

SECURITY OF SMALL STATES IN THE EVE OF 21st CENTURY*

Dr. G.Tumurchuluun

*Director, Center for Foreign Policy Studies
Ministry of External Relations Mongolia*

In this report three questions are addressed, namely: first, who are the so called “small states”, second, what kind of threats they are facing after the Cold War and third, how to deal with the threats in order to reduce their consequences, which might threaten international peace and security.

1. Introduction

The profound transformation in the nature of international relations in recent years cannot but affect the position of small states.

The number of small states has grown drastically in the post-Cold War period- almost 20 - and we are currently witnessing the birth of new generation of small states , formed through the dissolution of empires and multinational states. Some have regarded this trend as the third wave in the emergence of independent states in the twentieth century -the first and second waves being those that occurred after the First * The ideas expressed in this paper reflect exclusively personal opinion of the author and not necessarily the official position of the Government of Mongolia on the matter, and Second World Wars respectively. The Soviet Union fragmented, with the former Union republics opting for statehood, but division has continued beyond that. The Russian Federation at the very least bound to transform itself into a looser confederation rather than a federal structure. Yugoslavia has likewise disintegrated, as has Czechoslovakia.

During the Cold War era the problem of the small states somewhat neglected because of the tight hierarchical structure of international system. The end of this system has produced the re-emergence of small states and, simultaneously, a kind of anarchy in international relations when small states acquired certain degree of freedom of choice and freedom of action in their domestic as well as foreign policies, which in some cases conducted to international, regional and domestic crises and conflicts. This phenomenon gave an opportunity to the world community to pay more attention to, to have a new look at the problems of new and old small states.

As for as the definition of small states is concerned, Marshall Singer explained the item in connection with the concept of power. He identified four basic components of power, which, included wealth, organization, status and will. He contended that small states lacked one or all of these components of power. Robert Rothstien defines the small state as one ‘ which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions to do so’.

As argues Indian scholar Ashok Kashor, a convenient way to define a ‘small state’ is by population: it is a developed country with a population of up to 20 million or a developing country with a population of up to 30 million. Another way is to define a ‘small power ‘ by the size of its armed forces. The international relations literature makes a distinction between weak states with characteristics of internal divisiveness, high oppressiveness, limited political legitimacy and weak internal political and social institutions, and on the other hand, great and medium regional and local powers. Hence, Indonesia might be a regional power but it is a weak state because of its internal divisiveness. Kazakhstan is a weak state because of its retarded economic and political developments as a former Soviet republic but it is a local power of sorts given its erstwhile important position as a linchpin in the Soviet military-industrial complex during the Cold War. Israel is a regional power and a strong state and society compared to other members of international system. In my judgment all are small states.

Small states are not able to dominate in international relations, an area that is primarily influenced by great powers and their mutual relations. This fact is stressed by Morgenthau : “the protection of rights of a weak nation that is threatened by a strong one is then determined by a balance of power as it operates in that particular situation, the small nation must look for the protection of its rights to the assistance of powerful friends”

In peacetime, small states are able to exercise influence through international institutions and through the ability of this institutions to create and enforce rules and regulations. Usually, international institutions are the best friends of small states, - although economic and political integration keeps small states and their economies connected to the mainstream, thus reducing their autonomy and sovereignty. Small states are more exposed to risks of war than larger states and they, therefore, have a greater interest in developing international law, the establishment of international courts and the promotion of interests and institutions of peaceful change. The emphasis small states give to international insti-

tutions is an example of functional differentiation in international relations. Small states are not just large states writ small: their objectives, means and systemic functions are qualitatively different.

The size of a state does not necessarily determine its strength. Small states are not necessarily weak in terms of their national resilience, while great powers may very well suffer from internal fragility. The disintegration of the USSR and the turmoil in the former Yugoslavia shows how devastating the consequences of the decline in the internal integration and resilience can be, especially in multinational states.

2. Sources of Threat

In this respect, the most general conclusion is that global processes, such as liberalization, democratization, growing respect for multiculturalism, and the increased availability of means of communication and transportation which strongly affect small states on the three levels of their interests and activities, namely: the international, regional and domestic levels; these global trends facilitate the linking, of developments between these three levels. At the global level, it is argued that systemic changes affect small states in two principal ways. First, in an almost free market of arms trade, where the commercial interests of the suppliers predominate, the small powers have access to modern arms and technologies that enhance their capabilities. These include nuclear weapons and missiles. The North Korean case is an example. So as an Indian scholar pointed out, the small states are not helpless pygmies in the world today. Secondly, the systemic changes enhance their freedom of action. Although the new international environment seems to be anarchic in comparison with that of the Cold War era, the current global system does not, on balance, pose too many threats to small states. On the whole, the disappearance of the loose bipolar order did not harm the new and older small states. In certain respect, especially as far as, their cultural and political interests are concerned, the position of these states has improved somewhat. Neither the global system nor large states generate major cultural and political threats to small states. By the same token, although some small states suffer from severe domestic economic disadvantages and lack ample resources for successful competition in world markets, the options that are open to them, and those which have been created in this sphere, are greater and more appealing than the conditions during the Cold War era.

Serious danger is created, however, when these states face severe military and economic threats, emanating either from regional powers or from hostile ethnic neighbors. Under such circumstances the chances are that small states

will be left unsupported. Larger regional powers that are aspiring to establish or maintain their leadership, offer influence and pressure on smaller states, especially in view of their economic ties with small states. However, small states have become more assertive and more experienced in their efforts to ward off such kind of pressures from larger and smaller regional foes.

With regard to the domestic level, it has been noted that small states are likely to adopt aggressive strategies regardless of their absolute and relative military force and political and economic capabilities, especially when they feel that their aspirations and needs in regard to land, borders and ties with their co-ethnics in other host states have not been fulfilled and are jeopardized. Such aggression may be directed toward larger and smaller opponents.

Internal ethnic forces are most challenging and dangerous for the existence of the small ethnic states. These may be either combative native ethnic minority, ethno-national Diasporas. The deeper and wider the gaps between the various ethnic groups, the greater the dangers. Such encounters and clashes are usually not confined within the borders of a single small state; they have wider implications and thus cause regional and sometimes international tension and conflict.

Finally, the religious factor may be one of the most dangerous contributors to tensions, crises and conflicts worldwide in general and in Asia, in particular. In that respect the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia is a case in point.

3. Conclusion

The end of Cold War represented the third wave in the emergence of small states. The post-Cold War order on the one side, conducted to the freedom of action for small states and, on the other, consequently, opened the possibility of arms race, including nuclear among the small states.

At the regional level, regional powers represent a tangible threat to small states.

And at the domestic level, internal ethnic and religious contradictions may represent a dangerous threat to the very existence of small states.

To deal with the threats facing up and emanating from small states, it is important:

- at the global level, strict observance of the UN Charter provisions, multilateral treaties, especially NPT;
- at regional level : ARF should be strengthened, a regional multilateral

mechanism of discussion especially in the field of confidence building, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and disaster relief among member states of ARF;

- bilaterally, the stabilizing role of presence of American troops in the Asia Pacific;

- The importance of maintaining good neighborly relations among the large states in the region, notably among USA, China, Japan and the Russian Federation.

- If small states want peace, if they want their independence and sovereignty be respected, they should try to be internally democratic and externally law-abiding, since democracies don't fight each other

The success of small states will be determined basically by their ability to attain the skills and competence needed for navigating the unsure waters of international relations.