

The Security of Small Nations: Challenges and Defences*

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The 'essentially contested concept' of security is analysed, and some main kinds of ambiguity and dimensions outlined: level, kind of threat and kind of defence. Discourses on security, particularly of small nations, must avoid being trapped into dealing only with one level (national, which in practice normally means state), one kind of threat (military) and one kind of defence (again military). There is no clear relation between kind of alignment and military expenditures, but non-aligned states are overrepresented both among the very high armers and among the very low armers. Increasing gaps in military R&D make it necessary for small states to rely more on *different* military strategies from the great powers, putting more stress on invulnerability and on non-offensive defence. For bi- or multinational states, the relation between nations and state becomes crucial for any defence, and in particular for social and cultural defence, which presupposes the absence of major grievances that can be exploited by external powers. In welfare terms, but also in terms of national independence, economic threats are often at least as serious as military ones. One remedy is diversification of export commodities and of trade partners. Collective strategies of small states suffer from the 'free rider' problem, and from the vulnerability to collective counter-strategies from centre actors. It is therefore wise of the Non-Aligned Movement *not* to have attempted to become a military actor. Collective economic strategies will have to take other forms than the producers' cartel, whose difficulties are almost always forbidding.

1. *The Problems*

Several problems, interrelated only to a limited extent, can be formulated concerning national security of small states. On the one hand, we may formulate what looks like a question of fact: What factors *do* affect the national security of small states, and to what extent are they factors that can somehow be affected by the states themselves? The state of the art, however, would hardly permit any valid generalizations on this question, even if there are some scattered empirical research results that could serve as bases for fragmentary answers.

On the other hand, we may formulate questions in terms of perceptions rather than (some alleged) reality: How do small states *define* their problems of national security? How do they attempt to solve them? *What types* of small nations tend to make *what definitions* and *what choices* in these

respects? The aim of this article is to discuss to what extent social scientific analysis can contribute to clarifying the issues involved, and to what extent it can serve as a basis for proposing alternatives to existing policies. To do this, it is first necessary to discuss briefly the concepts of 'small nation' and 'security'.

2. *What Is a Small Nation?*

The notion of 'small state' or 'small nation' is rather old and established. There is, however, little consensus on how to conceptualize and operationalize it.¹ We find two main types of definitions, which we may call absolute and relational, respectively. In the first case, indicators of 'size' are sought, such as population, area, GNP, military capability, etc., and attempts are then made to correlate other variables with the size indicators. Relational definitions, on the other hand, are based on the underlying idea that the essence of 'smallness' is either lack of influence on the environment, or high sensitivity to the environment and lack of

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