

Thomas Kolnberger and Harlan Koff (Eds.) (2023). *Agency, security and governance of small states: A global perspective*. Routledge. 298pp, ISBN 978-1-0324-1048-7; eBook £31.19.

This book starts from the well-established premise that small states suffer from vulnerabilities in the economic and security sphere, but moves beyond the literature by situating this in a context where small states simultaneously tend to benefit from specific opportunities. The editors argue that one needs to study both sides of this vulnerability-opportunity paradox to understand how smallness can be deployed as a resource for agency in supranational contexts. The book considers a range of diverse case studies in its quest to understand how small states have transformed perceived insecurity into agency.

The strength of the book lies in its willingness to embrace the historic and geographic diversity of cases. Thanks to an interdisciplinary team of authors, it engages with what smallness and (in)security have meant in different historic contexts, taking into account both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ security challenges. In addition, it contains three chapters that focus on different theoretical frameworks for the study of small states, (in)security and agency. However, regrettably, these frameworks are not systematically tested in the ensuing empirical chapters. Nevertheless, the book makes an important contribution to the still limited empirical basis for small state studies on which future research can build.

The main part of the book is organized in four sections: The first section offers three theoretical contributions. In the first chapter, Pedi and Wivel argue that, contrary to popular perception, realism offers important insights for the study of small states. They derive from the realist literature a set of external and internal conditions, such as intense competition between major powers or great social cohesion within the small state that can create situations where small states can overachieve. Next, Thorhallsson and Steinsson emphasize the distinctiveness of small states due to unique disadvantages and needs. Small states experience political, economic and societal vulnerabilities that require them to seek shelter in international organizations or alliances with larger states. In doing so, they have to cede more sovereignty than large states. Neuman then argues that Wendtian structuralism and prototype theory is useful for the definition of small states. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the difference between self-perception of a state as weak and its actual performance; he argues that both state types ought to be studied to gain a better understanding of the field.

The second part of the book focuses on the ability of small states to pursue their own interests, i.e. to be agents and the makers/shapers of their destiny. This part consists of two historic case studies on the evolution of Luxembourg’s position within its neighbourhood (Kolnberger) and of the securitization strategy of the Spanish Philippines from 1565-1821 (Crailsheim). It also considers the contemporary case of Belize (Kauffer) and a comparison of the security policies of Luxembourg, Singapore and Lithuania (Dabila and Fouillet). All four chapters analyze how the case study states negotiate their regional status and their relationships with nearby states so as to strategically ensure their survival and/or the pursuit of core interests.

The third part presents small-state strategies in contemporary security affairs and looks at specific challenges and the responses of small states. Hawksley and Georgeou argue that even Pacific island jurisdictions, amongst the world’s smallest and often dependent on other states, exercise a measure of “sovereign” power in regional and international action on climate change, food security and development. Staying within the same region, Carter and Corbett also argue that adaptation is an important trait of small states. They argue that traditional security concerns

dominated by great powers and multilateral advocacy in climate security start to blend, as the Pacific states increasingly build climate action into security negotiations. Barros-Varela analyses the pragmatic shifts in the security alliances of Cape Verde, balancing its increasing alignment with NATO with the need to show strong respect for the UN Charter and awareness of the needs of its West African neighbours. Finally, Graef looks at the case of Slovakia to explore how Central and Eastern European policy-makers have tried to establish themselves in European and North American security networks through the use of forums such as GLOBSEC.

The fourth part examines how the domestic governance of small states interacts with foreign policy. Linden shows how the strategy of Luxembourg's government in exile during WW2 to establish itself as a norm entrepreneur reinforced its commitment to democratic governance, which in turn influenced foreign policy in the aftermath of WW2. Veenendaal studies the opposite phenomenon: how the replacement of formal liberal democracy in many small states due to the importance of informality leads to a concentration of power in the hand of a small elite that then controls the state's foreign policy. Finally, Graham and Nagar question the assumption that small states are more likely to be good global citizens in their pursuit of international stability through the example of the African Small Island Developing States (ASIDS). While several countries perform well, e.g. the Seychelles as a leader of blue economy and of anti-piracy efforts, they argue that size itself does not explain this and that the ability to be a good global citizen depends on reputation, position and the ability to attract attention.

In his conclusion, Koff illustrates how small states can indeed convert vulnerability into opportunities in global affairs. However, he also reflects on how small states themselves often undermine sustainability through their own short-sighted actions, and thus critically cautions against an over-idealization of small states. This echoes the findings of Graham and Nagar that small states are not always good citizens.

Overall, *Agency, security and governance of small states* makes an empirically rich contribution to the field. It takes into account a wide variety of historic and geographic contexts in its quest to understand how small states can successfully develop agency in the context of security threats. The empirical wealth can at times be confusing, though, and the reader would have benefitted from a stricter set of guiding questions that would facilitate a comparative understanding of the different chapters. Nevertheless, the book prompts readers to reflect in depth not only on traditional challenges, but also on recent and current events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change and their impact on the challenges faced by small states and their opportunities for an effective response.

Anna-Lena Högenauer
University of Luxembourg
Luxembourg
Anna-lena.hoegenauer@uni.lu