THE POLICY OF "DISTANCING" BY SMALL STATES FOR SECURITY

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Introduction

The present paper attempts at examining the concept of security in a new perspective, departing from the current negative definition of security as "absence of treat or conflict" and from the power-oriented definition as "possession of military capability." Together with this fresh perspective are offered definitions of threat and strategy. Then this paper makes a cursory review of some strategies that small states currently employ for their security. However, the main point of this paper is the policy of "distancing" which small states could include in their behavior to protect their security against external threats.

The Nature of Security

Security is a lively topic in contemporary thought but the relative absence of security in the world attests to its elusive nature. Today, confidence in the possibility of a more lasting peace wavers. Current events do not indicate the durability of security arrangements.

However, history reveals the ever-present striving of nations for security. Because security is often identified with the survival of the nation itself, great many theories and strategies have been formulated to show how security may be attained by effective manipulation of social, economic, political, and military conditions. Yet the relative absence of security is quite obvious.

While the lack of security may be attributed to the incapacity of nations, it is also partly due to intellectual failure as manifested in the misperceptions that are reflected in models for security. In fact, it may be argued that the current conventional theories of security are frequently counterproductive. For example, it has become customary for states to
create military alliances for their security but ultimately the smaller partners of such alliances feel a reduction in their security.

The security map of the world has greatly changed since the nineteenth century, thereby rendering the conventional approaches to security as rather antiquated. The transformations in the security map include the emergence of small nations, the increasing awareness of the limitations upon the power of big powers, the inappropriateness of the balance of power concept in international politics whose *ultima ratio* is military power, and the nature of military fire power today.

In addition, the definition of the concept security has undergone considerable mutation, losing its essential aspects. Thus there is a new need for looking at security in a new perspective.

Traditional perceptions of security which underlined many classical philosophic thoughts in both the East and the West had to do with the preservation of universal harmony, seen as lasting security. The philosophies of the East and and West indicated the path of righteousness which man ought to follow if distortions in the natural order were to be avoided and if the desired condition of security were to be achieved. Total security included spiritual and material aspects, all leading to the idea of a universal Good for Plato, fulness of being and the Good Life for Aristotle, universal social harmony and stability for Confucius, restoration of the original innocence of being for the Stories, salvation for the Christians, political legitimacy for Locke and Rousseau, the recognition of the rational possibility of a universal peace for Kant, and the use of power by the Leviathan-ruler to enforce the conditions of the social contract for Hobbes. Hobbes made security scientifically respectable by treating it in a comprehensive way, including some motivational theories about man and liberating security from former references to supernatural elements. Thus the "theory of security" of Hobbes has become a classic.

Contemporary thoughts on security appears to be an extension of a peculiar post-Cold War political climate, politics of detente, and of thermonuclear problems. One particular view states that security is the ability to *protect* the physical intactness of national life from external intrusion. Related to this is the idea that security is the absence of threat to national values, such a condition being brought about by the accumulation of instruments of power. Power and security therefore
became synonymous terms and security meant national power. Adding colour to this power view of security is the idea of geopolitical advantage, from which also developed the idea of building military establishments. The balance of power paradigm is the counterview to the power notion of security because balance of power avoids conflicts and brings about "peace through accommodation" or status quo. Force is to be displayed only when the survival of the state is at stake.

Because contemporary security thought has tended to emphasize balance of power and military power for protecting national interests, the concept security has become identified with the strategies for security themselves, such as balance of power, alliances, military resources, deterrence, and even war.

These approaches to security tending to concentrate on external threats give rise to the idea that security is absence of threat, a definition that is unsatisfactory because it emphasizes what is absent rather than what is present. They also overlook the internal factors of the state such as an ill-functioning political or social order which are crucial also to security. They also reflect a persistence on the reliance on military capabilities, to the exclusion of alternative strategies.

Security needs to be treated in a broader way, including all conditions under which it may be experienced, fully operationalized into propositions that are open to empirical testing for their validity, and must be seen in terms of the experiences of people as they are affected by their perceptions, social and cultural values, and objective conditions. Security must be given a new dimension by looking at it from a multidisciplinary approach in order to include certain experiences which have until now escaped the searching eye of human curiosity.

A Fresh Perspective for Security
Recent advances in the social sciences discipline encourage us to believe that more adequate generalizations about security are within our reach. Security thought can be brought into line with new methodological developments to enable us to reconceptualize old security concepts and make these more precise in their application to conditions involving security.

There are at least five tendencies that characterize our new perspective of security.
First, security should focus less on military aspects and give more recognition to non-military factors. Second, security should include alternative types of security conditions. Third, the presence of change is recognized as one of the factors that accompany security, making us realize that it is never experienced in absolute terms because change is concomitant with human growth and could be a valuable aid to increased security. Fourth, security should be presented in a positive way, explaining what it is, instead of stating what is absent such as "absence of conflicts"; and, security should not be confused with strategies. Fifth, security should be broadly approached, not only from the political aspects of life, but from all aspects of social life or human interaction, since the need for security is a universal experience of man.

Our positive definition states that security consists of the feeling that accompanies the actual, perceived or sustained satisfaction of values and/or the reasonable and stable expectations of their realization. It presupposes the presence of objective conditions that bring about this feeling. Value has two meanings. The first is as a standard for valuation or judgment for desirability or unworthiness. In this light, value is prescriptive or normative. The second is as a thing that is considered worthy or "valuable" or repetitive preference for a thing to which individuals attach a high priority. Thus value is anything that is desired. Both senses of value belong to the realm of perception and is, therefore, subjective. Conditions refers situations produced by factors external to the unit and they serve as objective basis for feelings although the latter originate from within the unit or actor itself. Threats are conditions that are perceived as constituting imminent impairment of the enjoyment or satisfaction of values. Threats reduce the alternatives of a unit to satisfy values or offset the conditions that produce security. The intensity of threats varies depending on how the unit perceives such conditions and the unit's abilities to neutralize, meet, or cope with them. When a threat engages a unit's total capabilities and reduces the conditions for producing security to nil, then the unit may be said to have reached the survival point at which there is no security to speak of. Threats may be actual, potential or fictitious. Actual threats reduce the enjoyment or satisfaction of values. Potential threats tend to reduce the satisfaction of values but are not transformable to actual threats due to some constraints. Fictitious threats are conditions that are perceived to reduce security but do not really exist.
Strategies are plans that are employed to secure far-reaching advantages for the user. They are positive when they are intended to enhance the conditions that increase the unit’s security such as by upgrading the quality and quantity of resources, developing new alternatives for resources, or by cooperation with other units. Strategies are negative when they are intended to deal with threats such as by ignoring threat, shifting the problem to the environment, manipulating conditions to reduce the impact of threat, escaping from the scene, or a combination of these. Strategies deal with the source of threat and are intended to remove this by non-violent or violent means such as by non-cooperation, detente, deterrence, co-existence, disarmament undercutting the capabilities of the source of threat or by military devices involving the use of coercion and firepower.

The separation of security from strategy is important for strengthening or sharpening our perception of security. Security is the goal, strategies are the means. Strategies that have no clear reference to security-goals tend to be easily misguided and may lead to results opposite to what is wanted, thereby diminishing security. An excessive reliance on strategies may be counterproductive of security because security as a goal may be lost sight of under the weight of heavy commitment to particular strategies. This thesis implies the presence of end-means relationship in security and strategy and the need to keep these two conceptually apart.

Security, defined as the feeling that accompanies the satisfaction of values, can be experienced under four general conditions, namely, prevailing or status quo conditions, change, isolation, and interdependence. As such, this definition obliges decision-makers or those who are in command of their communities to make a realistic ordering of their national values, to narrow the possible gaps between perceptions and the reality of a situation, to select the appropriate conditions for their security, and to avoid the likelihood that they would divert their scarce resources. As a consequence, these leaders can identify threats to their security and assess them in a more realistic fashion.

Security, as experienced under the different conditions above-mentioned, is manifested in several ways. Security in prevailing conditions is a belief or confidence that for a state its current demands are being met widely and that the prevailing conditions provide a scope for the upgrading of the quality and quantity of its expectations (values) on a
major range of activities. It is a perception or belief that the existing structures are supportive of the values.

In conditions of change, security is the belief that the emerging or evolving values are as desirable or preferable to the old values. It is also a belief that changes in one sector lead to the mutual upgrading of values and their realization. It is a belief that major alternations in the society are accompanied by the ability to fully adjust to such alterations and to discard incompatible values. It is further felt that the new institutions can accommodate new values rather than be in conflict with them.

Security in isolation (when a unit relies for its existence upon itself for important activities) is the belief that existing conditions facilitate a major range of activities so that there is no need to depend on external resources. It is also the confidence that it can extract benefits to itself from the environment without getting really involved in it.

In a condition of interdependence, defined as mutual responsiveness among partners on commonly accepted values, security is experienced by each partner when there is a belief that an increase in the benefit to one will be a benefit to all, that the resources of the other partners will be mutually shared in their use or that the resources of others will accommodate the needs of one partner, and that the need for change due to pressures impinging on one will be decreased by the other partners which will generate corresponding changes to help absorb the pressures on the first partner. For all these manifestations of security or what we now call feelings that accompany the satisfaction of values or realization of their expectations, there are objective conditions that produce the feelings or that detract from those feelings. The condition that produces the latter are called threats to security.

The values that are satisfied represent all aspects of human life.

Strategies of Small States for Security
All states are concerned for their security. However, not all states are able to identify their national values and arrange them into a hierarchy for appropriate identification of their satisfaction levels. Obviously, big states, because of a greater command of the resources available to them are able to satisfy their national values.

It is a different matter with small states. Without going into defining a small state, it may be said that small states have less resources and
less ability to manipulate local and external conditions to satisfy their national values. Small states are rather vulnerable to changes in the environment, being more sensitive to the enlargement or diminution of material and non-material resources that are necessary for satisfying their values. As a result, their values are not as much in quantity and quality as those of the big states. But suffice it to say that, small states keenly desire to maintain their security as well.

Some of the strategies that small states use for their security include isolation, alliances, submerging to larger entities in order to maintain part of its security, using leverages of geography and population characteristics to advantage, reliance on the United Nations and international legal systems, development of excellent leadership, membership in regional systems, non-alignment, and the like.

One of the strategies that small states use these days is the policy of "distancing." In Southeast Asia, at least four states use this policy but distancing has not been adequately conceptualized. In the following section the policy of distancing" is conceptualized by laying out its parameters and indicators.

The Policy of "Distancing"

"Distancing" is a policy of keeping an array of activities with external big states to a level whereby the small state, as user of the policy, is able to ensure itself against external interference or undue influence and at the same time, is able to conduct its domestic and external policies with reasonable autonomy. The distance has to be a certain proportion between the small state’s capabilities and the impinging external pressures and is characterized by a consistency of duration in accordance with the capabilities and pressures. On a desired level, distancing will allow for a minimum of interference and involvement with big power politics and maintain a maximum of vitality for the user state. Distancing is a strategy for use by a small state dealing with a big state whose actions are perceived to produce threats to the former’s security. Since there are equally strong external actors that are competing for influence over a small state, the latter state maintains equal distance or equidistance to them both, as Malaysia practices. The small state is not seen to terminate its relations with the big powers but it will maintain a distance or a relationship that is "formally friendly" and "equivalent in treat-
ment” as Burma does. The Philippines has expressed a desire for a similar policy, calling it “rational distancing” from the East and West blocs. Thailand calls its policy of distancing “balance of interests.”

It is useful to indicate the parameters of this policy of distancing. Firstly, it must be understood that we are not advocating a condition of isolation which is one of non-involvement with other states. In a case of distancing, the small state maintains interactions with many states but may exercise the option to reduce the degree of interaction with certain states due to provocations from the environment. Secondly, there are requisites for this policy. The small state user must have widespread and deep support from its population for this policy and for their government or have what is called legitimacy of government. The state must be able to identify its points of strength, such as traditional values with integrative effects, skilled population, resources, and the like, and capitalise on them in terms of conserving them for domestic use and for preventing disintegration. The small state must be creative enough to provide compensatory measures for what it will lose through a policy of distancing. And if all these factors are not in adequate supply, there must be a socialization process for the people to change attitudes from negative to positive, towards evolving new skills and values. The existing institutions will be proved to be difficult to sway one way or the other in favour or interfering forces.

Thirdly, distancing will always entail internal costs. For example, existing insurgency or poverty situations may deteriorate due to the diminution of domestic resources for satisfying the values of people. Or national leadership will be denied support from foreign sources.

Fourthly, there are external costs produced by a policy of distancing. There is a diminution of normal exchanges for purposes of a higher quality of life such as communication, foreign educational opportunities, friendship-building experiences, or foreign financial assistance for local resources because it will be viewed as producing permanent negative effects on the small state which are more harmful than temporary gains.

For these last two items, distancing obliges small states to search elsewhere, other than the states which are the sources of threats to security, to develop relations with other states to fulfil the needs for upgrading their values.
Operationalization of Distancing

How is the policy of distancing manifested? The small state that uses a policy of distancing must carry out the programme of upgrading values and satisfying needs internally, without arousing interest from outside states and big powers. It must consolidate its groups of individuals and institutions that are particularly attractive to big power influence and insulate them from such. The small state must know its own assets and liabilities and must be able to manipulate the social conditions so that foreign interference on them will be found to be expensive or not worth the while.

The small state should keep its immediate neighbours in friendly terms except those which appear to be surrogates of big powers. It should remain in good terms with them by looking for various types of affinities. The small state should work with its neighbours to eliminate vacuum situations in the immediate environment.

The small state must always endeavour to remain a distinct entity with a high degree of freedom to maintain its identity. In dealing with states which are showing signs of being interventionists, the small state can “break up the marriage without losing the dowry.” It means that it can institute a reduction in interaction with such a state or cut off any existing alignment but the small state must be able to retain for its own use all such installations and institutions that have been established in its soil by the big state.

Of course the small state shall continue its foreign intercourse but its behaviour must be in accordance with the policy of distancing. It will promote its economic interests in the external environment through the use of tactical means on piece meal basis in contrast to committed and predictable behaviour.

It must endeavour to maintain balanced trade and avoid questionable foreign loans. The small state must maintain a radical image by moving in a direction away from diplomatic and political ties with the big powers and by posing somewhere along the fringes of non-alignment and by making overtures to the enemy’s friends. But the small state must keep scrupulously away from the civil strifes of the neighbouring states.

The small state’s leaders need to maintain an aura of respect and fear. They have to state candidly their demands and they have to utilize their leverages with greater skill to support their policy of distancing.
They also must be able to convert any asset to useful leverage so that the small state's image could be somewhere on the unpredictable side. The leaders may also manifest clearly their hesitancy on foreign proposals in every way to discourage more guile from the big states.

As part of its diplomacy of distancing, the small state should endeavour to cut off military, political, and ideological lines with interventionist powers and should earnestly discourage any link-up that can lead to the subversion of its security. Some states mention foreign trainers as security risks because of their "other" interests.

The small state should try as much as possible to engage in even-handed diplomacy to make its distancing credible. It should have no political tie-up with others, although cultural affinities are tolerable. As much as possible the small state must have no alliances. As regards ideological and military polarizations, the small state should take a stance of detachment but with a watchful or cautious eye.

The Small States and Polarity
These days we hear the question of bipolarity or multipolarity in international politics being bandied about. The question of bipolarity has to do with the polarization of states vis-a-vis the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the competing superpowers for world domination. However, in recent years, many organizations of states have emerged. Some of these may be mentioned: the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the European Community, the COMECON, the Arab states' group, US-Japan-China trilateralism, and the like. Some states have asserted their individualism based on economic or nuclear power such as Japan, France, India, and Israel.

Because of the rise of such states and groups of states, the concept of multipolarity has been counter-poised to that of bipolarity.

It is my position that the counterpositioning of the two concepts is not a valid one because of some fault in the logic. Bipolarity is based on the criterion of military - or thermo-nuclear power politics. It follows that multipolarity should also be based on the same criterion, as for example, ASEAN or NAM or SAARC should now become new poles of thermo-nuclear power for world domination.
However, we know that many of those groups or states have opted to stay out of the US-USSR global struggle. They were formed to promote goals other than military, ideological, or political world dominance. They were formed to promote peace and progress through cooperation in various fields, not military. This is especially true of small states’ groupings such as ASEAN and NAM. Therefore those groups or individual states should not be typologized into multipolarity because they can not be reckoned from the power politics of bipolarity.

Distancing is, therefore, a policy which enables the user to remove itself from conditions that produce threats to its security or to manipulate the external environment to protect and promote the satisfaction of its national values as well as the people’s social values, thereby producing the feeling of security.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present security in a new perspective, first, by showing why contemporary security thought has become confusing and, second, by giving the concept a positive definition. In this paper, security is defined as the feeling that accompanies the satisfaction of values. The need for keeping security and strategy conceptually apart has also been emphasized because an excessive reliance on strategy and a misidentification of both may prove to be counterproductive for security.

In conceptualization of the policy of distancing, one of the strategies currently being used by a few small states, the major emphasis was on scrupulous use of the tools and options available rather than being ideological or dogmatic. By operationalisation the concept and laying down the parameters we are able to discern the flaw in the current typologization of international politics of bipolarization and multipolarization. Finally, it was also argued that distancing is not isolation but making the best out of the prevailing situation.