National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)

Thesis Summary

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This dissertation analyzes the security strategies of small states in the post-Cold War world. In this regard, this research aimed to answer two questions. (1) What are the major security policy tools that small states have and what determines the availability of those policy tools? (2) What factors determine small states’ choice of policy tools?

Specifically, using the four case studies of Maldives, Brunei, Timor-Leste, and Seychelles, the study identified a framework of three major security policy tools utilized by small states to resolve their security problems as diplomatic/legal tools, economic tools, and military tools. In order to create this framework of security policy tools, the research identified the factors that determine the availability of security policy tools and additional factors that determine the ultimate security policy choices of small states.

The three major policy tools identified were categorized as follows:

(1) Diplomatic/legal tools
   a) Utilize the UN and other global, regional, or sub-regional multilateral institutions (DL1).
   b) Foster closer bilateral relations with major powers and sub-regional powerful countries (DL2).
   c) Seek legal solutions to security issues through arbitration, mediation, and/or file controversies over security matters to the institutions such as International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. (DL3).

(2) Economic tools
   a) Small states that have the natural resources and therefore the wealth provide economic benefits to sub-regional powerful countries as a means to foster closer bilateral relations (E1).
   b) Provide economic/financial investments opportunities to major powers and, thereby, secure additional diplomatic support from major powers over security issues (E2).

(3) Military tools
   a) Take independent measures to strengthen military capabilities (M1).
   b) Obtain support from major power(s) over security matters (M2).
   c) Invoke collective security measures under the United Nations auspices (M3).
The factors that determine the availability of the above policy tools were identified at the systemic and state level as follows:

**Systemic Level:**
(i) Access to global, regional, or sub-regional security and legal frameworks.
(ii) Existence of a powerful country in the sub-region.
(iii) Rivalry among major powers.
(iv) Shared borders with a powerful country.

**State Level:**
(i) Sizable natural resources.
(ii) Important geostrategic position.

The following factors at the state level and individual level, that represent the national interests and personal interests, were identified as additional factors that also (in addition to the above factors) determined the ultimate choice of policy tools.

**State Level (national interests):**
(i) Cost of dependency on one major power.
(ii) Fear of political interference.

**Individual Level (personal interests):**
(i) Personal political interests of leaders.
(ii) Personal economic interests of leaders.

The second major finding of this research is that the general tendency of small states is to use diplomatic/legal tools first, economic tools second, and military tools last. Economic tools can be slightly more politically sensitive and can involve socioeconomic costs and the risk of being caught up in a great power rivalry with negative consequences, more than diplomatic/legal tools. However, at the same time, investment by major powers can also be socioeconomically beneficial to the small states. For these reasons, economic tools are less favored than diplomatic/legal tools, but more favored than military tools. For small states, military tools are the least preferred because they are politically sensitive and fiscally burdensome.

The third major finding of this research is that in addition to the factors at the systemic and state level, small states’ policy choices are also influenced by state level factors, cost of dependency on one major power and fear of political interference. Moreover, in many cases, individual level factors, personal political and economic interests of leaders also influence small states’ policy choices.

There are also several additional findings of this research. First, related to the primary finding of this research, is that small state security policy options and ultimate policy choices are not only determined by system level factors. This is a re-interpretation of the traditional view that small states’ foreign and security policies are primarily determined by systemic factors. As explained in the primary findings, small state security policy tools are not only determined by systemic factors but also state level factors. Moreover, the ultimate policy choices are primarily determined by state and individual level factors.

Second, small states security strategies are a combination of multilateral and bilateral security policies. In adopting the different policy choices, small states do not limit their policies to what is available in their immediate sub-region, but seek
solutions to their security problems both within and outside their immediate sub-region. This finding goes against the conventional view that small states tend to seek solutions to their security from their immediate environment. To the contrary, small states have evolved from newly independent states to confident state actors that seek strategic choices available in the global system rather than limiting their policy choices to their immediate sub-region.

Third, this research finds that the current global system that is in the process of shifting from a unipolar to a potential multipolar system provides the best situation for small states to exploit the strategic competition among the major powers to their advantage, without having to ultimately pick any specific side as was the case in the Cold War bipolar system. This finding is also contrary to the traditional view that the Cold War bipolar system was the best system for small states, where small states had more room for maneuver by hedging against the two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Fourth, small states prefer to have a wide network of security partners rather than a security alliance with one major power as a means to avoid over-depending on any one power. Moreover, the security partnerships range from those with sub-regionally powerful neighbors and regional powers to major global powers.

Fifth, small states can learn from strategic policy choices of other small states and thus, avoid making mistakes that other small states have made. As evidenced from the case study of the newly independent small state, Timor-Leste, there is much scope for small states to learn from the successful security policies of other small states and avoid their failures.