

Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior.

Jeanne A.K. Hey (ed.)

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Foreign policy by a small power can be dealt with succinctly: There is no such thing. Small nations are only props on the world stage, not independent actors, and thus of little interest to the student of world affairs. This remark by a Bismarckian theoretician of Great Politics is referenced in a book on Dutch foreign policy by Joris Voorhoeve, a former defense minister, but also a student of small power foreign policy. (He probably was referring to Henry Kissinger.) This suggestion reflects a largely held opinion amongst scholars of international relations, including some originating from small states.

It is however possible to offer a different perspective, whereby foreign policy is considered a full political activity of states, great and small alike. Studying the foreign policy of any given state is as valuable a study of any other political interaction. It similarly implies identifying actors, interests, trends and dissecting intricate power, bureaucratic and other relationships within, but also between, states. That leads to the question raised in a major study on small states' international behavior: are small powers something great powers writ small ? (see Rothstein, *Alliances and small powers*, 1968). The jury is still out.

Jeanne Hey's collection of studies on foreign policy behavior of a wide range of small states is a most welcome reminder that this question is still unresolved. The comparative analysis of small states' foreign policies was off to a very promising start in the 1970s, but unfortunately this academic effort was not maintained. Hey's volume is all the more timely, since she rightly points out that today's world is increasingly made up of small states. It could be argued – a similar point is raised by Paul Luif in the Austria chapter – that smaller states usually are more sensitive to ongoing developments in the international system, since they are more vulnerable than great powers. The study of small powers' international behaviour might then shed some light upon similar behaviour by greater powers in a not so distant future.

Hey's design is original and very ambitious. She intends to reach out to common characteristics of small states, ranging from a still recluse Laos over the English-speaking Caribbean states and to tiny Luxembourg, firmly integrated in the European Union. In order to be able to distinguish between idiosyncratic and systemic characteristics, she proposes as a conceptual framework the – slightly adapted – levels-of-analysis approach offered by James Rosenau 35 years ago. All chapters are organised along the respective importance of the international, state (domestic or national) and individual level as the conducts for explaining the international behavior of a small state.

Since human science is necessarily a never ending story, Hey's volume should not be seen as the final study on the subject of small states' foreign policy. The absence of a guiding theory, and also the absence of comparisons with non-small states' foreign policy – Hey recognises both points – make it difficult to consider our unresolved question as finally settled. Hey offers a wealth of comparative material, but also many interesting points and partial conclusions, such as the importance of economics in most of the countries under study (but may also be seen as of the utmost importance to great powers) and the willingness of most of the small states to consider joining regional arrangements and regimes as a means of

safeguarding against undue interference from neighbouring great states (but does Joseph Nye say something different about the United States in his *Paradox of American Power*, published in 2002 ?).

I personally was particularly struck by the close resemblance between Curtis Ryan's analysis of Jordanian foreign policy and my own reading of Belgian foreign policy from 1830 until today. Notwithstanding all idiosyncrasies, we both reach similar conclusions as to what constitutes the vital interests of small states. Ryan's conclusion that the core factors guiding Jordanian foreign policy are rooted far more in domestic politics and political economy than they are in external security or military concerns, contradicts one of the conclusions of the editor of the volume, and offers therefore a useful starting point for a similar follow-up volume.

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