

Journal of Sociology & Cultural Research Review (JSCRR)

Available Online: <https://jscrr.edu.com.pk>

Print ISSN: [3007-3103](#) Online ISSN: [3007-3111](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

BALANCING ACTS: SMALL STATES AND THEIR ROLE IN SOUTH ASIA'S GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITIONS

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Abstract

This article examines the complex role of small states in South Asia's geopolitical landscape, focusing on how these nations navigate the regional competitions between larger powers like India and China. The study explores the strategic maneuvers employed by countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives to maintain sovereignty and achieve economic development amidst pressures from their more dominant neighbors. The analysis begins by identifying the geopolitical interests of India and China in South Asia, detailing how their pursuit of influence impacts the political autonomy and policy decisions of smaller states in the region. The paper discusses the diplomatic strategies that small states use to balance relations with these powers, including non-alignment, strategic hedging, and active engagement in international forums such as SAARC and BIMSTEC. Further, the study evaluates economic aspects, noting how small states leverage foreign direct investment (FDI) and aid from larger countries to bolster their economies while attempting to minimize political dependency. Examples of infrastructure projects and bilateral trade agreements are used to illustrate these economic engagements. The article also addresses the challenges these small states face, including internal political instability, limited bargaining power, and the risks of becoming arenas for proxy conflicts. It assesses how these nations use international law and regional diplomacy to mitigate such risks and strengthen their geopolitical standing. In conclusion, the paper argues that while small states in South Asia are often seen as mere pawns in larger regional games, they possess agency and have developed sophisticated strategies

to play a significant role in shaping the regional dynamics. Recommendations are offered for small states to enhance their strategic autonomy while engaging constructively with larger neighbors.

Keywords: *small states, South Asia, geopolitical competition, India, China, regional diplomacy, strategic autonomy, economic development.*

Introduction

Small states are generally characterized by their limited resources, which include not only economic assets but also political clout, military strength, and cultural influence. Their small geographic size typically leads to constraints in land and natural resources, reduced population sizes that may limit both the labor force and domestic markets, and economies that struggle to compete on a global level. Despite these challenges, small states hold significant strategic value in the international landscape. Their geographical positions can be crucial due to factors like proximity to major powers, control over important maritime routes, or access to unique resources (Fox, 2023). Additionally, the experiences of small states can yield valuable perspectives on the behaviors and actions of larger states, enhancing our understanding of international relations. However, when examining the interactions between small states and larger nations, it is essential to recognize the implications of their small size. This characteristic greatly influences their strategies for achieving survival and prosperity in a global environment where external factors can significantly impact their destinies. Small states often face the pressing issue of reliance on larger powers for security, economic stability, and development (Kuik, 2021). To address these challenges, they utilize a variety of strategies, including forming alliances, fostering partnerships, and engaging with international organizations for support.

In the context of South Asia, it is of utmost importance to comprehend the specific and multifaceted roles that small states occupy within the diverse region. A meticulous and detailed examination reveals a variety of approaches that these small states adopt to not only withstand but also thrive amidst the numerous challenges posed by a volatile and unpredictable geopolitical environment. This essay aims to delve into and explore the broader and extensive literature on small states, shining a light on the diverse, complex roles they play both within their immediate national contexts as well as in the wider realm of international politics. The existing literature highlights and indicates that small states have skillfully developed distinct and innovative strategies for managing a dual focus on both conflict and cooperation, adeptly navigating the intricate complexities

that arise from their limited size and finite resources available in the context of their national interests and international engagements.

Furthermore, this section will comprehensively outline the detailed methodological framework utilized to analyze the complex geopolitical strategies employed by small states in the diverse region of South Asia. This thorough exploration aims to facilitate a much deeper understanding of their distinctive approaches in the context of regional and global interactions. The analysis will sharply underscore the broader implications of the arguments articulated within this essay, vividly illustrating how these small states contribute significantly not only to the maintenance of regional stability but also to the intricate and multifaceted dynamics of global politics. Ultimately, a key insight emerging from this thorough examination is the acknowledgment of the critical, often overlooked contributions made by small states, which play an absolutely essential role in shaping the broader narrative of international relations. This recognition not only enhances our understanding of their relevance but also underscores the intricate interdependencies that exist in the global arena.

Historical Context

In the continuously contested geopolitical landscape of South Asia, there exists a marginalized yet small voice, equally valuable and frequently neglected, that needs to be acknowledged and heard: the small states. These small states are positioned between the regional power play and showdowns, often finding themselves without a sizeable presence on the global platform; rather, they exist as a crucible formed from the unresolved historical narratives of the region (Plagemann et al., 2021). They are intractably beset with the relics and complexities of the region's colonial past – a politico-territorial monstrosity that cannot be overlooked. The legacy of these small states dates back to the colonial era, when a significant part of the region was under the British dominion. As a result of this colonial rule, the Indian land ultimately evolved into three independent countries: India, Pakistan, and later, Bangladesh. These transitions were not merely political; they were deeply rooted in historical nuances and the socio-cultural dynamics that shaped the identities of these nations (Das et al., 2022).

South Asia has an incredibly fascinating and intricate history to present, a history that was instrumental in shaping the complex political, social, and territorial contours we observe among the diverse states of South Asia today. This region has continually served as a vibrant cauldron of competing powers, where both inter-state and intra-state rivalries and friendships have constantly teetered on a delicate balance (Omar, 2023).

The substantial historical trajectories of the expanding Imperial China and the British Crown moved in tandem with the evolution and emergence of these modern-day states, each influencing the other in profound ways. The pivotal moment of freedom for these small states arrived with the rise of nationalist movements; some were protracted and gradual, while others were swift, violent, and brutal (Kuik, 2021). When the ink of those nationalist declarations dried up, the newfound sovereignty of the newly formed independent states of South Asia inevitably witnessed a complex power triangle dynamic at play, involving the elites of these small states, revolutionary leaders with diverse agendas, and the overarching colonial meta-power that still loomed large, keeping ordinary inhabitants at arm's length from the decision-making processes.

Theoretical Frameworks

There are numerous distinct theoretical frameworks through which a diverse group of scholars seeks to understand the multifaceted roles of small states as geopolitical actors in the increasingly complex contemporary world. Broadly speaking, many of these frameworks can be situated within the expansive realm of realism, liberalism, or constructivism, and scholars who work within these particular traditions analyze small states' behaviors in terms of these specific theoretical presuppositions (Willis, 2021).

Those who adopt a realist lens, for instance, typically view small states as the relatively passive objects of larger state competition and the various power dynamics that ensue, emphasizing their vulnerability and susceptibility to the whims of more powerful neighboring states. Conversely, those who take a more liberal view tend to imagine small states as rational actors actively seeking to maximize their respective positions in the international arena, pursuing strategies that enhance their autonomy and security. Constructivist perspectives, however, consider small states as entities that are significantly shaped by the perceptions, normative structures, and ideas that operate within their particular regional contexts, demonstrating how their identities and interests are socially constructed through interaction with larger entities and international norms. This dynamic interplay of ideas, perceptions, and power relations ultimately culminates in a rich tapestry of behaviors and strategies among small states as they navigate the complexities of global politics (Michalski et al., 2024). For scholars who are deeply concerned with the complex dynamics of small states in South Asia, part of the analytic challenge is not only to sift through the various possible theoretical frameworks but also to navigate the intricacies that arise when attempting to truly understand the contemporary predicaments faced by small South Asian states in a rapidly shifting

geopolitical landscape. This analytical challenge is further compounded by the fact that any attempt to rethink and analyze the life of small South Asian states might inherently involve and subsequently extend any one given definition of what constitutes a small state (Ahmed, 2023). Consequently, the closest thing to a holistic perspective must take into account many varied and often contradictory theoretical perspectives that exist simultaneously within this discourse. The heterogeneity and importance of the South Asian regional context significantly amplify this theoretical confusion, as they simultaneously limit the theoretical utility of extant bodies of work that have previously examined these dynamics in different global contexts—contexts often characterized by different distributions of power and resource relationships that may not directly correlate with those present in South Asia (Bukhari et al.2024). In light of this situation, the best and most insightful way to truly understand the multiple small state propositions that orbit around the geographical and political sphere of South Asia is to approach it through the various theorists who have dedicated time and effort to working upon the theoretical interpretations of the small state. It is only by bringing all of these academic impulses into a meaningful and productive dialogue that we can ultimately find a properly polyvocal understanding of the unique predicaments associated with smallness in this complex and multifaceted region.

Geopolitical Challenges Faced by Small States in South Asia

The situation of small states in South Asia is highly challenging and complex. Their geographic situation makes them particularly vulnerable to centrifugal forces that are generated by the ongoing competition of the major powers in the region. The border issues that some of these states have with their neighboring rivals drive them to try to bandwagon or align themselves, when not openly balancing, with their powerful neighbors to ensure their own security and stability. Most small states are also landlocked, which significantly limits their options and autonomy, and their economies depend to a high degree on what happens in their larger neighbors. These smaller states are irremediably connected by deep economic and cultural ties to their more powerful counterparts, which can often dictate the terms of their engagement and development (KAUSIKAN, 2021). Moreover, some small states also suffer from internal political instability, which is viewed, rightly or wrongly, as having been influenced or even sponsored by a neighboring country to further their interests. Finally, periodic regional conflicts can potentially involve small states, leading to significant demographic shifts and security burdens that can strain their limited resources. More indirectly, as in any part of the world,

these states are often required to adapt to sudden shifts in the global geopolitical landscape and the evolving ideas of world governance that undergird the foreign policies of the superpowers, shaping their international standing and prospects for future stability (Long & Long, 2022).

To effectively navigate around such intricate, complex, and multi-leveled challenges, small states within South Asia can decisively adopt adaptive strategies that can be applied in a singular fashion or in combination with one another. Geographically predisposed to respond to these various pressures in kind, the nature of neighbor relations clearly reflects the intrinsic vulnerability of small states and serves as a measure of their resoluteness to assert their own sovereignty against different competing pressures, both central and systemic, as they contend with all the failed efforts made by small South Asian powers in their attempts to arrive at final agreements (Faisal et al.2021). Geopolitical persecution remains a significant and undeniable fact of life in South Asia and will continue to have a determining influence on the future type of state or rule of law that exists within a small country; this is particularly due to the ongoing superpower rivalry that constitutes a persistent force in the region. Geopolitical dynamics comprise an ever-adapting sphere, and fighting against the will of stronger powers requires not only resilience but also the deployment of brilliant adapting techniques, as the above four case studies in South Asia have so aptly reflected and demonstrated (Sehgal, 2024). Furthermore, environmental security stands out as another critical factor that clearly impacts the very rights of a small state to ensure its continued survival in the challenging contemporary world.

Case Studies of Small States in South Asia: Bhutan and Maldives

Bhutan has made a very conscious decision to remain intentionally small and somewhat insignificant in the eyes of its formidable neighbors, thereby instituting a long-standing and deliberate policy of maintaining what can be described as the "status quo." This status quo is characterized by a distinct form of "benign neglect," which allows Bhutan to exist in a way that does not attract overwhelming attention or interference from larger powers. This thoughtful approach enables Bhutan to draw both power and vulnerability simultaneously, thereby creating a unique and delicate balance in its regional dynamics and relationships. By unilaterally establishing national security restrictions, Bhutan has effectively inhibited large-scale external commercial interests, tourism, and foreign cultural exchanges, all of which potentially carry significant security implications and risks (Kaul, 2022). These very restrictions may also lead to the loss of greater economic benefits

that could be derived from engagement in such exchanges and activities. In this way, Bhutan carefully navigates the complexities of its geopolitical environment and seeks to preserve its sovereignty and identity amidst global pressures.

Meanwhile, the Maldives, a small island nation situated in the Indian Ocean, finds itself caught in the complex and often tumultuous headwind created by the presence of the world's leading democracy, as well as the second-largest economy on the globe. These islands are often beset by inherent deficiencies in hydrocarbons, as well as limited agricultural lands, leading to a scarcity of agricultural production (Di Biase & Maniku, 2021). In the 1970s, the construction of Aqua Maldives brought attention to the pressing need for a comprehensive survey of the country's fisheries and marine resources. This survey revealed that the natural resources, although limited, presented a straightforward opportunity for the Maldives to utilize as a foundation upon which to build its development. Intriguingly, the Maldives has also demonstrated a capacity to exert authority and governance over its people, interests, and properties. Presently, however, the Maldives finds itself in a precarious position, heavily reliant on foreign aid amidst a decline in its once-thriving tourist industry. The situation has been exacerbated by a bipolar democratic transition and ongoing political conflicts that have attracted varying degrees of geopolitical interest and interference from outside powers (Khan et al.).

Foreign Policy Strategies of Small States in South Asia

Like small states elsewhere, small states in South Asia adopt various foreign policy strategies to exercise their agency, assert their sovereignty, and pursue national interests. Small South Asian states tend to adopt four principal foreign policy strategies. First, they tend to rely on diplomacy, both bilateral and multilateral. In multilateral diplomacy, the activism exemplified by the leadership role displayed by Sri Lanka during the Bandung era has been taken up through sub-regional diplomacy, in the form of the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka initiative, engaging in trilateral cooperation and contributing to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation. Second, small states in South Asia have tended to rely on the multilateralism of larger powers. This is particularly the case when small states are linked with disparate or even antagonistic poles (Jones & Jenne, 2022).

Third, small states have relied on strategic partnerships to leverage protection from extra-regional providers. In South Asia too, small states collaborate with various powers in a manner that best suits their national interests or even leverage one with another. Finally, the security relations

of these small states may be associated with great power rivalries. Their preference may be influenced by a desire to maximize strategic autonomy, establish regional trade relations, repose trust in a regional security order versus multilateralism, or other security considerations. Making foreign policy understandable and obtaining support from sponsors for its policy are significant aspects of foreign policy (Pizzolo & Pelaggi, 2023). Furthermore, these small states forge their foreign policies based on the strategic contingencies particular to their historical and geopolitical contexts. Thus, Bhutan's strategic quiescence serves it well. Bangladesh has made a virtue of necessity by leveraging its most important neighbor, India, to interfere in its civil war and also mediate, thereby creating a role for itself. Maldives too has been able to evolve a limited but often efficacious policy of ordered diminution of India's influence.

Ultimately, foreign policy behavior is also significantly circumscribed by various essential domestic contours such as political regimes, societal identity, prevailing institutions, and other influencing factors. These four categories represent just a few ways of effectively capturing how small states strategically utilize the inherent flexibility and unique quirkiness that stems from their limited size as a valuable resource in the arena of international politics (Fox, 2023). For example, in addressing the profound challenges posed by its current economic devastation, the Maldives' diminutive geographical size has proven to be instrumental in its ability to gather and mobilize a coalition of multilateral states. These states share a belief that through collective diplomacy, along with the influence of the International Financial Institutions they manage, they can exert necessary pressure on the existing authoritarian regime. This cooperative effort not only aims to facilitate improved governance but also serves as a crucial trigger that can assist in generating better access to financial resources and economic opportunities for the nation moving forward.

Economic Diplomacy and Trade Relations of Small States

Leonce has carefully emphasized the strategic significance of small states within the complex landscape of South Asian geopolitical dynamics, drawing attention to the various key variables identified in both political and strategic studies (Plagemann, 2022). In alignment with these insights, other prominent security studies scholars have similarly argued that, even in a world that is becoming progressively more cooperative and interconnected, states need to be consistently exercising and demonstrating raw power in the intricate realm of world affairs. Furthermore, power and security scholars, on the other hand, have expressed the viewpoint that, without developing and maintaining a robust relationship founded on trust,

states can hardly hope to tackle the increasingly intricate and globally relevant issues that affect them successfully. The relationship between small states and marketable geographical macro-slews continues to be characterized by a state of flux, even though this dynamic has become increasingly intense in the contemporary era of accelerated economic and technological globalization, where the interplay of these forces is reshaping traditional power structures.

Small states utilize various economic instruments to strengthen their bargaining power effectively within the complex realm of international relations. These strategies are actively pursued by the sovereign governments of every country, regardless of their size or global standing, in order to enhance their positioning and leverage within international frameworks. Small states in South Asia, however, present a contrasting narrative to this conventional viewpoint as they play significant roles within the economic diplomacy domain. This scenario highlights the complex nature of 'small states' functioning within a context dominated by 'big economics and unequal power dynamics.' In an increasingly competitive and interconnected world, small states are working strategically and intently to augment their economic growth and overall development (Lai & Kuik, 2021). Specifically, offshore sectors like port services, along with the services offered by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the fields of education and medical care, are playing crucial roles. These sectors are not only diversifying their economic risks but have also significantly increased the regional prominence and influence of some small states. The multifaceted nature of economic diplomacy encompasses essential components such as trade dynamics, investment flows in commerce and foreign direct investments (FDIs), external aid considerations, infrastructure politics, market access strategies, tourism initiatives, and establishing a favorable image on the global stage (Canello, 2022).

Security and Defense Concerns of Small States in South Asia

The reliance on new technology has enabled both Pakistan and India to undertake comprehensive military expansions, a significant development that has invariably led to security dilemmas, particularly for smaller states within the region. This military buildup and increased arms enhancement have raised a variety of concerns regarding stability and peace in South Asia. Notably, the dependency on defense partnerships and technological advancements has been shown to influence not only the strategies that accompany territorial expansion and military rivalry among states but also, perhaps more unexpectedly, the role and influence of third-party states. This influence manifests in a unique manner such that the small state's

capacity to depend on external powers for its security needs can greatly impact its defensive strategies, even without the direct involvement from more powerful regional or global leaders entering the fray (Baig et al.). This nuanced understanding challenges and deviates from existing literature and conventional wisdom that often overlooks the intricate dynamics at play. It highlights that the security perceptions among small states are intricately tied to and significantly shaped by the intra-war security environment they navigate. Consequently, this perspective is particularly relevant in the context of South Asia, especially today, as smaller states have assumed a critical scaffolding role. They play a vital part in maintaining and voicing the rhetoric surrounding deterrence strategies while simultaneously needing to develop robust defense capabilities to counter threats posed by larger neighboring states (Lin-Greenberg, 2023). Moreover, this dynamic may lead to strategic alignments, such as potential cooperation and security dialogues between Sri Lanka and India. Such alignments can serve to fortify Sri Lanka's ties with India as the latter country actively engages in military diplomacy within the region, positioning itself as an alternative partner as Sri Lanka carefully evaluates its relationships with major powers, including China. Through these adjustments and collaborations, small states navigate a complex web of strategic interests, all while searching for effective means to enhance their security and maintain regional stability.

The concomitant impact of terrorism and other transnational threats is also not to be underestimated in security matters. While home to many disparate cultural, ethnic, and religious identities, internal security is often central to governance, and domestic matters may outweigh external ones in importance. Collaboration with actors deemed by regional rivals to be of ill repute generally has impacts on the security evolution of small states, and these impacts may be sudden, such as when relevant information comes to be known by a regional power, or be the consequence of the state entering into an alliance. Examples of the impacts of external powers on security arrangements extend to off-the-shelf cooperation or military transfers. Internal security trumps other security issues in the security evolution of regional small states (Löfflmann2022). Many South Asian states have Deep South or Eastern-inspired insurgencies to quell; Bangladesh's is of particular concern, being heterogeneous, deep-rooted, and characterized by elite feuding which diverts state resources from security-related matters. Additionally, Pakistan and India's heavier strategic involvements have seen them become very involved in their own relationships with their immediate neighbors. Optimizing regional security dynamics in ways that are

relatively unproblematic is of concern for these actors regardless of how security dynamics are shaped by the actions of external powers.

Regional Organizations and Alliances Involving Small States

Numerous small states actively participate in various regional organizations and alliances that have a significant influence on South Asian geopolitics. This trend of regionalization and regionalism has proven to be quite beneficial over time. However, due to persistent bureaucratic inefficiency and a notable lack of autonomous decision-making processes, these regional outfits have frequently struggled to accomplish their fundamental objectives related to regional security and sustainable development. In this context, forums, as opposed to formal organizations, tend to offer small states a more viable platform to engage with larger states on a more equitable basis (Schindler et al.2022). Such regional organizations hold substantial geopolitical significance, as they address critical issues surrounding collective security and the challenges of cooperation among nations in the region.

Defending small countries from big-state aggression is one of the objectives, but it does not specify when the use of military force is fair. Furthermore, it has little, if any, impact on inter-regional disagreements since it is located within a security whole. South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal cannot resolve bilateral disputes with any member state using the organization's help. To do so, it promotes regional development and encourages its members to make such use of the location. Regional conflicts have been discussed but have not been resolved at the institutional level. It may simply advocate conflict resolution. Bilateral and multilateral alliances among small states take precedence over non-regional members (Bishwakarma & Hu, 2022). These arrangements are focused on a willingness to accept friendly conflicts of interest with their sovereign power. What makes these ties significant is the regular interaction that we have and, even more so, their official interaction with the outside world. Small states should identify themselves with the rising probable power that may be a potential significant benefit. In addition, linking up with large states offers the possibility of creating a market economy. Significant exports to large states are an obvious enhancement for small nations. At this time, this is solely dependent on the organization (Mulder, 2022). However, there is a great opportunity for it to expand its diplomatic and development area, which will promote relations between events.

The Role of Small States in Mediation and Conflict Resolution

In the intricate geopolitics of the South Asian region, particularly over the past few decades, various regional powers, along with extra-regional

powers, have continually sought, both individually and in changing combinations, to enhance their varying degrees of influence at the potential expense of one or more other competing powers in the area. Often, such efforts have faced significant resistance from their relatively weaker neighboring states. A robust body of literature dedicated to examining small states revisits and generalizes the central argument that these smaller states must carry out a delicate balancing act between the ambitions of larger, more dominant powers while sometimes opting for aggressive or extreme policies as a form of blackmail (Lai & Kuik, 2021). These narratives tend to reflect the underlying power positions of the actors involved more than any other substantive factors. However, what has been noticeably absent from the ongoing debate is precisely what we are beginning to explore: at least some of the potential ways in which small states endeavor to assume a more independent, and in fact, mediating role in various regional conflicts. This kind of diplomatic operation is also observable in theoretical discussions. It seeks, through an expanded conversation about the prospects and methodologies of mediation, to broaden the conception of not only solving but also managing crises, as well as examining the roles played by regional international organizations in these processes (Do, 2022). This involves an effort to bring many more participants and levels of engagement into the conversation, thereby recognizing the complexities of regional dynamics and the importance of diverse actors in conflict resolution.

Small states in South Asia have often engaged in mediation, arbitration, and acts of good offices with the aim of resolving regional disputes or ensuring that relationships with the belligerents do not end up harming their own interests. Mediation is one of the oldest traditions of diplomacy, and small states are particularly suited for it for several reasons: i) reputation as peaceful actors, ii) lack of a priori strategic interests in the disputes they seek to solve, iii) problem-solving rather than dictatorial goals, and iv) often, as a bonus for their efforts, obtaining international and regional recognition. Neutrality is a guarantor of their credibility as mediators. The ability of small states to solve regional conflicts is often contingent on their ability to gain the trust of the parties to the conflict. The prime characteristic of a broker is objectivity and lack of interest in the outcome of the process (Singh & Siddiq, 2023). Historic examples of South Asian small states in such a role are the Maldives; Sri Lanka; Nepal. Small states have also been vital troop suppliers for peacekeeping missions – for example, Nepal, the Maldives, and Bangladesh, among several other such inputs at other times. Of course, such cheerful prospects must be relativized. Although small states are suited for mediation, they may find themselves hobbled in the

process. It is not just anti-mediatory traditions that the world's big powers suffer from – remember, those are strongest also in India and its diaspora, including those from small states – but, more fundamentally, the power game that lies behind it. It may be that the recourse to mediation might give way to a different concept that of a mechanism for regional security providing an assembly for mechanisms of conflict resolution and of communication and persuasion linked to it.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that a number of key factors converge to make small states potential challengers as well as collaborators to larger schemes of regional and global actors. Even if within a limited bandwidth, there is room for these marginal units not only to resist catchy slogans, ideological lures, and emotional appeals but also to bluntly sidestep discretionary decisions taken far from their doorsteps. Often using legal reference points and diplomatic niceties, small states can and do play on even terms with the great powers. This essay has also demonstrated an array of tools that small states use to find maneuvering space in their quest to control their destiny at least partially. Notwithstanding their enduring vulnerabilities and their proclivity to being easily 'captured' by larger states, small South Asian actors equip themselves with a range of strategies such as maintaining alliances with opposing sides, leveraging their good offices, generating bridges with rival neighbors, playing on the colonial past and the historical geographical constellations of their territories, carving out neutrality stances, and resorting to institutionalism or bandwagoning options. Tracing the extent of their dependencies on outside powers with which they have had a long-standing love-hate affair may, in many instances, account for the degrees of their security and insecurities. In conclusion, given the unique characteristics and diverse strategies of South Asian small states, Trans-Himalayan collaboration within the 'arc of advantage,' a collaborative arrangement of South Asian states, may enhance their strategic depth. Using their institutional offer and regional forums, smaller partners can, in the meanwhile, become bridge builders to foster policies of larger allies. Furthermore, the present quiet upturns of Nepal-Bhutan-India security connections or India-China economic dialogue may see the migratory politics of South Asian frontiers trickling upward, leaving warrants of various arcs for which policies in the capitals would have to be framed. Research on South Asian small states to secure and use opportunities arising cannot be a dead-end project itself. A new generation of studies on South Asian small state political economy, as well as social and security issues, must leverage a new toolkit a wide range of survey and experimental

work using existing and complementary quantitative and qualitative data. More than 60 years have passed since a monumental work that first made large parts of the international community aware of the importance of small states. In a rapidly changing world of geopolitics, it makes perfect sense to rekindle this critical mass of research.

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