Chapter 1

Small States in Global Perspective: In Search of a Role Model in Regional Stability

Shaheen Afroze

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Small states have mostly been marginalised and bypassed in the literature on international relations. This is mainly because of the preponderance of realist argument within the discipline that the only states that actually matter in international politics are the ones with enormous amounts of power. Back in 1914, Fisher, a British historian, expressed that, 'sooner or later the small states will go. They will be absorbed in larger political aggregates. They will follow the line of historical development, which has created the large modern states of Europe out of a mosaic of tiny and warring fiefs. And nobody will regret their demise, least of all the citizens themselves.' Why then are there still so many small-sized countries in the world today? Why is their number actually increasing? According to one report, at the outbreak of World War I, only 62 independent countries existed in the entire planet. The past half-century has witnessed the number grow from 74 in 1946 to 193 in 1998. The logical questions are then: Are the small states whose number stand more than 200 today meaningless in international politics? How do they survive and operate in international system? Do they play any positive role in regional peace and security? Has globalisation opened up any space for newer kind of role for the small states?

The existing literature on small states contains generalised observations about the problems, prospects and dynamics whereby the small states
Small States and Regional Stability in South Asia

Small states failed to acquire resources from and somehow manage to deal with their external environment. Small states appeared to be nothing but appendages of the spheres of great power influence, helpless fragments at the mercy of the giant neighbours. No wonder, the literature remained confined to cataloguing their vulnerabilities, insecurities and survival strategies. But the end of the Cold War has spawned new relationship, new thinking and enlarged the degrees of maneuverability available to the small states. With increased globalisation and expansion, the visibility and the pro-active role of smaller states are coming to the forefront. One, thus, finds their presence in multilateral agencies and conferences, contribution to international peacekeeping operations, and pro-active in world forums. Significantly enough, it was the near-unanimous voice of the developing countries, more appropriately the voice of the small states that contributed in the collapse of the Mexico round of the WTO negotiations. Although the prospect of positive development in this posturing are still uncertain, the small states did make their voice heard, demonstrating the point that small states can act successfully, positively, creatively and significantly in international politics. Thus, the actions of the small states may have greater nuances and underpinnings than the literature on them actually projects. Overall, success stories of small states are seldom taken into consideration.

The contention of this paper is that small states, believed to be in the periphery and viewed in terms of centre-periphery frame of international politics, are not without political significance in the present-day globalised, interdependent world. First, they add up arithmetically as a force in the international bodies, including the United Nations. Second, at specific geo-political and sub-systemic level in which they are located, they possess geo-strategic values often disproportionate to their size. Third, many of them possess strategic resources like oil, gas, uranium, etc. that can sometimes be suitably used as political weapons. In sum, as observed by Erling Bjol, 'the small states are constantly sources of tensions and conflicts that dominate the international scene. Not only some of them have been able to play prominent parts in international dramas, but often they have been able to defend successfully their interests, even against great powers'. In brief, the small states represent a meaningful category of foreign policy actors in international system. Although the meaningfulness of small states is sometimes recognised it is not fully explored.
Against this backdrop, this paper sets out i) to examine the activism of small states by exploring the types of role they play in the light of emerging regional and global realities; ii) to bring insight as to how small states can influence the course of international relations; and finally iii) to bring out the role model(s) of the small states and examine if these role model(s) can be applied in the context of South Asia for regional peace and stability.

1.2 EMERGENCE OF SMALL STATES

Small states are certainly not new phenomena. Their existence could be traced back even to the times of ancient civilisations. A peek into the pages of history shows that the ancient Greek city-states consisted of populations smaller than Iceland of today. Athens at the height of its glory during the reign of Pericles had perhaps 200,000 people, including the slaves. Italy during the Renaissance period also consisted of tiny city-states. Florence at its peak had some 70,000 citizens. Venice had a population of 115,000. But small states withered away in the 19th century because of the sudden phenomena of territorial unification and integration. Italy was unified in 1861. After a decade, Germany got united too. Britain, France, the Netherlands and others also followed suit and hastily pulled the empires together. However, following extensive social, political and economic changes in the 20th century small states began to reappear. Soon after the Second World War and with the advent of the process of decolonisation, the small states began to emerge as independent entities. The colonial powers decided to give up most of their colonies, as formal administrative control of distant and often alien territories was becoming too burdensome for them. Also, the demand for self-determination, reinforced by the imperative of democracy was increasingly becoming the prevalent rule in the world. As the small states grew in number, the political map of the world radically changed. Since then a veritable revolution has taken place in the position of the small states in world politics. But the growing importance of small states has its origin in the era of the Cold War when both super powers sought to increase their influence in the Third World courting the small powers. The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed the dissolution of federal unions with a rapid and dramatic break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia giving birth to numerous new small states.
1.3 DEFINITION OF SMALL STATES

The term 'small state' received currency in international politics for the first time as small power in contrast to great powers in the Treaty of Chaumont concluded in March 1814. The treaty categorised such states as small which were not in a position to provide 60,000 men each for the next 20 years in the event of another French aggression. This idea laid emphasis on military or war-making capability measured in terms of armed forces.8

In the subsequent academic discourses two trends were observed. The first was to consider small in terms of the basic and commonplace indicators of size and strength like territory and population, GNP, productive capability, resource base, industrial capacity, etc. International organisations like the World Bank, the IMF, and the Commonwealth categorise small states on the basis of population and the dividing line is usually one million population size, even though population size over the past decade has driven specially some of the African small states above these population parameters. The second was the capability aspect, which also gained prominence in defining small states. According to this view small states are those, which are weak economically, militarily, technologically and also in industrial capacity. The problem with this kind of view is that it is too broad-based and encompasses almost all aspects of capability of states. Talukder Maniruzzaman has put more emphasis on the military and war-making capability of a state when he states:

In determining a state's war making capacity, one has to look at both its potential war power and its immediate war preparedness. Both the potential war capability and current war preparation of a state are generally measured in quantitative terms...the Gross National Product (GNP) of a state indicates its potential war making capacity...GNP subsumes all the elements that constitute the potential military power of a state. As to the current war preparedness of a state, the yearly military budget is probably the best indicator.9

This kind of quantitative exercise fails to take into account some significant qualitative aspects of a state in the absence of which a realistic ranking cannot be obtained. Attempts have thus been made also to categorise states on their specific behavioural characteristics in international interaction. Maurice East is of the view that the foreign policy behaviour of states is an important criterion to determine their
size and asserted that small states are characterised by low levels of overall participation in world affairs; high levels of activity in intergovernmental organisations; high level of support for international legal norms; avoidance of the use of force as a technique of statecraft; avoidance of behaviour and policies, which tend to alienate the more powerful states in the system; a narrow, functional geographic range of concerns in foreign policy activities; and frequent utilisation of moral and normative positions on international issues. But this behavioural description of the small states does not suffice to explain interstate relationships. Singer and Small have suggested differentiating between large and small states on the basis of their rank in the international status order measured by the number and category of diplomats that each receives at its capital. This description of status ordering based on a single criterion to the exclusion of economic, military and political criteria also seems to be too simplistic to have much explanatory power.

Thus the conceptual problems involved in finding a satisfactory definition of small states are quite distinct which is evidenced by the many contradictory and diverse attempts to establish rigorous definition that can be accepted and agreed upon by all, attempts that abound in the literature on small states. The seminar on the small territories run by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies 1962-64 concluded that 'it proved impossible for the seminar to decide what 'smallness' means with any precision. It is a comparative and not an absolute idea. Whatever scales of magnitude are employed seem arbitrary and it is difficult to pick out on them where smallness begins or ends. Countries can be small in one sense and not in another. Smallness in whatever form it may exist is only one of the variables. The issue is complicated still further.' Nevertheless, several scholars on international relations have attempted to define small states. For instance, David Vital defines a small state on the basis of population. To him a small state is the one, which has a population of 10-15 million in the case of economically advanced countries and a population of 20-30 million in the case of underdeveloped countries. Vital's definition of a small state is subjective if not arbitrary, as he himself admits and concludes that 'these definitions are put forward to make clear the identity of the subject of this study, not with a view to the creation of a precise concept for manipulative analytical purposes'. Sharp Paul
remarks, 'Focusing on size per se, measured in terms of population, GNP or defense expenditure involves making arbitrary cut off and yields little of great significance beyond the obvious regarding the characteristic behaviour of those states which happen to fall within the specified parameters.'18 Robert Rothstein gives a psychological as well as a material dimension of a definition of a small state. To him a small state is one, which recognises that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions processes or developments to do so.19 If we accept his definition then all states in the current international system except the United States of America come under the heading of small states. Robert Koehane regards Rothstein’s definition as anachronistic because it serves well only for those periods in the past in which obtaining ‘security primarily by use of its (a state’s) own capabilities was a live option for five to ten states in a system of limited scope. When only two or three states qualify for great power status, with 130 – from West Germany (or at least Italy) to Lesotho categorised as ‘small’ the definition becomes useless for analysis. As such, Robert Koehane has developed a definition of his own. To him small state appears to be one whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system.20 Although all the scholars have struggled at length to define small states, none has reached an unequivocal operative definition of the subject.21 The problem remains: which criteria are to be adopted? Should one take size of population or size of territory? Or should the criteria be economic22, psychological or lack of military strength? There may be states that may have a large population, for example Bangladesh, or a large territory, for example Sudan or Congo, yet be militarily and economically less powerful than states with a similar population or territory. The usefulness of the concept of small states has been questioned from time to time: how should smallness be defined and how dependent it is on the relationship with its external world?

This paper suggests a commonsense concept that ‘small’ is a relative term.23 A comparison of global and regional configurations of states of the world shows that several countries appear small when it is surrounded by states with much larger powers. Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland appear as fairly large powers in a global perspective. But in the European regional
context when juxtaposed with countries like UK, France, Italy, Germany these countries look small. Similarly, countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel; Nigeria, South Africa and Libya; Brazil and Argentina and Indonesia, although smaller powers in comparison with super powers and great powers, are large states vis-à-vis other states in their respective regions. Similarly, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives are all treated in this paper as small states. It is true that none of these states with the exception of Bhutan and Maldives is a small state in the strictest sense of the term. Compared with the 192 United Nations member countries, more than a hundred countries are smaller than Bangladesh in terms of population and nearly 78 are smaller in size than Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Nepal. Nevertheless, because of the sheer gigantic size of their common neighbour, India with the power capabilities it commands, all these states obviously appear to be small states\(^{24}\), no matter how big they are in size or population compared with other smaller countries in the international system.

1.4 REALIST PARADIGM AND THE ROLES OF SMALL STATES

The dominance of realist paradigm, which explains the behaviour of a state through its power capabilities, small states’ role and contribution to world peace and regional stability has been generally overlooked or ignored. The realist school of international politics maintains that the power of a national community is a function primarily of its mobilisable and deployable military force.\(^{25}\) Power is viewed as a quantifiable and commensurable mass, which can be measured and weighed.\(^{26}\) Chan in his study of Taiwan’s trade relations with the US noted, ‘in general, structural models of international relations are apt to posit the analytic or policy importance of one or more tangible assets, to treat these assets as proprietary properties, and to assign national status on the basis of these assets. The world is seen to have a hierarchy and countries are somehow locked into the structure. Attention tends to be directed to the more objective or quantifiable aspects of national assets, to the domestic rather than foreign sources for generating these assets, and to the basic rigidities and asymmetries of the international relations system’.\(^{27}\) Snider asserted that the general concern of most empirical approaches to the definition and measurement of power in world politics has been with power as a strategic resource base for a very
specific purpose: to index the war fighting potential of nations. Researchers such as Singer et al., Choucri and North, Doran and Parsons, Handel, Cline, Wayman, and Stoll combined dimensions such as industrial, demographic and military (or other equivalents) in constructing capability index to assess war-fighting potential of nations. Snider observed that all these indices held an underlying assumption that additional increments of resources are somehow converted into additional increments of power. The preponderance of the realist paradigm in international politics has thus treated power as a quantifiable, monolithic, homogeneous and highly fungible entity, which can be acquired, possessed, accumulated, measured, compared and used irrespective of time and contexts.

Since small states tend to rank so low on the traditional power hierarchy, they were understood to have no capability to influence the course of international relations. However, our experiences often contradict our expectations derived from the notion of power based on tangible power assets. In commercial negotiations, diplomatic disputes, even military conflicts, the weaker side is sometimes able to prevail over the stronger side to obtain a more favourable settlement than its objective assets and liabilities would suggest. As Baldwin noted, there are tendencies to exaggerate the effectiveness of military power resources and to treat military power as the ultimate measuring rod to which other forms of power should be compared. These tendencies are considered to be counter-productive in theorising about international politics. Power resources that are effective in one context can be ineffective in another. Rothstein has also pointed out that small powers have been successful in influencing world politics in spite of their seeming lack of power. Therefore, analysing small states and their behaviour requires more than an application of traditional power assumptions because traditional theories about the relationship between power and behaviour lack the ability to explain small states' power that can emerge from factors other than material resources. Although the environment of the small states may vary widely, all states have in common minimal productive population, some resources and geographic area and also some are characterised by a limited pool of human and material resources. Small states have at their disposal the non-tangible power sources or tools like diplomacy, regional cooperation mechanism, charismatic leadership, strong civil society etc. through which they can
wield some influence and may serve as role models to promote stability
and peace in their respective regions.

Thus small states conscious of their capabilities and limits nevertheless
play a host of roles in the international arena starting from devising
survival strategies to resolution of international disputes and conflicts
to contributing in international peacekeeping operations. By taking
part in various international forums, a small state thus gains prominence
and is recognised globally. This also helps them become part (to some
extent) of the decision-making process whereby they can exert influence
on the bodies that are involved in the preparation of global decisions
on world peace and security. The international position of the small
states becomes more solid which enhances their level of acceptability
and security. This further strengthens their domestic stability. Since
they are involved in international processes, there is less probability of
their becoming targets of the potential foreign policy ambitions of
other states.

In the following section an attempt is made to illustrate the roles of
some of the small states from the region of Southeast Asia, Europe and
South Asia which through their endeavours have made considerable
imprints in the international arena and may serve as role models to
other small states in other regions of the world.

1.5 SMALL STATES’ ACTIVISM IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In conflict resolution, big states barely figure. As mentioned earlier,
according to the realist paradigm in international politics, tangible
sources of power explain the foreign policy behaviour of states. The
amplitude of these resources carries with them a measure of influence
over international politics. The extent of this influence manifests itself
over time in various arenas of international politics, an influence that
marks them out for particular patterns of relationship. They extend far
and wide and soon acquire deep-seated relational currents and niches
of influence, and a relational power set firmly in the international
perception. In the traditional power hierarchy, power and influence
relate themselves directly with one another. This carries with it a form
of baggage that impedes a mediating posture in conflict situations.

On the contrary, small states, at the other end of the continuum,
have in the same reckoning better potential to intercede and mediate
between warring parties. Their potential arises from a kind of non-tangible source of power often resorted to in international politics. Small states are thus the more prominent of the current intermediaries in conflict resolution. They would carry less baggage in the form of disparate agendas than would the bigger powers. Conventionally, then small state powers are the regular feature of mediation politics.

Norway and Sweden – two of the small states of Europe – played important roles mediating in the Middle East conflict in 1988. The signing of the 1993 Oslo agreement is termed as a watershed in the history of peace effort in the Middle East. It was one of the most serious attempts at peace in the Middle East since the creation of Israel in May 1948. Numerous previous efforts by individuals, organisations, and large states to establish direct dialogue between Israel and the PLO had all ended in fiasco. Through a series of secret diplomacy, Norway succeeded in getting the entrenched adversaries to agree to a gradual Israeli withdrawal from some of the occupied territories and to local Palestine self-determination. It may be mentioned here that this was not Norway’s first peace effort in the Middle East. The idea of Norway as a suitable mediator was raised seriously for the first time in 1979, in connection with the Camp David agreement.

Norway has also been involved in the peace process between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since 1997. The basis for the ongoing peace process is the acknowledgement by both parties that the conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1983, cannot be resolved militarily. In February 2000, Norway agreed to a request from President Chandrika Kumaratunga and LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran to assist the process as a third party. After the December 2001 parliamentary election, both the new Sri Lanka government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE officially requested Norway to continue to assist the parties in the peace process. President Kumaratunga has expressed support for the continuation of the peace process with assistance from Norway.

The role of Norway has been to assist the parties in their efforts to reach a political solution. Norway’s activities have focused in large part on help to facilitate communication between the parties, minimise misunderstandings, and seek common ground between their positions as the foundation for a peace process. Norway also has supplemented
the regular communication activities of the parties, by briefing various actors in Sri Lanka and internationally.

The logical question that comes to one’s mind is why Norway has been chosen to act as a third party to assist in the peace process? Why not other countries in Europe? The reasons may be that Norway has no political or economic interests in the region and is considered neutral; it is acceptable to all the major regional and global actors; Norway and Sri Lanka have a long standing development cooperation which has focused in recent years on efforts to promote reconciliation and peace; and also it has spent time building contacts and relationships of trust with decision makers on both sides. Moreover, Norway being a small state in Europe has earned the credibility of successfully participating in the peace processes in the Middle East, Sudan, Guatemala, Colombia and elsewhere.\(^42\) Norwegian participation in a number of international peacekeeping operations, as well as the fact that the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo, has contributed to Norway’s reputation as a country of peace.

Sweden has also involved itself in mediating in many conflict situations where the parties wished to avoid involving the major powers. Folke Bernadotte, a Swede who was the very first UN mediator, was assigned to try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1948. Since then, other Swedes have assumed the role of mediators in various disputes. Sweden has also mediated in the Middle East from 1967 to 1991, and in Iraq-Iran conflict from 1980 to 1984.

1.6 SMALL STATES’ ACTIVISM IN THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Small states, like big states, have a constructive role to play in matters relating to international peace and security. United Nations peacekeeping is a major platform through which small states participate in and contribute to the maintenance of global peace and security. Small states are not only beneficiaries of international peacekeeping; they make outstanding contributions to UN peacekeeping missions too. Since 1948, when the UN sent in military observers to supervise the truce in the Arab-Israeli conflict, there have been 56 UN peacekeeping operations. Currently, there are 16 UN peacekeeping operations in the field. Thus far, 130 nations have contributed personnel at various times; 89 are currently providing peacekeepers. Small states have
Small States' and Regional Stability in South Asia

played a critical role in supplying personnel for peacekeeping operations. According to the statistics of February 2004, the major contributors of military and civilian personnel to current missions have been the smaller states including Bangladesh (6821), Nepal (2302), Ghana (2301), Jordan (1826), Kenya (1822), Ukraine (1321), Uruguay (1881), Sweden (232) and Finland (237). Since 1989, Singapore has also sent more than 400 personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. It may be mentioned here that the small Island State of Fiji has also taken active part in many UN peacekeeping operations. Even with the end of the Cold War and greater major power involvement in peacekeeping, small states still remain the key players of future peacekeeping operations.

1.7 SMALL STATES' ACTIVISM IN REGIONAL COOPERATION

Small states' visibility and their constructive role have been more outstanding in regional cooperative mechanisms. These kinds of organisations provide them with opportunities to represent their interests in the international system. And it is in these platforms that they have been relatively more successful than in other areas. It is observed that in those issue areas critical to the interests of the small states, there is considerable scope for imaginative diplomacy, particularly if it is pursued in collaboration with other similarly interested small states and with the mobilisation of regional cooperative institutions, which are increasingly a critical focus of small states. Singapore, a small state sandwiched between Indonesia and Malaysia, is often cited as a concrete example of how smaller states can play important roles as conveyers or in getting regional cooperation processes launched and get going. The ability of Singapore to effectuate the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) process within a year of putting forward the idea is a case in point. By taking initiative of launching the ASEM process Singapore projected itself not just a trading post, but also a diplomatic and political weight in the international field. At the same time, through the mechanism of regional cooperation the small states get opportunity for wide and manifold contacts at both official and unofficial levels. Extending small state's diplomatic reach through such multilateral forums is essential to build its own barriers to outside shocks and strengthen its chances of survival. In the European Union (EU) too, the roles and contributions of the smaller states of Europe such as Belgium,
Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland, Austria have been a tremendous force for making the EU an example of stability and prosperity on the continent. It may be mentioned that the continent of Europe had generated two World Wars. EU has reconciled many long-standing enmities and conflicts and has rendered the idea of waging further wars between them unthinkable. European Union today stands out as a classic example to demonstrate how intractable problems can be overcome by both big and small states working together, given the political will and the right framework.

In the South Asian context, Bangladesh initiated the idea of a regional cooperation mechanism. The smaller states recognise the fact that active participation in international and regional organisations will help them build their identity more solid and acceptable. The security of small countries is dependent on their inclusion in the activities of various international integration processes. In this environment, small states can participate and act as co-decision makers.

1.8 SMALL STATES OF SOUTH ASIA

From the above discussion, it is clearly evident that the smaller states in the international system are not totally without political significance. True, their influence or power (however limited) is contextual and issue based, but the small states examined are found to be effective in the areas mentioned above. Now the relevant question is: can these be replicated or translated in the context of South Asia – an asymmetric and Indo-centric region? The case of South Asia stands out in marked contrast to other regions of the world. The huge asymmetry that exists between the big state India and the other smaller states in the region in terms of size, geopolitical location, resources, population, economic and military power places the former in a position of advantage over the latter. This not only gives them a sense of insecurity but also a feeling of inferiority and subordination.48 In fact, asymmetries of strategic and security perceptions in this region of South Asia are a concomitant of the asymmetries of size of the member states. Small states in this region, therefore, would require finding a role within these strategic determinants from overbearing physical differences, and through these consequential asymmetries of security perceptions.

Again South Asia is a region where one witnesses build up of conventional arms race, nuclearisation, spread of small arms and
drugs trade, frequent border skirmishes, insurgencies, ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts, extra-parliamentary political violence and instability. The increasing use and traffic of small arms and drugs and the often-related money-laundering operations in and through the smaller South Asian countries seem to have gained proportion almost autonomous in character. The most worrying factor is the inflow of these menaces from external and transnational sources. The issue of arms transit to Northeast India is a constant source of problem in Bangladesh-India relations.\(^48\) According to one estimate, there are over seven million AK 47 rifles on the loose in South Asia, and if all types of guns are included the number could quadruple\(^50\). To make matters worse, the sophistication of weapons and intelligence capabilities of criminal organisations far outstrip the resources of law enforcers within these states. In Sri Lanka, the 21 years old conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lanka state remains unresolved till date, despite the periodic efforts for dialogue and negotiations. The cease-fire agreement between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE on February 22, 2002 appears to be already running into difficulties. Although the Norwegian facilitators are struggling to get the Sri Lanka government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the negotiating table, another complicating dimension has been added to the peace process with the eruption of violence between the Island’s Tamils and Muslims who constitute Sri Lanka’s third largest ethnic group.\(^51\) In Nepal, the Maoist insurgency led by the extreme left groups has gained momentum since 1995. Four to six districts in Nepal’s northwest region are already under the grip of the insurgents and they are expanding their influence in the east of the kingdom as well.\(^52\) In Bhutan, the southern Bhutanese of the Nepali origin are lighting for their political and economic rights and nearly 100,000 of them pushed out by the royal regime are now rotting as refugees in Nepal. In this conflict and strife prone region, only the Maldives appears to be in peace although geographical remoteness keeps it vulnerable to many unforeseen politico-strategic developments in the ocean.

Equally, the socio-economic indicators of South Asia reveal a very gloomy picture of conditions of the people of the region. The region shares 22 per cent, or over one-fifth of the world’s population. The per capita GNP is $440, the lowest in the world. The region shares only 1.3 per cent of the global income and 40 per cent of the global poverty. It is
a region with a disproportionately high share of the world’s total illiterate population (46 per cent), more than twice the global average. Fifty per cent of the world’s malnourished children inhabit South Asia. In terms of human deprivation, South Asia represents one of the most difficult cases in the whole world. Economic globalisation is likely to have further negative impacts on the economy of the poor South Asian smaller states.

The purpose of the above discussion is to reveal the fact that the small states of South Asia are handicapped by many of their own predicaments, which is not the case with smaller states of other regions. In the regions of Europe, Southeast Asia or the Middle East, smallness does not necessarily mean poorness in resources. None of the smaller states in the mentioned regions is surrounded by hegemonic, hated or hostile neighbours. In addition, they possess geographical advantages too. As such, they have been able to command greater acceptability in their respective regions and beyond and could contribute positively to the establishment of peace and stability. As Kenichi Ohmae and others have pointed out that the smaller economic units that are politically sovereign, like the Republic of Singapore for instance, may be the ones with the most distinct exemplary effects as models. In the past decade, Brunei and Mauritius have been termed as boon economies and a number of Caribbean countries have merited as success stories in terms of tourism and offshore dealings.

In effect, instances of small states of South Asia figuring in regional or international roles are of different orders and motivations. Whatever may be their impulsion, they are born of exigent circumstances, and not the result of a firm thrust of its own small power potential. A role for a small state in this region must, instead, be cast on a broader plane of her building capacities and status, as it would accrue to her standing in the traditional hierarchy. If the small power gains for it a measure of resilience in its inter-state relations the small state would at once be a more positive factor, and also be less vulnerable to negative influences. Small states pitched at various points on the linear scale of the power hierarchy, but which have acquired these resilient capacities, have been found to be more active in assuming roles. On the other hand, there are others that have not acquired sufficient sustaining capacities for their states and become targets of exploitation. Predatory or malign
influences can bear upon these states within the regional configuration at the points of weakness.

This very much accounts for South Asian regional relations too. It is inevitable that the small power perception lies at the base of interstate relations in this region. From the point of view of the big powers in this region the affliction is explained as a form of self-perception, one that is self-inflicted. Small states are then left to look for a role in this constricting milieu of state relations in this region of South Asia. This has been the region's history. Nevertheless, intermittent efforts of the small states to cut through these constraints seeking a way and a role are commendable. Nepal's idea of Zone of Peace and Bangladesh's initiative of regional cooperation may be cited as examples.

In this constricted milieu what kind of role can Bangladesh play and contribute to regional peace and stability? Could regional stability be found in domestic stability in the context of South Asia? As has been observed, the capacity to play a role is measured by the sufficiency of the base from which it is projected.55

1.9 BANGLADESH'S ROLE AS A SMALL STATE IN SOUTH ASIA

In the age of globalisation, the barrier between national and international issues is increasingly becoming thinner. As such, the successes in meeting various problematic domestic issues of small states can become an influencing factor in projecting their image and thereby creating their greater acceptability in the international plank. A vibrant democratic and socially empowered nation with a reasonable condition of law and order with an independent higher and lower judiciary itself then becomes a source of stability. Bangladesh as a small state has been successful in making imprints in the international arena in various non-traditional areas too. The fact that it is no longer regarded as 'unknown quantity' or 'bottomless basket' is because of the positive image that it has been able to carve out for itself in terms of social development. In the areas of population control, non-formal education, micro-finance and social empowerment of women, Bangladesh has been able to successfully create a space of its own. Its performance in the above mentioned areas have been appreciated by the donors and its development partners. The micro-credit facility has brought about a revolution in Bangladesh, as it has brought about major changes in the lives of the rural poor, especially the women.56
With Grameen Bank taking the initiative, the majority of NGOs, large and small, have made credit disbursement one of their major activities. Today the model of Grameen Bank and the idea of micro-credit are increasingly replicated in a number of developing countries in Asia and Africa. Bangladesh has also made significant progress in the health and education sectors too.

Bangladesh has also successfully transited to a democratisation process. The mass upsurge of 1990 paved the way for Bangladesh’s transition to democracy from an authoritarian rule. The journey began in 1991, with a number of democratic elements like a constitutional formula providing a framework of democratic government, institutional structure capable of both sustaining and accelerating the change and providing the instrument for stimulating increased participation, and for securing higher level of institutionalisation without the fear of army interventions in politics. The people’s representatives were the sole authority in their endeavours to materialise the will of the people.

It is observed that Bangladesh can also make a dent in environmental diplomacy to be backed by adequate human resource development in environmental and sustainable development research. Models based on disaster coping capability, arsenic mitigation, coping with import of hazardous consumer items and hazardous technology, transit and dumping of hazardous water, on-shore and off-shore pollution may be propagated not only raising Bangladesh’s image and stature but also projecting the value of Bangladesh’s human resource – both in real and literal senses. These are the areas where Bangladesh can improve upon and can earn international standing larger than what her power resources would otherwise dictate.

From a normative angle, Bangladesh’s concern and commitment for peace is deeply embedded in the country’s philosophy, culture and tradition. Later, such concern was influenced by Bangladesh’s own experience of liberation war, its volatile geo-strategic situation in the region and various developments at the levels, national, regional and international. Needless to mention, peace culture is the cornerstone of Bangladesh’s foreign policy and is testified operationally by certain of its policy fundamentals like friendship to all and malice to none, support for the cause of world peace, upholding the cause of the UN, opposition to all forms of colonial oppression and discrimination, support for people fighting for liberation, support for human rights
As a result, Bangladesh’s peaceful approach to politics has manifested itself in different facets.

As an originator and architect of regional cooperation in South Asia, Bangladesh strives to see South Asia as a region where there will be fewer conflicts, more cooperation, and more of human development. The first and foremost task before Bangladesh is to revive and gear up the SAARC process. Bangladesh believes in the concept of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) not only in a specific Indo-Pakistan context, but also in the wider South Asian context. It must be remembered here that SAARC is the pre-eminent confidence building process in South Asia. Bangladesh stresses the need for negotiating and implementing more confidence and security building measures at both bilateral and regional levels to create conditions in which outstanding issues can be dealt with more maturely so that eventually they could be resolved amicably and peacefully. Bangladesh looks upon CBMs not as an end in itself but as a means to resolve conflicts between the conflicting parties. The Indo-Bangladesh treaty of 1996 on the sharing of the Ganges water and the 1997 Peace Accord of CHT are two cases in point. Even if the conflict is of a military nature, CBMs may not necessarily have to be military in nature as political and economic CBMs may clear the way for solving military conflicts. In fact, what is important is that a continuous, uninterrupted and unconditional dialogue between the parties in conflict should always remain en route. Bangladesh along with other countries of the region could work towards strengthening the regional civil society movements that can help rethink security and promote human-centered security discourse.

As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh as a South Asian small state has vital stakes in regional security and stability and peace. It believes that peace and stability in the region cannot remain hostage to perennial India-Pakistan rivalry and conflict for an indefinite period of time. Ever since nuclear explosions by both India and Pakistan in 1998, Bangladesh has not only been raising concerns but also has offered to mediate between the two belligerents. Although the offer expectedly was turned down by India, Bangladesh again got involved in regional diplomacy in the wake of the last rounds of hostile interactions between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh Foreign Minister visited Islamabad and New Delhi and expressed deep concern at the deterioration of regional peace and stability. The efforts may apparently be considered
abortive but the consistency of the efforts, also knowing that Bangladesh’s initiatives in 1980 in the face of suspicions and reluctance from both India and Pakistan led to the creation of the regional forum of SAARC, demonstrate Bangladesh’s commitment to promotion of regional peace and stability.\textsuperscript{58} The world community, particularly Japan\textsuperscript{59} and European Union, has hailed Bangladesh’s role as a stabiliser in the region.

Bangladesh has demonstrated its opposition to war and violence and its interests in international peace and human rights by its active participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The strength of Bangladesh’s commitment to peacekeeping can be perceived in its willingness to make large, varied and sizeable troop commitments. Bangladesh has been sending its units to UN peace support operations in troubled spots around the world since the late nineteen eighties. Bangladesh has participated in peacekeeping operations across four continents, including many difficult and dangerous missions. Bangladesh has participated in 30 out of 56 UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh provided force commanders for the UN peacekeeping missions in Mozambique, Georgia and Sudan. Bangladeshi peacekeepers are now serving in 12 out of the 16 ongoing missions. Bangladesh is also emerging as an important contributor of the civilian police (CIVPOL) for these missions. The performance of the Bangladesh armed contingents in UN peacekeeping is well-recognised and praised. It is one of the countries that has provided the largest number of personnel for peacekeeping operations. Presently, Bangladesh is ranked amongst the top two troops contributing countries to the UN.

As a party to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, Bangladesh has very important role to play. Since the dismantling of nuclear weapons is not possible, Bangladesh can persuade and urge the nuclear weapons states of South Asia to have restraint and control over their stockpiles and start thinking to reduce them gradually. Bangladesh can lead the South Asian Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) in mobilising international support in persuading India and Pakistan to sign a binding legal instrument to guarantee their security against any possible use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. It can also urge upon the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) to formulate ways to peace education and set up disarmament institutes.\textsuperscript{60}
1.10 CONCLUSION

Small states need to deal with the broader issues of general capacity building, which will give it the strategic space within which it would play its role. The need for a small state is to promote and advance her national interests and security through a sustainable policy and direction on both the domestic and external fronts. Viability, acceptability, capacity and status for a role for the small state accrue in the very process of its pursuance of her national interest and security. National interest incorporates state, social and civilian interests on a balanced and cohesive basis. A degree of relative economic independence would be but another dimension to her national security interests. A very large area of this activity falls on the domestic front. As Kenichi Ohmae points out, "look at Singapore....three million people without their own sources of food or water, have grown from a per capita GDP of $1,000 at independence to $24,000 today, and are host to 500 multinationals. What matters is leadership and vision".

On the regional and international front, the role for the small state would be in the promotion of multilateral mechanisms and associative diplomacy as means by which small states advance their ideas and initiatives. This would entail the avoidance of short-term limited self-interest, which detracts from the long-term interests of the small state. The value of multilateral diplomacy to small states has been widely discussed and talked about in international relations discourse. It has been observed that multilateral diplomacy is particularly relevant to the diplomatic activities of small states and that it is generally in their interests to pursue, as far as possible, a multilateral approach in their international relations. It benefits the smaller states because they can use their limited resources and greatly expand their international contacts more effectively. Multilateral diplomacy also complements bilateral diplomacy in offering opportunities for numerous bilateral discussions, which are particularly important for those states that do not have frequent contacts with each other. Also the small states should put stress on the elements of advocacy and lobbying. Lobbying capacity for the small states is also very important in order to influence the international rule making and policymaking.

This paper concludes that the small states are indeed a meaningful category and do make significant contributions in promoting regional peace and harmony within their limited scope. Although small states'
roles are context, time and issue bound, they can draw on experiences of others thereby setting examples of their own, some of which may indeed be emulated by the others of the kind. There are scopes and they can capitalise on them to strengthen their positions. It must be remembered here that small states, like large states, depend on factors that operate within the larger world system including natural and man-made forces. Whereas under favourable conditions, small states not only survive but as well prosper and grow with an image of appreciation outside their world, under unfavourable conditions they can find themselves in serious predicaments.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 The Economist, 03 January 1999.


9 Ibid. pp. 4-5.
17 A population size of under 10 million has also been proposed as the most important criterion by J. Henderson, ‘New Zealand and the Foreign Policy of the Small State’, in R. Kenneway, and J. Henderson, (eds.), Beyond New Zealand II: Foreign Policy into the 1990s (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1991), p. 5.
21 It certainly does not render the small states ‘too broad a category for purposes of analysis’, as held by P.R. Baehr, in his Review Article, ‘Small States; A Tool for Analysis?’, World Politics, Vol. XXVII, April 1975, pp. 456-466; See also, R. Thakur, ‘The Elusive Essence of Size: Australia, New Zealand and Small States in International Relations’ in R. Higgott and J. Richardson, (eds.), International
Small States in Global Perspective


23 This idea has been borrowed from Charles Edward Morrison and Astir Suhrke, Strategies of Survival, New York, 1979; Although Maniruzzaman used conventional war capability (expressed in terms of GNP and military budget) as absolute criterion in defining smallness, the treatment of smallness as a relative term can also be observed in his definition. He defines a small state as 'a state with a very low conventional war capability, not only in absolute global comparative terms...but also vis-à-vis the large powers in the region' (emphasis added), Maniruzzaman, op. cit., p. 14.

24 Bangladesh is 4.380% (app) of the size of Indian territory, Nepal is 4.288% (app) of the size of Indian territory, Bhutan is 1.429% (app) of the size of Indian territory, Sri Lanka is 2.067% (app) of the size of Indian territory and Maldives is 0.009% (app) of the size of Indian territory. For details see, Syed Anwar Husain, ‘Security of Smaller States in South Asia: A Bangladesh Perspective’ in Arun Kumar Banerji (ed.) Security Issues in South Asia; Domestic and External Sources of Threats to Security (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1998), p. 33.


27 S. Chan, “The Mouse that Roared: Taiwan’s Management of Trade Relations with the United States”, Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 20, No.3, October, 1987, pp. 251-292...


32 Handel, op. cit.

33 R.S. Cline, World Power Trends and US Foreign Policy for the 1980s, Boulder 1981; Also Cline, World Power Assessment: A Calculus of Strategic Drift, Boulder 1975. Recognising Cline’s World Power Assessment as a pole opposite of contextual analysis advocated by the Sprouts, Lasswell and Kaplan, Baldwin commented that, ‘if one wanted to promote the idea of power as monolithic, homogenous, unidimensional and highly fungible, it would be difficult to improve upon Cline’s


36 Snider op. cit. p. 317.


39 Rothstien, op. cit.


41 Ibid.

42 In his comment Frank De Silva points out that small states can be at times surrogates of other powers and interests referring to the Norwegian Peace Aid (NPA) mediating intervention in Sudan. That intervention had the creeping effect of altering the military balance in favour of the rebels. There was a peace accord signed, which provides for secession after the lapse of some years.

43 United Nations Website.

44 This is explained by the fact that the peacekeepers from small states are seen as more neutral and readily accepted in the conflict situations. There is also a contrary view that they do not pursue peacekeeping purely out of humanitarian considerations. They do it for increasing their international power and prestige. There is also an economic incentive, which is a significant source of revenue for a small developing country. Again, there are some small states like Sweden who are criticised for being major arms suppliers while at the same time pursuing peace often in the areas where they are selling weapons.


46 The idea of ASEM was proposed in 1994 by Mr. Goh Chok Tong, the Prime Minister of Singapore.


55 As commented by Frank de Silva.


