



# Security of Small States

*Edited by*  
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Security is a universal experience and constant preoccupation of mankind in its individual, social and corporate existence. The acute sense of insecurity in all spheres, however, reflects not only the ineffectivity of the means adopted to ensure security or the relative enormity of the magnitude and sources of insecurity but also the elusiveness in conceptualisation of security problems.

Bulk of the contemporary security debate is dominated by two paradigms: 'East-West central balance' and conventional, military-oriented territorial or external security. The post-war developments in the domain of security do not, however, entirely corroborate the validity of these paradigms. The emergence of numerous independent states in the Third World in the wake of decolonisation has added new dimensions to international security. For one, the epicentre of crises and conflicts in the post-war period has shifted to the territories of the Third World, mostly with involvement of big and industrially developed nations. Since most of the newly independent states are small by any standard, this category of states has specially been rendered vulnerable due to this change in conflict scenario. Recent examples are Grenada, Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Chad and Lybia. Their capacity to deter attack is extremely limited, vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters is high and resilience to internal shocks and traumas is little indeed.

Secondly, threats to security of small states are not only external but also internal and non-military in nature. In fact, poverty, lack of national cohesion and political instability possess greater potentials for insecurity to these nations.

Intellectual resources, however, devoted to the field of security of small states, have so far been, negligible. There has also been a general lack of awareness among the international community about the special needs and problems of security of small states. Conceptualisation and approach to national security in the context of the small developing countries therefore, needs innovations and new moorings.

The present volume on the security of small states is an attempt at providing wider understanding and creating greater awareness about the nature and sources of threats to security of the small developing countries. It is also intended to deal with possible options available with small states for enhancing security and survival prospects of these nations.

Scholars contributing in this volume, looked at the concepts of small states' and 'security' from their own perspectives. Discussion on domestic aspects, regional context and international response to the needs and problems of the security of small states resulted in interesting sets of alternative strategies for security and survival of the small states.

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The "International Seminar on the Security of the Small States" was the third in the series of international moots sponsored by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies. The theme of the seminar was of direct relevance to Bangladesh and the overwhelming majority of the Third World states which found themselves highly vulnerable in the contemporary international environment.

The principal objective of the seminar was to draw on the knowledges, expertise and experience of eminent scholars drawn from many parts of the world in sharpening and deepening our perception of the security interests and problems of the small states in all their aspects, perspectives and dimensions. In the past, the balance of power equation so pervaded the international security doctrines and structure that it clouded a proper comprehension of the definitional and typological categorization of the threats to the security of contemporary nation-states.

The most striking political phenomenon in the constellation of events that came in the wake of the establishment of the United Nations was the emergence of new independent nation-states reflecting the vision of a new world order. As they grew in number, the political map of the world was radically altered. Legally and theoretically, all of these states were equal as members of the United Nations. But, in all other respects, such as, size, population resources, economic and military power, they were unequal and widely divergent. The special weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the small states, in particular of those states categorized as "small island states", "Mini-states" and "Micro-states" were brought into sharp focus. But, the definitional task of small state proved to be both difficult and elusive.

The structure of international peace and security as envisioned in the Charter of the United Nations was based on the assumption that the big powers representing the five permanent members of the Security Council would uphold the Charter principles including the principle of non-use of force in the settlement of disputes. But, soon after the commencement of the cold war between the two super powers, these sacred principles were being violated with impunity causing open armed conflicts in many parts of the world (though Europe and North America were so far spared of such armed conflicts).



In such a world scenario, the Third World countries found themselves highly vulnerable. Internal threats of destabilization loomed larger than ever due among others to lack of national cohesion and reduced flow of external resources retarding the pace of development and sharpening the competition between defence and development needs. In some cases, particularly those countries which are strategically located, or command resources of strategic importance to the great powers, the problem of vulnerability was compounded by the spectre of regional or super power intrusion in various forms—military, political, economic, ideological and cultural.

Small states came to be viewed as those lacking the capacity to organize and guarantee their security. In this view, a large number of states with a fairly large population would fall within the ambit of small states. As a matter of fact, most Third World countries regardless of size, location and resource endowment appeared to be vulnerable in the present pyramidal power-structure with the super-powers at the apex followed by great powers, regional powers and middle powers.

Such vulnerability will continue to exist in varying degrees as long as the security structure remains micro-political in character. As a matter of fact the great powers comprising two power-blocs appear to be no less vulnerable, despite the difference in the source of threat and quality of vulnerability. It is a tragic-irony that the threat perceptions of the militarily powerful and militarily weak nations have one thing in common : both live in terror, some with a huge arsenal of deadly armour and some without them.

A similar paradox is also observable in the world economic scene. The industrially developed countries with a quarter of the world population and commanding four-fifths of the world resources are gripped by problems of unemployment, inflation and recession with an ever mounting expenditure on the arms race. On the other hand, the Third World countries continue to groan under the crushing burden of poverty, disease and illiteracy, compounded by the ever present security threats. The agonies of both sets of states appear to lie embedded in the inherited world order from a bygone era totally unsuited to the emerging new realities.

History provides us with two dominant sets of forces. *One* : the drive for power and military supremacy ; arms race ; violence and wars with untold sufferings for the human race ; and now with the deadly



nuclear weapons, the threat of complete self-annihilation becoming more real than ever. *Two* : the ceaseless quest for a good life based on human and moral values ; creative, inventive and innovative endeavours relieving human suffering, alleviating poverty and deprivation and enriching human civilization.

The two sets of forces have set the world on two different courses, one inexorably leading it to the brink of a nuclear avalanche, and, the other to preservation and enrichment of human values, enduring peace and a good life for all. Theoretically speaking, if one thousand billion dollars now spent annually on arms could be pumped into productive activity, all parts of the world would blossom in prosperity and contribute to harmony in inter-state relations. The nations collectively already command the required resources and technology to achieve this goal.

What is needed is a will and a strategy based on the cooperation of all nations cutting across all barriers, East-West and North-South, and spurring the nation-building efforts of the Third World. The countries of the Third World, the main-stream of the United Nations, are now better organized than ever before to play a catalytic role in concert with other like-minded nations, regional associations, the United Nations and other institutions and movements like the NAM, the OIC, the Group of 77 in curbing the arms race, removing the spectre of a nuclear holocaust and creating a saner and more equitable world order.

I hope, the learned papers included in the present volume and the recommendations of the Seminar will contribute towards a better understanding of the security interests of small states and also to an emergence of a consensus on measures necessary to safeguard them at national, regional and international level.

Dhaka,  
The 10th September, 1987.

Muhammad Shamsul Huq



## INTRODUCTION

Security is a universal experience and constant preoccupation of mankind in its individual, social and corporate existence. The relative absence of security, however, in all spheres, reflects its elusiveness not only in the effectivity of the means adopted at the operational level but also in conceptualization of appropriate security paradigms at the intellectual level. Conceptualization of contemporary security discussion is characterized by an overwhelming systemic bias and an inadequate comprehension of the component-whole relationship. It is conventionally and conveniently assumed that security of the whole or the system would ensure the security of the components. Empirically, however, this is not necessarily the case. In the post-War period, the epicentre of crises and of conflicts has shifted to the Third World where majority of the nation-states of the world are located. For one, the security and stability of these countries are affected by a host of domestic and regional problems. The scenario is all the more complicated by the fact that most of the conflicts, are actually fought on the territories of the Third World on proxy basis and with involvement of the developed countries.

A second lacuna in conceptualization of security occurs in its military-oriented definition in terms of "absence of threat or conflict." Consequently security has come to be identified with accumulation of the instruments of power. The scope of security deliberations in the process is narrowed down to traditional militaristic strategies for security.

The concept of security, as viewed above, can be flawed on many counts both on universal and contextual planes. Firstly, security is not military security alone, it does not lie only in the absence of external military threats. Security has its intrinsic positive elements—presence of values, satisfaction of needs, feeling secure and striving unhindered for growth and development. Military or instrument of force has its own value to security to the extent that it is required for elimination of the external or coercive sources of threats to security. On the otherhand, if security entails also presence of certain positive elements, then an altogether different approach would be required.



At the contextual level, the conventional militaristic external-oriented definition of security fails to capture the magnitude and variety of the problems of the vast majority of the Third World developing countries. Most of these countries are still passing through the painful and traumatic process of nation building activities. The internal problems are complicated and magnified many times not only by external intervention, proxy wars, border conflicts and overflowing ethnic explosion but also by more subtle but debilitating threats to economic, social and cultural independence. The Third World countries in general and the small states in particular, are inherently vulnerable and susceptible to external manipulations.

Conceptually, we emphasised on the positive elements of security because they are inherent in the very process of nation-state formation. The transformation of contemporary security maps of the world includes the emergence of the vast number of states who are small in size and capability and inherently remain vulnerable. There are, of course, countervailing forces. The very process leading to their emergence is manifestation of a set of positive values, the spirit of nationalism and desire for remaining independent as a unit of the international system. But in most cases, these rationale and nationalistic feelings remain dormant and primordial forces become apparently dominant. Forces external to the system make it all the more complicated, as mentioned earlier.

Going back to the academic plane, intellectual resources devoted to the field of security of small states are only a recent phenomenon and remain inadequate at that. Problems of security of small states find mention in the existing ethnocentric literature to the extent they have bearing on the central east-west balance. Often security problems are considered proportionate to the size. However, feeling secure or insecure, satisfaction of needs etc. can not be less for small states and more for bigger state. Infact, such as inter-state comparison on security, which is one of the fundamental values of any society, is not only value-laden and unwarranted. This only reflects a state of lack of adequate awareness and appreciation of the security needs of small states. In view of this, problems of security of small developing states require not only a comprehensive and non-conventional approach at the operational level but also a reconceptualization, wider understanding and greater awareness.



The present volume on the security of small states is a humble attempt in looking at the problems of security of small states from this new perspective with the purpose of providing wider understanding and creating greater awareness about the nature and sources of threats to security of the small developing countries and evolving ways and means of enhancing security and survival prospects of the small states in the contemporary world. The volume consists of the papers and salient aspects of deliberations of an international seminar on *The Security of Small States* held under the aegis of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka during 6-8 January 1987. The widely participated seminar aroused a great deal of interest and curiosity among the participants and concerned section of the public at home and abroad.

A major problem was encountered while preparing the conceptual background of the above mentioned seminar : to what extent we should go in laying down rigid definition of the concepts of "security" and "small states". Regarding "security" it was pointed out that the existing conceptual contours were quite inadequate and lopsided and needed to be broad-based on a wider landscape of the Third World, specially, the small developing countries.

More problematic was the concept of "smallness" : what is smallness and how small is small ? To what extent smallness provides a meaningful frame of analysis ? Incidentally, there already emerged a concept of smallness in some seminal works including the ones by the Commonwealth Secretariat\* and Talukder Maniruzzaman.\*\* The former followed the benchmark of one million population and while the latter constructed a composite score of GNP and current defence budget. We had, however, slightly different consideration in mind. We preferred to be less rigid because our purpose was to provide an understanding of the problems of security faced by the small states. The problems of small states pertained basically to those of the nation building processes faced by the developing countries in general. The difference was that the smaller states were basically and inherently disad-

\* *Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society*, London : Commonwealth Secretariat, 1986

\*\* *The Security of Small States in the Third World*, Canberra papers on Strategy and Defence No. 25, 1982



vantaged in tackling the problems, absorbing the shock and resolving the crises. Another reason for not being rigid about defining small states was that the concept 'small' is relative and contextual and is defined by the particular geopolitical settings, social and political realities which make countries vulnerable. A country, otherwise big, may be a small state because of its juxtaposition with a still bigger neighbour.

The relative openness of the framework resulted in wide coverage of the problem by the disparate and eclectic group of scholars contributing in this volume. Although the scholars differed widely about the need for defining and delimitation of the small states, there also appeared interesting convergence of opinion. Firstly, the scholars agreed that the concept of security in the context of the small states needed new moorings in view of the fact that the threats to security of the small states—both internal and external—were basically non-military in nature. Secondly, the problems, although looked at from individual perspectives and interpreted variously, converged to a set of variables like fragile socio-economic base, lack of cohesiveness, lack of stable political system, dependency, lack of manoeuvrability and susceptibility to pressures and manipulations. Thirdly, the scholars presented apparently diverse set of broad policy directions for ensuring security of small states. The policy recommendations included regional cooperation, policy of distancing, tolerance and accommodation (multi-culturalism) and neutrality and finally, grave-yard strategy. Interestingly, however, there was an underlying unity in all these recommendations. All these basically pertained to the process of nation-building or building up of a cohesive and solid/invincible nation. To an extent the national efforts would require regional cooperation not only for supplementing-resources but also for resolving regional conflicts and insulating the region from external interventions.

The volume contains broadly six sub-themes. *Abdur Rob Khan* and *Mohammad Humayun Kabir* in their article "The Security of Small States : A Framework of Analysis" and *Jasjit Singh* in his article "Insecurity of Developing Nations, especially Small States" define the *Perspectives of the Security of Small States*. *Anirudha Gupta's* "Domestic Aspects of the Security of Small States in South Asia : The Case of Nepal" and *Anwar Husain's* "Ethnicity and Security of Small States : The South Asian Context" deal with the *Domestic Aspects of the Security of Small States*. "Underdevelopment, Dependence and Instability in the Small States: What is the Way out" by *Atiur Rahman*



and Jaglul Haider and "Economic Vulnerabilities of the Landlocked Countries : Possible option" by Golam Mostafa cover the *Economic Aspects of the Security of Small States*.

*The Regional Context of the Security of Small States* has been dealt with in a number of articles : "The Security of Small States in the South Asian Context" by A. I. Akram, "Regionalism and the Security of Small Island States : The Case of South Pacific" by Amena A. Mohsin, "Small States Security in the South Pacific" by David W. Hegarty, "Security of the Republic of Korea in the Northeast Asian Strategic Environment" by Kook-Chin Kim, "Security of Small States : The Case of Nauru" M. S. Rajan and "Security and Foreign Policy Options : The Case of Singapore" by S.I. Khan.

*International Response in Security of Small States* has been dealt with in three papers : "Small States in the International Security System" by Ataur Rahman, "Diplomacy and Security : Dilemmas for Small States" by R. P. Barston and "The Role of the United Nations in the Emergence and Security of Small States" by Waliur Rahman.

Although almost all the papers touched on possible ways and means of ensuring security of small states, five papers exclusively focused on possible *Strategies for Security and Survival of the Small States*. The papers are : "Regional Organization and Security of Small States" by Bhabhani Sen Gupta, "The Policy of 'Distancing' by Small States for Security" by Estrella D. Solidum, "The Way to Promote Peace and Development and Safeguard the Security of Small States" by Guo Jing'an, "Neutrality and Multiculturalism : The Applicability of the Swiss Model to the Security of Small States" by Zillur R. Khan and "The Grave-yard Strategy : A strategy for the Small States" by T.A. Imo-bighe.

The final chapter titled *Conclusions* summarises the major arguments and consensus viewpoints of the participants in the seminar. The conclusions drafted by a team of rapporters headed by Iftekharuzzaman was presented and adopted in the concluding session of the seminar. So, the conclusions have been kept intact so that the readers get a flavour of the trends of discussion in the seminar.

An editorial point may be noted here. Although the papers have been sequentially ordered, one would obviously encounter certain overlappings of issues and facts, even inconsistencies between them. However, we considered them as individual viewpoints and so long as the facts



and figures were mentioned with proper citations we did not feel like editing the overlappings and commissions out.

We would conclude on a note of further research. The present volume is by no means exhaustive. There is scope of undertaking a typological study of the nature and sources of problems of security of small states including the landlocked countries ( the present volume contains one), island states, small-population-large states, large-population-small states, famine-prone states and the so-called rim states vis-a-vis the relatively large developing world.

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**PERSPECTIVES**