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Small States and Alliances

Introduction

The articles in this volume are the result of a workshop in Vienna in November 1999. The workshop was organized by the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, the Bureau of Military Scientific Studies, the Austrian Defense Academy, the Department for Political Science and the University of Vienna. The papers are based on the following questions and arguments.

The Cold War system was based on the concept of "balance of power." For Hans Morgenthau alliances are the "most important manifestation of the balance of power." In this observation members of alliances have common interests based on the fear of other states. Stephen Walt has since modified this concept. For him alliances are the result of a "balance of threat." In the old system the existence of alliances and a potential threat were inseparable.

Since 1989, the political landscape of Europe looks quite different. The main threat on which the balance of power of the Cold War was based has faded away. According to some analysts, alliances can hardly survive without a sufficient threat. Consequently, they concluded: "NATO's days are not numbered but its years are." Seven years after the end of the Cold War, NATO shows no signs of demise, however. In this respect, the prediction that alliances would weaken without threat appears to be wrong. NATO looks like it will be an exception to these rules and cornerstones of alliance theory.

There is no small amount of alliance literature on the questions: Why do states form alliances? When do they form alliances? What size will the alliance be when it is formed? Statistically oriented research tested the correlation between alliance commitments and involvement in war. After the end of the Cold War, the focus shifted. Now, the literature on alliances tries to explore the questions: Why do alliances dissolve? What are the forces or events that lead states to abandon security ties that they once welcomed? Why do some alliances persist in the face of such strains? Why do some alliances survive even after their original rationale has evaporated?

Another interesting part of the alliance literature, however, relates to small states. It is on why, how, and under what conditions states engage in alliances. What are the benefits and costs of alliance? How are the benefits and costs of alliances allocated among their members? What determines who allies with whom? Can small states still pursue their own security interests within an alliance? Can they even become an integral part of an alliance?

In particular for small states, the decision to join alliances depends on the judgement whether the overall benefits of doing so are greater than the costs. Does the perceived threat warrant the costs? Does the increased security resulting from the partner's commitment outweigh the loss of autonomy sacrificed in the commitment to the partner? Under what conditions and when does a small state need the enhanced deterrence of attack on itself and the enhanced defense capability? Is it prepared to accept the risk of having to come to the aid of the ally, when one would have preferred not to do so in the absence of commitment? And memberships, of course, do cost money that could arguably be better spent elsewhere. What are the alliance's benefits for small states after the end of the East-West conflict?

Alliances can be defined as formal associations of states bound by the mutual commitment to use military force against non-member states to defend member states' integrity. Alliances call for the commitment of all participating states to take effective and coercive measures, in particular the use of military force, against an aggressor. Can small states be confident that the system would come to their aid in the eventuality of aggression from outside the alliance? Other states in the system, in particular the great powers, might not consider the threat to a small state or a civil war as a threat worthy of collective action. On the other hand, small states might find themselves obligated to participate in a conflict in which they had no direct interest; this risk has been called "entrapment", the logical opposite of "abandonment".

Are these anxieties – that small states could be drawn unwillingly into the wars of big states – reasonable? The results of empirical research are mixed. On the one hand, data show that the onset of war is unrelated to alliance formation and configuration. On the other hand, the magnitude, duration, and severity of war are substantively connected to alliance configuration, for the reason that war spreads through alliances. Alliances turn small wars into big wars. Are small states dragged into the wars of big powers or are they protected by big powers? Small states are thus always caught in the trap of being "entrapped" or "abandoned". The greater one's dependence on the alliance and the stronger one's commitment to the ally, the higher the risk of entrapment. The looser the ties, the larger the risk of being abandoned in the case of war. One strategy to escape this trap in history has been to adopt "neutrality" or "hide."

Traditional military alliances, as defined above, have lost their meaning after the end of the East-West conflict. How can NATO endure in the absence of a serious opponent? NATO is changing. NATO is redeveloping its structure. It will do both, include former members of the Warsaw Treaty organization and develop strong cooperation with Russia. Most important of all, the core of the Cold War NATO, (nuclear) deterrence and collective defense (enshrined in Art. V of the Washington Treaty) is becoming less and less important. This concept defines the primary purpose of the alliance as defense of NATO territory against a major attack. NATO's activities are therefore less concentrated on collective defense. NATO will not focus on a single mission – collective defense – anymore, as it did during the Cold War. No longer preparing only or primarily for a coalition war on its agenda, it now focuses on crisis management, peacekeeping, humanitarian action, and also peace enforcement. The "new NATO" looks and acts in part quite differently from the old NATO. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program has already been designed according to the new requirements. Cooperation of the Partners with NATO can be organized on an individual level through peace-keeping exercises, military-to-military contacts, and similar activities. The new Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) provides a mechanism for productive consultation and more meaningful communication among Partners and increased decision-making opportunities for partners relating to activities in which they participate. Is this sufficient for the security needs after the end of the Cold War? How much influence do small states have within the alliance, and on what issues? What are the advantages of staying outside, what are those of being a member?

Some of the small states of Europe look to NATO as the primary military-security alliance, although with various degrees of enthusiasm. The most enthusiastic small state supporters of NATO are former members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, seeking full membership not only for the security NATO would provide but to demonstrate their full membership in post-Cold War Europe. Some small states in NATO are more enthusiastic about the prospects for a European security organization in the framework of the EU than others. The states not participating in an alliance (Sweden, Austria Finland) are wary of linking themselves too closely to the Alliance, finding the security posture of the EU more acceptable. The PfP

program also developed a powerful alternative for those small states that do not want to or cannot join NATO.

Scholars, practitioners, policy-makers and advisors from several countries will be invited to discuss these issues. They will address historical, empirical, and theoretical topics. They will also be asked to give policy recommendations.

The purpose of David Singer's and Volker Krause's article is to review research on formal alliances, with a focus on alliance policies of so-called "minor powers," often also referred to as "small states." Specifically, they address the following two questions: First, what are some sources of minor-power alliance commitments? Or, what are some benefits minor powers can expect from formal alliance ties? Second, what are some consequences of minor-power alliance commitments in terms of armed conflict? Or, are minor powers with formal alliance connections more or less likely than those without such bonds to become involved in militarized disputes and wars? The authors argue that minor powers, given their rather limited capabilities, may have a strong interest in alliance commitments not only to enhance their military security but also to obtain a variety of non-military benefits, such as increased trade or support for domestic political regimes. One of the problems with alliance bonds is, however, that allied support often requires minor powers to make significant autonomy concessions, allowing allies, most notably major-power allies, to gain influence over their minor-power alliance partners. Additionally, alliance ties may reduce minor powers' diplomatic flexibility to prevent foreign policy crises from escalating to all-out warfare while leaving it uncertain whether allies will honor their pledges of military support in the event of armed conflict or war.

Stefan Bergsmann tries to develop a theoretically useful definition of the concept of military alliance. He argues that all definitions developed so far are not clear, concise and narrow enough to be a useful basis for further theorizing. He proposes to define an alliance as "an explicit agreement among states in the realm of national security in which the partners promise mutual assistance in the form of a substantial contribution of resources in the case of a certain contingency the arising of which is uncertain."

Simon Duke concludes that the behavior of small states in the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) and more general European security contexts is distinguished by diversity as much as by similarities. It is difficult to ascertain any specific type of behavior that distinguishes larger from smaller state behavior. Even the presence of four neutral and non-aligned states (NNA's) in the EU, which is often taken as an exemplar of small state behavior, shows considerable differences between their outlooks. Their respective NNA positions may be substantially modified by decisions of other small states to join, or not, alliances such as Estonia's potential membership of NATO. Amongst the small states there may also be significant differences of opinion such as the pro-European stance of Belgium and the pro-Atlantic stance of the Netherlands, in spite of their very close relations in other fields. The argument that the small states should adopt a coherent position so that they may make their voice heard by the larger states suffers from the false assumption that there is a sufficient identity of interests amongst the smaller states or larger states. Smaller states may well be most effective when they engage the larger states from positions of relative influence, such as the EU Presidency, where they can modify or shape agendas. With the overall theme of small states and alliances in mind, it would appear that the absence of any overt threat to the security of most small states in Europe has decreased the relevance of alliances for smaller states. As a consequence, small states have shown far more willingness to develop specific links to security organisations that reflect only their immediate concerns. Alliances, in the traditional sense, were designed to address threats from without and there is no guarantee that

larger states will wish to involve themselves in intra-state rivalries. Unlike the Cold War, smaller states may now choose to involve themselves on an à la carte basis in a wide range of security commitments with an emphasis upon their own security requirements and those in the immediate vicinity. Alliance membership or non-membership for smaller states now carries different costs and benefits than in the Cold War era and this is in part because the very nature of security and alliances has changed. One factor that has not appreciably changed, however, is that smaller states still have the ability to upset the designs for stability promoted by the larger states.

Small states form an alliance to balance against a rising hegemon. Following on this argument some scholars argued that states must also perceive the changing balance of power as a threat to their security before they form an alliance with other states. Christian Tuschhoff argues that the changing balance of power among states no longer means a new military threat, however. Tuschhoff further argues that Germany increased its power relative to its NATO allies during these years. Further, the changing balance of power was made possible by the mechanisms of military integration that are distinctive to NATO. This is an important instance of how a small state gained control at the expense of its originally more powerful partners. And still such change did not affect the stability of the alliance as a whole. The institution of military integration allowed for a changing balance of power among allies, i.e. peaceful change that could have broken NATO apart if institutions had failed to mediate among allies.

Michael Mosser attempts to show through the story of small states embedded within one international organization, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), that the importance of small states to international organizations and to international relations more generally has been understated and misunderstood. The focus on power rather than influence, and on states on their own in the international states system rather than within international organizations, has led the field to dismiss out of hand the possibility that small states can act strategically to preserve their security while at the same time contributing to the stability and efficacy of international organizations. He mostly deals with a brief theoretical exploration of the role small states might be expected to play in international organizations, and a historical treatment of the role the small NNA states did play in the CSCE. He attempts to show that despite their size, small states were able to engineer influence in the organization, but not without utilizing the built-in rules and decision-making procedures undergirded by strong norms favoring equality and negotiation over confrontation. Much more than a negative use (or threat of use, as the case may be) of the consensus decision-making rule was at play in giving small states a voice in the operations of the CSCE. In fact, he states without too much exaggeration that the operational modalities of the CSCE itself gave the opportunity for any state, regardless of size, to engineer influence, but that the small NNA states were the ones who had one of the largest stakes in keeping the process alive and thus were most keen in having their voice heard. It is no surprise, then, that the NNAs were able to get their interests across in the CSCE. What is surprising, however, is the way they were able to go about it.

Erwin A. Schmidl collects together advantages and disadvantages of smaller states in international peace operations. On the one hand, because of their structure – “small is beautiful” – they are sometimes better organised, and benefit from the “everybody knows everybody”-syndrome. Being smaller, they tend to be more flexible. Another positive qualification one might rightfully expect of personnel – military, police or civilian – from a smaller country: because being forced to working with limited budgets, they are used to improvise, and trained to think flexibly: an obvious requirement in peace operations (“corporal’s wars”); unfortunately, Austria has the dubious honor to serve as a prime

example. On the other hand they have less weight – or ”punch.” Because of their background (and lack of “back-up”), contingents from smaller countries are in general better suited for civilian, police, or limited military – esp. “specialist” – tasks than for fighting units. This, just as their sometimes less aggressive image can be an advantage as well, dependent on the character of a particular mission. Despite these deficiencies there is a tendency to include small states in peace operations – partly because the presence of many contingents helps the “international” image of these missions, and because it corresponds to the principle of (at least in theory) equality between the states as embodied in the UN Charter (“one country – one vote”). It also meets the (usually erroneous) self-image of international organisations of being actors themselves rather than just a stage. And it fits the ambitions of smaller countries (and their politicians, civil servants, and military officers) who often seek “to play a role, too” (the “we-too” phenomenon).

Svend Aage Christensen discusses the costs and benefits of alliance membership for small states on the basis of Glenn Snyder’s theory of alliance behavior. According to this theory, alliance politics are played out in two games, the alliance game and the adversary game. The alliance game refers to politics within the alliance, while the adversary game concerns politics between opposing alliances and nations. Christensen develops four adaptive modes of behavior in adaptation theory and their characteristics: dominance, balancing, acquiescence and quiescence. Following adaptation theory, Danish policy concerning the defense dimension of EU seems to be very close to a policy of quiescence.

Danish policy concerning the defense dimension of the EU is determined by the so-called national compromise of 1992, according to which Denmark remains outside the defense dimension of the EU, including membership of the WEU, common defense policy and common defense. According to the Edinburgh Decision adopted by the Heads of State or Government, 12 December 1992, Denmark does not participate in the elaboration and the implementation of decisions and actions of the Union which have defense implications, but will not prevent the development of closer cooperation between Member States in this area (Protocol on the position of Denmark).

The other side of the coin is an extraordinary Danish activism in NATO. This aspect of Danish security and defense policy rather qualifies as a policy of balance, characterised by a high degree of participation, an offensive power priority and a high degree of sensitivity to the eventuality of being left out of the fora, in which decisions concerning the future security landscape of Europe are being made.

Gunnar Lassinanti takes the discussion’s point of departure in three circumstances: 1. The geopolitical location of the states in question, 2. The history, traditions, political and other domestic circumstances of those states, 3. The alliances available and their relationship to different states. He looks at the case-study Sweden. Sweden’s policy of neutrality evolved gradually starting around 1840. Sweden’s neutrality policy has rested on unilateral decisions taken by the Swedish Government and the Swedish Riksdag (parliament). Thus, it does not build on international agreements in the same way as the neutrality policies of Finland, Switzerland and Austria. Immediately after the Second World War, Swedish neutrality policy was based on maintaining a strong defense force. In fact, at the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s Sweden’s defense force was one of the strongest in Europe and this was also true in part in later decades. Until the 1990s, Sweden’s neutrality policy entailed non-alignment in times of peace, with a view to remaining neutral in the event of war. During the course of the 1990s, the Swedish Government has ceased to use the term ”policy of neutrality”, which has gradually been replaced by the expression ”non-participation in military alliances”. In recent years, Sweden has become involved in more far-reaching international defense and security

policy cooperation than would have been possible during the earlier epoch of neutrality. Sweden cooperates with the “new NATO”. It takes part in the NATO Partnership for Peace, PFP-cooperation and in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, it has sent military personnel to work with NATO, Russia and others to uphold the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. However, Sweden is not prepared to become a full member of NATO thereby committing the country to cooperation under article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, since such a move would entail giving mutual security guarantees and forming part of a common, collective defense system. The threats are no longer primarily military in nature, but are more concerned with international crime, terrorism, the risk of sabotage on essential infrastructure, illegal immigration, environmental damage, shortcomings with respect to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, etc. The new threats call for new concepts and new security policy instruments. These are to be found in those areas generally known as “soft security” or “civic security”. With its enormous economic and political resources, the European Union is without comparison the most important organisation in Europe when it comes to promoting soft security.

According to Kari Möttölä the Finnish concept of security benefits from EU membership which does not entail article V -type common defense of the traditional meaning but which is based on access to influence, mutual solidarity and spill-over effects from the practices and experiences of political and economic integration. In case of military threat, membership would not necessarily bring military assistance but political and economic support and institutional lobbying in competent international fora and mechanisms dealing with international security. Consequently, Finland supports consistently the strengthening of the EU's capability to act on its Common Foreign and Security Policy, most recently also in the common security and defense policy, initially and in practice in military crisis management. The main argument based on traditional military security calculations is, that in the absence of military threat, there is no reason to risk regional stability through Russian countermoves with no obvious security benefits to be gained by NATO membership. Stability and security in the immediate region is best promoted and ensured by Finnish (and Swedish) non-alliance combined with a credible national defense adjusted to the local circumstances and historical experiences.

According to Anton Grizold and Vinko Vegiè the new European security environment produces positive and negative effects on Slovenia's security. The main positive effect of this environment on Slovenian national security comes from the general easing of tensions among the European powers resulting in a lower risk of an outbreak of a large military conflict and a direct military threat to European countries. On the other hand, the most severe negative effect on Slovenian national security derives from the Balkan conflict area. All in all, the post-Cold War European security environment has brought about the recognition that Slovenia should ensure its national security within the larger, evolving multi-institutional European security structure. Since Slovenia, as a small state with limited socio-economic and military capabilities, will certainly never become such a strong military power as to be able to threaten other states, one of its fundamental national interests is to become involved in the process of European integration by becoming a full member of the EU and NATO.

Located in the heart of Europe, Switzerland has traditionally pursued a security policy based on the idea that the country is surrounded by enemies instead of by friends. Heiko Borchert calls it a heroic act that the Swiss government has launched its new Security Policy Report labeled “Security through Cooperation.” It implies stepping out of the country's economic, political and military isolation. However, Borchert argues that the decision comes late, perhaps too late, and it is somewhat half hearted. The reason why the end of the Cold War in Europe offers no relief for Switzerland's foreign and security policy lies in the

persistence of neutrality. According to the author neutrality can be modified. If this will not occur soon, the Swiss government risks being caught in a neutrality trap. Because of the neutrality trap the country has enormous problems participating in international military operations and training exercises. Additionally, its reluctance concerning the EU's political system has increased the distance between Bern and Brussels at a time when the Union is ready to have its own market, its own currency, its own army and even a kind of common "domestic policy." This leads to a first rate foreign and security policy dilemma: On the one hand, NATO membership is technically possible but not politically desirable; on the other hand, EU membership is politically desirable but not possible – at least not in the near future.

From 1955 onwards the status of a (permanently) neutral country had served Austria well as an instrument of its foreign and security policies and as a symbol for the developing Austrian identity. However, since the end of the 1980s, the substantial legal and political aspects of neutrality have been changed, Gaertner and Hoell argue. Permanent neutrality between East and West was a more or less effective means to protect Austria from the military blocs during the Cold War. Yet the concept of neutrality has to change along with the concept of alliances. This does not necessarily mean the converse, however, – that neutral states will now have to join an alliance. It means only that the status of neutrality must take on a new meaning. Austria's neutrality has already de facto adapted several times to changing situations: membership in the UN was a move away from the Swiss model; the permission for aircraft of the anti-Iraq coalition to overfly Austrian airspace in the second Gulf War (1990/91) was compatible only with a broad interpretation of the legal concept of neutrality; membership in the EU with its CFSP and Amsterdam Treaty (that includes peace making) has little to do with traditional understandings of neutrality. Neutrality has become a function that does not extend beyond the negative definition of non-membership in NATO. This is not to say that little remains of neutrality; but that these changes demonstrate the flexibility of the concept even within its existing legal framework. Neutral states today must be willing to participate in international peace operations. They cannot remain aloof from every conflict, for neutrality is neither eternal nor does it require an identical response to different situations. The fact that Austria's neutrality no longer looks the same as in its early days does not mean that it has ceased to exist.