

# SMALL STATES AND REGIONAL STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

edited by  
Mohammad Humayun Kabir

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## *Foreword*

Bigger states tend to look at the region through the prism of power and the smaller states find more comfort in the ideals and principles of interstate relations including international law. Unilateralism and bilateralism appear to be the preferred means of states with greater power while multilateralism offers a better sense of security and stability to economically, politically and militarily disadvantaged or small states. In the anarchic system of contemporary international relations around the world, and in South Asia in particular, the role and ethos of smaller states assume much significance. The objective of this study has been to understand and explore the areas where smaller states of the region including Bangladesh can constructively contribute towards regional stability in South Asia.

The scholars associated with this study found it intellectually a daunting task to articulate a realistic framework to overcome the challenges of asymmetry that tend to determine the interstate relations in South Asia. Various dimensions and consequences of asymmetry have been examined and explored in seeking to understand the defining factors for stability in South Asia. The researchers have given a commendable account of themselves. We are confident the readers will agree that this is a ground-breaking work.

Regional stability is a function of perceptions, policies, priorities and performance of the state actors in the region and beyond. In a globalised and interdependent world no state, by itself, can either establish enduring stability or sustain it in a given region. Commitment, cooperation and contribution of all states, small and big, in the region are essential for building regional stability. The geopolitical and historical realities of South Asia make it all the more important that the quest for stability in South Asia should seek to involve, integrate and inspire all the states of the region irrespective of their geographical size & location, natural endowments, quality & size of population, economic prowess and military power.

Big and small are relative concepts. For the purpose of academic study and analysis such a concept of differentiation is at times found useful. A

country may be relatively small in size but not necessarily so in terms of initiative, influence and open-mindedness towards regional cooperation and stability. A country relatively big in size may or may not have psychological attributes to match its size. Despite the conceptual challenges in respect of definition of small, the BIIS study tried to draw a line between states of South Asia. Not all participants in this study felt equally comfortable with the definition of small which formed the basis of this research work.

We live in a world characterised by equality and inequality. Equality in terms of international law need to be appreciated in the context of inequality in endowments and power. So called small states of South Asia will have to reckon with various aspects of equality and inequality vis-à-vis the relatively more powerful and resourceful states. The role of small states in advancing the cause of regional stability straddles the divide between equality and inequality. This study underlines the importance of these realities in the quest for regional peace, stability and security.

05 April 2005  
Dhaka

Ambassador Mufleh R. Osmany  
Chairman  
Board of Governors, BIIS