states behaviour in foreign affairs from the literature on foreign policy. He began his work with the conventional definitional characteristics of small states⁶ and observed the behavioural patterns that were traditionally attributed to small states. These behavioural patterns included :

- a. low levels of overall participation in world affairs;
- b. high levels of activity in international organizations (IGO's);
- c. high levels of support for international legal norms;
- d. avoidance to the use of force as a technique of statecraft;
- e. avoidance of behaviours and policies which tend to alienate the more powerful state in the system;
- f. a narrow functional and geographic range of concern in foreign policy activities; and
- g. frequent utilization of moral and normative positions on international issues.

He argued that the major implicit assumption underlying these behavioural pattern was that the small state behaviours were the result of the same general processes of decision making that were found in large states. He observed that these patterns corresponded quite closely to the outcomes of the application of a 'rational' model of foreign policy in which small state's behaviour was governed by it's limited resources and a limited international potential. Consequently he argued that all behavioural expressions mentioned above indicated a low-profile course of action in which small states minimized their perceived risk and their scarce resources such as manpower, military capabilities and hard currency. He further argued that according to such model, as far as the role of information is concerned,

⁶ East mentioned that small states are traditionally defined to possess one or more of the following characteristics: small land area, small total population, small total GNP (or other measures of total productive capacity) and a low level of military capability.

the element of 'rationality' was also expressed in decision process of small states. He based his argument on the assumption espoused in the literature that the small states' actions were the results of the decisions arrived at by a decisional unit which had been monitoring world affairs closely, had an 'adequate information base' from which to operate and had a long range policy perspective. Essentially, the point East emphasized was that the conventional model assumed that the small states like their larger counterparts also evaluated 'all possible' alternatives and then made a 'rational' choice. This was precisely the point where East appeared to disagree with the conventional model and its assumption of 'rationality'.

With this disagreement he evolved his 'alternative model'. In his discussion of the alternative model East made an opposite assumption i.e., the foreign policy process of large and small states were fundamentally different. Similar to the discussion on the conventional model, he began with the definitional characteristics of small states and constructed the alternative model on the premise that the small states were constrained in terms of resources. He maintained that since the small states had smaller proportion of an already small resource base to devote to international sector, the organizational size and capacity of small state's foreign office was also likely to be small. He argued that this implied that there would be fewer persons involved in monitoring international events and executing foreign policy decisions. As a consequence, he stated that small states were incapable to deal adequately with the total range of international issues facing them. Small states had to be selective and prioritize their involvement in terms of functional and geographic areas. Another consequence of smaller capacity to monitor the system, as he argued, was that the small states were likely to be slow in perceiving international events and developments. The inability to gather early signals implied that small states were likely to get fewer opportunities and alternatives to influence a situation. Consequently, he maintained that by the time a small state received a signal it was likely to be too late for negotiation or ambiguous behaviour (including softer low-risk alternatives such as verbal response) to be effective.

Table 1 : The Summary of the Assumptions about and Prédications of Small State Behaviour under the Conventional and Alternative Models

	Conventional Model	Alternative Model
Assumptions	Foreign policy of small states are similar to that of the large states.	Foreign policy of small states are fundamentally different from the large states.
	Small states have limited resources.	Small states have limited resources.
	Small states monitor closely the world events and have an adequate information base from which to operate. They have long-range policy perspectives.	Resource constraints limit small states' organizational capacity to monitor international events and developments. Small states are also likely to be slow in perceiving early signals about international events and developments.
Prédications	Based on the rationality of matching behaviours with resources small states tend to focus on a narrow range on international issues.	Since small states are unable to monitor all international events and developments they are predominantly less active, are differentially active and have selective priorities. They focus on a narrow range of international issues. The issues that are related to economic growth and development tend to be more important.
	Small states are predicted to exhibit a low-profile course of action. Their actions tend to be cautious and low-risk oriented.	Small states are predicted to exhibit behaviours that are likely to be at a higher level of intensity, less ambiguous, more hostile and threatening, i.e., high-risk behaviours.
	Small states seek methods of interaction that are less costly and more economical. For example, instead of bilateral diplomacy small states prefer multilateral diplomacy, regional organizations and multiple diplomatic representations.	Small states seek methods of interaction that are less costly and more economical. For example, instead of bilateral diplomacy small states prefer multilateral diplomacy, regional organizations and multiple diplomatic representations.

Hence, contrary to the predictions of the conventional model the small states, at this stage, were more likely to adopt a definite, unambiguous and high-risk behaviour. As he wrote, "a small state does not enjoy the luxury of engaging in early, low-level, ambiguous behaviour when trying to take effective action in such situations." The summary of the assumptions about and predictions of small states, behaviour under each model is presented in Table 1 above.

II. THE THEORETICAL CONSISTENCY OF THE ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Having described the models we shall now assess the logical consistency of the alternative model from a theoretical perspective. A number of observations may be made regarding the model as proposed by East. First, one is likely to be perplexed when one finds that similar conclusions were derived from different premises. For example, East argued that the premises of conventional model and that of the alternative model were different. While the conventional model assumed that the foreign policy process of large states were similar to that of the small states, the alternative model assumed that there were fundamental differences between large and small states in terms of such process. However, both models concluded that small states focus on a narrow range of activities when dealing with external affairs. One immediately suspects that either the premises were not different or that the conclusions were not logically consistent with their respective premises. As far as logical consistencies are concerned, let us, for argument's sake, assume that the reasoning provided by the author adequately established the linkages (which, however, as we shall see later, is not the case) between the conclusions and the premises. However, the difficulty appears to lie in the assumption of different premises. Observing the behavioural pattern of the small states under the conventional model, East argued that such pattern closely resemble the

"application of a 'rational' model of foreign policy to the situation facing any state with limited resources and a limited international potential". While he rejected the assumption of similarity of foreign policy process of small and large states (the processes of both types of states were equated using the argument of similar application of the rational model) he implicitly used the same argument of the 'rational' model when he asserted that the organizational size and capacity of the small state's foreign office was smaller corresponding to their smaller resource base. His definition of the term 'rational' appears to be very instructive in establishing the point just made. He wrote in a footnote (footnote 7 of his article), "the term 'rational' is used to imply the minimizing of costs and the maximizing of impact by operating under the same assumptions and rules that might apply in a large, developed state." Certainly the small state's focus on a narrow range of activities are based on a rational decision keeping in view the maximizing of impact by expending minimum resources from its limited resource base. Also, the limited size and capacity of foreign office is certainly another reflection of rational decision. It is apparent from this analysis that the premise of different foreign policy process of small and large states can not be sustained by the argument of rationality.

Second, it appears rather simplistic to assume reliable linkages between size and capacity of foreign office of a small state and the degree of ability to perceive early signals and finally the manifestation of high-risk behaviour. Let us try to elaborate the assertion. It may be asked whether there is any connection between the degree of size and capacity of a foreign office and the degree of its ability to perceive early signals. The author did not provide any empirical evidence. As soon as we ask such question we enter into a gray area. What size and capacity is required for perceiving a given amount of early signal? The literature does not provide any clue to such question. Perhaps the size and capacity of a small state's foreign office is adequate for perceiving early signals in the limited and narrow range of

areas that concern the small state. This assumption seems to be convincing if we consider the aspect of rationality. It can be argued that the areas of interest for a small state are prioritized in such a way that more resources (from what is available) are committed to those areas that are most important; so that the foreign office can function best in such areas and is capable to perceive early signals that are needed most. Then using the author's argument, the small states will not be required to exhibit high-risk behaviour. Let us consider the next item in the linkage, i. e., the lack of early signals and the demonstration of high-risk behaviour. Accepting the definitional characteristics of small states, it may be argued that as a result of a narrow resource base small states have less international aspirations, consequently they have fewer stakes in their relations with other countries. This implies that they have less need for early signals hence they have less risky behavioural expressions. Unlike some of the large states, small states (for example) are hardly concerned with 'star war' or have 'burning' gostrategic concerns or have desperate need to amass sophisticated military hardware (including nuclear capabilities) or are in need for maintaining regional and global sphere of influence. The importance and need for early signals appears to be crucial in these and other similar areas. Such need and importance seem to be much depreciated in the area of small state's primary concern i. e., economic growth and development. The diminished need for importance of early signals in the area of economic growth and development implies that there will be fewer surprises for the small states in an evolving situation. In influencing such a situation the small states are not likely to exhibit high-risk behaviour. However, instances of high risk behaviour in such situation may be found. It, therefore, appears that the understanding of high-risk behaviour in terms of the lack of early signals does not take us far.

Finally, a crucial contradiction may be observed in East's formulation. East asserted that as a result of resource constraints the size and capacity of a

small state's foreign office will be small; thereby such state will be unable to perceive the early signals and this ultimately would lead to the demonstration of high-risk behaviour. It may be argued that the same resource constraint which East maintained as the premise for his argument of small states' high-risk behaviour is likely to prohibit such states in adopting such behaviour. This is because high-risk behaviour frequently involves commitment of resources which significantly scare in case of small states.

III. AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Apart from the conceptual difficulties of the alternative model one also observes certain points regarding the empirical part of the study. East studied data from 32 countries (large and small, developed and developing) generated by the CREON project. It appears that the study might have been biased by the a priori categories and the structure of the data set upon which the study was wholly dependent. Further, despite the impression of imperviousness conveyed by the use of statistics the study remained 'vulnerable' to subjectivity. Certainly, the decision about which event will fall in which category in the data set is a matter of opinion and judgement. Besides these criticisms, the most disturbing aspect of his study is that it is a typical example of 'what-one-gets-is-what-one-wishes-to-see' type of study. This is the point we would like to examine in some depth. To establish the point we shall borrow some of the tables presented in his study. However, before that it is necessary to highlight the hypothesis he considered. The hypotheses he developed from his theoretical framework were divided into four categories such as, *level of international activity, low cost foreign policy techniques, high-risk behaviour and relative importance of foreign policy issues*. The hypotheses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 : The Summary of the Hypothesis of the Alternative Model

Level of International Activities	1. Small states will participate less in foreign affairs than large states.
Low cost foreign policy techniques	2a. Small states are more likely to engage in joint behaviour in foreign policy because this allows two or more states to pool their resources to achieve greater influence.
	2b. Many targets of small states' actions will be groups of states or International Organizations.
	2c. Small states will exhibit relatively less verbal behaviour and more non-verbal behaviour.
High-risk behaviour	3a. Small states will exhibit more conflict behaviour because of the perceived necessity to take high-risk and often hostile action if they are to influence the direction of the situations as they develop.
	3b. The behaviour of the small states is likely to be more specific.
Relative importance of foreign policy issues.	4. The economic issues will be of great importance to small states.

We shall now consider each hypothesis in terms of the data presented. Data provided to validate the first hypothesis appears to support it adequately. The average events initiated by the large states are far greater than the small states. However, the interpretations of data to support the remaining hypotheses appears to be somewhat confusing and misleading. In addition one fails to understand why part of hypothesis 2a and hypotheses 3a were not tested. Let us examine the remaining hypotheses in turn. In testing hypothesis concerning the 'low-cost' foreign policy techniques (hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c), he considered the events initiated, the targets of the events initiated and verbal/non-verbal behaviour of large and small states. The statistical tests (Chi square test and Goodman-Kruskal test) provided the evidence which he needed to support his hypothesis. One does not have any difficulty to accept (as the statistical tests suggest) that small states do

initiate more joint behaviour events than large states, that small-state events have fewer single targets and more joint targets than large-state events and finally that small states exhibit less verbal behaviour and more non-verbal behaviour than large states. However, one also gets an impression of certain similarities between the small and large states from the Tables that were presented by the author. The point may be apparent by observing the figures in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 (these tables are reproduced here for reference). For example, Table 3 shows that in case of large states, events initiated by a single state (65 percent) is greater in number than the events initiated by two states (30 per cent) which in turn is greater in number than the events initiated by three states (4 per cent). Similarly, in case of small states the number of events initiated by one state is greater than the ones initiated by two states which is in turn greater than the ones initiated by three states. The Table 4 and Table 5 also reveal similar features.

Table 3 : Percentage of Events Initiated, by Size and Number of States Participating

	Number of States		
	One	Two	Three
Large States	65	30	4
Small States	46	40	14

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table 2.

Table 4 : Percentage of Events Initiated, by Size and Number of Targets

	Number of Targets				
	One Target	Two or Three	Four to Ten	Eleven or More	IGO as Target
Large States	85	5	1	0	8
Small States	75	5	2	7	17

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid* Table 3.

Table 5 : Verbal/Nonverbal Behaviour by Size (in Percentages)

	Number of States	
	Verbal (Words)	Nonverbal (Deeds)
Large States	76	24
Small States	62	38

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table A.

These observations appears to indicate that the author considered only those arguments that were needed to substantiate his point not what the figures spoke for themselves. Incorporating the author's argument and the observations just made one is likely to conclude that while large and small states have similar patterns of behaviour they lay different emphasis on low-cost and high-cost foreign policy techniques; small states tend to emphasize more on low-cost foreign policy techniques than large states.

In testing the hypothesis concerning high-risk behaviour (hypothesis 3a and 3b) of small states the author considered the events that were categorized as conflictful and the ones as cooperative. To ascertain the degrees of cooperation or conflict he used an eight point scale (as shown in figure 1) in which the events were assigned to the points corresponding to the sub-categories of cooperation and conflict such as deeds, intent, desire and evaluation.

Figure 1 : Eight Point Scale of Cooperation and Conflict

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cooperation				Conflict			
Deeds	Intent	Desire	Evaluation	Evaluation	Desire	Intent	Deeds

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*.

The Table 6 and Table 7 (reproduced here) represent the percentage of conflictful and cooperative actions for size and development respectively. Conducting chi-square test and Goodman-Kruskal test he argued that while Table 6 rejected his hypothesis (which stated that small states exhibited more conflictful behaviour than large states) Table 7 supported it.

Table 6 : Conflict/Cooperation by Size (in percentages)

	Cooperation	Conflict
Large States	63	37
Small States	69	31

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table 6.

Table 7 : Conflict/Cooperation by Development (in Percentages)

	Cooperation	Conflict
Developed States	66	34
Developing States	62	38

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table 7.

In addition, he also presented data (reproduced here in Table 8) utilizing the 'uncollapsed coding scheme' to test another hypothesis which states that small states are more likely to exhibit non-verbal behaviour, especially non-verbal conflictual behaviour as compared to large states. To test the hypothesis he conducted chi-square test and showed that the test results confirmed the hypothesis.

Table 8 : Revised Foreign Policy Action Scheme by Size (in percentages)

	Cooperation				Conflict			
	Deed	Intent	Desire	Evaluation	Evaluation	Desire	Intent	Deed
Large State	21	16	10	17	20	5	9	3
Small State	30	14	16	10	14	4	5	8

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table 9.

As mentioned before, there appears to be little difficulty in accepting the test results. However, similar to the observation made earlier it may be mentioned that one also notices similarity of patterns between large and small states (as in Table 6 and Table 8) and between developed and

developing states (as in Table 7). Unlike the author's conclusions, given the test results along with the observed patterns in the Tables one is inclined to infer that while large and small states have similar patterns of behaviour the small states emphasize more on conflictful non-verbal behaviour than large states.

The author presented data to prove his hypothesis that small states behaviour is less ambiguous compared to large states and considered events that were problem specific and the ones that were target specific. Conducting Chi-square test he showed that the results confirmed his hypothesis. However, the author did not provide data regarding events that were ambiguous either in terms of problems or in terms of target. Hence it was not possible to observe such patterns.

Hypothesis 4 concerned the relative importance of foreign policy issues. The author maintained that 'economic issues will be of great importance' to small states.' Hence, he hypothesized that the economic bureaucracies (i. e., those agencies responsible for the economic aspects of the polity) of small states as well as developing states will be involved in the execution of a higher proportion of foreign policy issues than the economic bureaucracies of large states. Using percentage figures he showed that data supported his hypothesis. However, as he did not provide any figures for non-economic bureaucracies of large and small states that are involved with the execution of foreign policy events, it was not possible to observe any similarities or differences of patterns between such states.

In addition to the data on economic bureaucracies the author also considered data on the skill or resources utilized in executing events. Table 9 (which is reproduced here from Maurice East) represents such data in percentages. He hypothesized that small states initiate more events involving economic resources than the large states. He showed that the results of Chi-square test confirmed his hypothesis.

Table 9 : Type of skill or Resources by Size (in Percentages)

	Economic	Military	Diplomatic
Large States	25	11	59
Small States	10	5	82

Adopted from, Maurice East, *ibid*, Table 12.

However, like the previous observations one also gets the impression from Table 9 that there are some similarities in behavioural patterns between large and small states. One will notice from Table 9 that both large and small states initiate far more events involving diplomatic resources than either economic or military resources. Hence, given the test result along with such observation one can conclude that while there are certain similarities between the patterns of small and large states, the small states are more likely to initiate more events involving economic resources than the large states.

Whatever evidence the author provided, appear to have supported his hypothesis. However, looking at the Tables one gets an impression that (despite the difference of behaviour between small and large states) the pattern of their behavioural responses bear certain similarities (of course with certain differences in emphasis and magnitude). All that the study showed is that there are differences in behaviour between large and small states but it did not show that the patterns of behaviour are different between them.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the picture drawn in the preceding analysis one gets a conflicting signal as to whether the small and large states behave differently or not. The theoretical and empirical difficulties associated with the alternative model indicate that far from being persuasive about the claims made, one is left in a state of uncertainty as to whether small states' behaviour should be studied from a small state's perspective or it is possible to derive lessons from big state behaviour. Certainly, more research is needed to evolve an in-depth understanding of small state behaviour.