SMALL STATES IN THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

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During the past decade, scholars and practitioners have experienced a growing unease about the validity and viability of long-prevailing theories in their efforts to grasp the increasingly confusing and disturbing international security environment. The singular importance of post-war US-Soviet relations and the strategic nuclear competition so overwhelmed their security perspectives that they have been somewhat slow in reacting to security needs and problems of non-central system actors, particularly small states. The problems of these states have either been obscured by the scholars or assumed to be readily assimilated within various centrally conceived and managed security systems. But the record of the last several decades, however, shows that although relative stability of central strategic balance has been generally maintained, the states of the developing world have become the primary terrain on which wars in the post-war era have been fought. The increase in the number of inter-state and intra-state conflicts illustrate conspicuously the absence of order and security in these states. The rhetoric of global interdependence of nations has been seriously questioned when many of these states are threatened with acute economic insecurity and even physical annihilation by widespread famine, drought, flood, epidemics, etc. There are, therefore, serious doubts about the stability of the present international security system and its norms and values which are often insensitive to qualitatively different and specialized security needs and concerns of small developing states. It is in this perspective, that an attempt has been made in this paper to understand the multi-faceted security problems of small states and to understand their complex linkages with the global security system.

Problems of Approach
There are, indeed, enormous difficulties in defining a small state in the contemporary system and to find out a coherent approach to analyse their
security problems. Apart from small developed states, there are now 130
developing countries having a population ranging from less than a
million to 100 million. The population and territorial sizes of these
states vary significantly having no proportionate relationships between
the two. Small territories may have large population while large territo­
ries are inhabited by less population. Locationally these states span
various ecological zones with diverse geographical features—-island states,
land locked states, disaster-prone areas and so forth. In terms of resource
base, technological development, stages of economic growth and military
preparedness, there are also wide variations among these states. Per
capita GNP, for example varies from less than $ 100 to more than $ 4,000
( in case of Singapore ). These wide variations among small states have
made their security requirements unique, specialized and often country-
specific.

The concept of security in the context of small states has been
approached from various dimensions. At one spectrum, definitions of
security convey a 'minimalist approach' where it is defined primarily
from the military-strategic perspective with the overall focus being
directed towards the protection of the state from physical attacks both from
within and without. This approach emphasizes centrality of military
security and credible defense against external threats. The maximalist
approach, on the other hand, includes both physical and non-physical
aspects of security. This approach generally takes into account diverse
factors that underpin the threat perceptions of the states. The maximalist
approach while admitting the importance of credible defense forces,
gives more stress on establishing stronger links between defense and other
aspects of development. It appreciates both facets of security—-strength­
ening internal capacity and establishing broader linkages with the
international system. It is, indeed, difficult for most small states to muster
a defense effort that could meet all possible external contingencies
through military means. It is also inconceivable that majority of these
states would be able to safeguard their territorial integrity against a
sustained military offensive by powerful neighbours, or major powers.
Some of the small island states of Indian Ocean ( like Maldives, Mauritius,
Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, etc. ) are so fragile and vulnera­
table that forces foreign to these states do not have to even exert
direct military pressures. They can even obtain desirable political changes
indirectly through mercenaries or internal dissidents. Their security
is largely dependent upon what is often called 'strategic consensus' of the major powers, which in turn is shaped by international security environment.

**National Vulnerabilities and External Interventions**

Vulnerability is key-note that affects the security perspectives of the small states. Lack of credible defense forces, sharp and often irreconcilable polarizations in society, subversions, irredentist movements, limited resources, undiversified economic structures, inadequate supply of food, energy and economic wherewithals for sustained development are some of the main features of this vulnerability. Although there are uniqueness in the patterns of vulnerability, all of these states regardless of political, ideological and economic differences seek to change from the present position to one that is less vulnerable and hence more secure.

The insecurity of these countries arises both from internal strains as well as international security framework. The direction and pace of internal development are often critically important to understand the military-strategic weaknesses of these states. The historical process of state-formation often burdened these countries with unresolved and bitter territorial or border disputes. The concept of nationhood of these states was also materialized by colonial powers in a way which in many cases, went against territorial, ethnic, religious or culture-historical traditions.

Most of these states also emerged in a broader global political universe which was deeply fragmented by inequities of wealth and power. The transformation of these countries into modern nation-states have further churned up layers of social and political consciousness leading to ethnic-linguistic conflicts, religious sectarian strife, struggle for greater shares in development resources, and crisis of political succession. These factors, singly or in combination, contribute to internal security threats. The conflict-ridden setting of the small states, thus created by distorted state-structures, fragility of political institutions and inequitable resource distribution, open up these countries to multi-faceted security threats by outside forces.

The unprecedented increase in the number of intra-state and inter-state conflicts amply demonstrates the current insecurity of small states. The number of these types of conflicts now stands at 160, of which 30 conflicts are inter-state and the rest 130 are intra-state mainly in
the form of civil wars, internal subversions and insurgencies. These internal conflicts of small states are often exacerbated by overt or covert interventions of neighbours and major powers. There have been literally hundreds of incidents in which external powers have sought to influence the outcome of events in these states through military means. The activism of the U.S. and other western industrial powers stirred Soviet interventions in these countries. The rise in US military interventions in Southeast Asia, Caribbean and Middle-eastern countries in the late 1960s led to a turning point in Soviet policy of military involvements in different regions. These interventions of big powers have taken different forms, ranging from outright physical occupation, as in the case of Afghanistan, to coercive diplomacy which consists of covert or not so covert interventionism, demonstration of use of force without war and arms supplies. In fact, the coercive diplomacy is increasingly replacing war as the prime instrument of interventionism. The insecurity of developing countries has to be looked at from this perspective. It has been documented that the United States demonstrated use of 'force without war' on 223 occasions during the period from 1945-1982, of which 168 were in the developing countries. In case of Soviet Union while the figures are somewhat lower (167 up to 1979), the trend is comparable. Apart from Afghanistan, she has been also heavily involved in military conflicts in the Middle-east, Southeast Asia and African countries of western Sahara, Somalia, Sudan, Ghana, Angola, Ethiopia etc. Other western powers particularly Britain and France are also engaged in influencing and even determining the outcome of local political conflicts in their former colonies in Middle-eastern and African countries.

Given the fragmented incohesive character of small states, overt or covert interventions by outside powers is an important element in their security calculations. These interventions particularly in sensitive local conflicts where the regional environment is not conducive often lead to complications and escalations. Cambodia, Thailand, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Chand, Uganda, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka are all experiencing a lingering crisis where conflict-resolution has become delicate and difficult matter.

The competition and rivalry of major powers in the Third World states vary significantly. It is obviously at its most intense where strategic and economic interests are deeply involved. In spite of
geographical isolation and features of extreme smallness and dispersal, security concerns of many small island countries in Indian Ocean or the Caribbean have more to do with the global policies of major powers and regionally powerful states. Their security problems are linked with strategic importance and their role as strategic bases and, therefore, they are subject to intense superpower rivalry. In the face of increasing militarisation of the oceans by the big powers, and presence of their surrogates or regional powers, even prudent management of security and foreign policies would hardly enable them to avoid entanglements in big powers competition. The security perspectives of these countries, therefore take on special meanings, as these states possess only a minimal deterrent capacity in the face of such tensions between the powers.

Security Linkages and Global System

In many ways, today's global system resembles an 'anarchic society' of nations. We can no longer speak of the system as exclusively bipolar. A host of new actors are now participants with considerable asymmetries—some have only one dimension of power—for example, economic (Saudi Arabia) but not military, or military but not economic (Vietnam): or no power other than a good geographic location or a potentially usable vote in the international or regional organization. But all are now participants whose behaviour is an integral part of the world security order, imperfect or partial as it is. For a variety of historical, structural and technological reasons, as we have indicated earlier, the small states are the most disadvantaged entities in the system, and they are the ones who suffer from extreme vulnerabilities. But their security needs are not addressed by the present international system. Whereas any major threat to the security of the developed state—military, economic or technological, immediately takes on the character of a crisis for the whole system, in the case of small states the linkages between their security concerns and those of the system appear to be ephemeral. There is hardly any commitment in the developed world to the security of these states unless there are some important states in terms of strategic location or vital economic interests. The global security system dominated by major powers, therefore, permits and often encourages local conflicts in large parts of the Third World states. This policy impinges on the security of small states in an extremely dele-
terions manner worsening the already destabilizing internal dynamics and perpetuating insecurity.

Arms supplies to the developing nations is one major implication of the present anarchic global security system. The supply of arms by the major powers not only perpetuates conflicts among the developing countries, it also benefits of the major powers. The sale of arms to affluent nations in exchange of bases, access facilities, staging points etc. are often counter-productive to their security. The arms supply relationship overtime gets converted into an implied security relationship. The supply of sophisticated weapons to a small state engenders a sense of insecurity among its neighbours who, in turn, seek arms from the same source or a rival source. In the process, some of the small states may achieve an enhanced capacity to utilize a variety of political and economic instruments of security policy. Whether this capacity has improved the security and environment of these states remains an open question but in many, if not most cases, it has not.

The diffusion of weapons to scores of small states has enlarged the scope of regional conflicts with increasing potential of "internationalization" as it is evident in many small states like Angola, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Yemen, Namibia, Cambodia etc. The conflicts are persisting for many years providing pretexts for intervention and escalation. The small states today, are indeed undergoing a series of pressures and challenges to survive as nation-states. How to improve the situation? What could be the measures to protect the core security interests of these fragile and incohesive nations? Good 'home-management' is, of course, the first essential step. But is it possible unless there is a broader consensus on 'vital issues' at the regional and global levels? Regional security approach is often advanced by scholars in order to 'localize' conflict resolution. This approach is likely to work in areas marginal to super powers competition. However, in areas of intense rivalry, it is doubtful whether it is possible to disentangle regional events from broader competition. It is, therefore, important that some consensus on a core of vital security interests pertaining to these states should evolve through dialogue and consultation not only between the two super powers but also with regional actors. There are, at present no ground rules limiting competition and rivalry in various regions. The regional systems are also non-homogenous with no clear and defined lines of contest or cooperation. The super
powers often concede to regional actors local preponderence (as the United States in case of Brazil) if they see some benefit, but if it is otherwise, they do not care regional boundaries, but manoeuvre, instead, to insinuate their influence to small states of the region, or backyards of their rivals.

**Conclusions**

In fact the vision of a non-conflictual and cooperative environment in various regions of the world is unexceptionable. The actual achievement of such a future even something a kin to over armed peace that exists in Europe will be extremely difficult given the complicated interactions of big powers and regional powers, and the presence of many turbulent small states. The global security system today is in disarray—each individual actor may seem to be acting in a way to maximize its security interests but the system as a whole has less direction and fewer points of control. Never before have so many states been so interdependence for their security and yet so bereft of means and mechanisms to harmonize their actions if for no other reasons than to minimize the mutual harm and damage that they can inflict. From the perspectives of small states, it is obvious to have doubts about the efficacy of the system since it hardly caters to their security needs and encourages resolution of conflicts. It is, therefore, imperative to promote confidence-building, mutual trust and self-reliance among the members of the global system to make it an effective and equitable strategic and security arrangements for all states irrespective of size, power and wealth.