MEETING THE NEEDS OF MICROSTATE SECURITY

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This article examines the pressing security concerns of microstates, particularly against the backdrop of recurring themes of vulnerability in the literature. It reviews those arguments in the early years of decolonization which expressed scepticism about the prospects for independence in such very small dependencies given their lack of defensive capacity and the geopolitical risks which they face in a potentially dangerous external milieu. The article argues that these doubts and concerns have not been realised in the actual experience of microstates particularly in terms of conventional threats from larger predatory states. It describes the few exceptions, Kuwait and Grenada, and the more likely problem of contested decolonization in very small dependencies such as East Timor which were subject to irredentist claims. The article reviews the more recent broad interpretation of security dilemmas facing microstates such as drug running, money laundering and even environmental hazards. It then reviews the actual security strategies of microstates and concludes that most have very small security forces or none at all. The central conclusion of the article is that microstates rely on international norms and particularly the principle of extantism which invests sanctity for the territorial integrity and independence of even the smallest members of the international system.

Key words: microstates; vulnerability; security strategies; extantism.

Perhaps the most persistent question attending the sovereignty of microstates is the issue of security. Is it possible for very small states to meet the most elemental requirement of their statehood: the defence of their independence and even the survival of their international legal personality? Certainly small states in general lack the military capabilities to resist threats from most other powers. The early ceiling imposed by small size, both in terms of personnel and technologies, will mean that small states will generally seek alternative security strategies, typically through alliances or the
exploitation of international norms sanctifying the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention. The experience of microstates suggests that these security vulnerabilities are particularly glaring with this class of very small states which lack any kind of military defence. Indeed, most are constabulary states with, at best, modest paramilitary and coast guard units, possibly in collaboration with the local police forces. These vulnerabilities are particularly acute among developing microstates, which confront a manifold array of security risks, even beyond conventional threats from other states, to their frontiers and their independence.

Doubts concerning the reality and substance of sovereignty for small and weak states have long hinged on the questionable capacities of these states to engage in armed conflict to ensure their continued independence. During the 19th century and well into the 20th century, it was widely felt that, if a state lost its power to make war, it lost its sovereignty. For von Treitschke, for instance, sovereignty finally meant ‘… drawing the sword when [the state] sees fit’. ‘A defenceless State may still be termed a Kingdom for conventional or courtey reasons’, he said, ‘but in point of fact such a country can no longer rank as a State’ (von Treitschke, 1965). Or consider the view of the distinguished jurist Quincy Wright:

in practice a state is not regarded as fully sovereign unless it has substantially all of the powers of normal states at the time. Among the powers commonly possessed by states is that to convert a state of peace into a state of war, to defend itself … to occupy res nullius, to perform wrongful acts rendering itself responsible. (Wright, 1930; see also Bisschop, 1921)

Self-help was the fundamental ‘mark of sovereignty’ (Fenwick, 1948) and often used as a criterion for distinguishing states as sovereign and non-sovereign. The notions of the state as fortress and the capacity to use force as the principal feature of sovereign power have been persistent themes in international relations. ‘The key consideration’, noted Andrew Scott, ‘is whether a group of persons desiring to proclaim themselves a “nation” have the capacity to assert their independence and act on that basis’ (Scott, 1967).

A credible military capability and actual independence were also seen to be critical to a state’s capacity to undertake its international obligations. The rejection of Liechtenstein’s application to join the League of Nations occurred in part because the Principality had no army (League of Nations, 1920). Although similar questions were raised in the discussion of Luxembourg’s application, the fact that the Grand Duchy abandoned its policy of neutrality and maintained a standing army justified its capacity to fulfil the obligations of the Covenant (Hudson, 1935). Similar concerns have been raised in the context of United Nations membership and the capacity of member states to fulfil their obligations under the Charter, particularly the central responsibilities of contributing to international peace and security (Higgins, 1963).

Doubts over the capacities of small states to meet their own security requirements seemed to be all-absorbing in the burgeoning postwar literature of small states, most of which were considerably larger and more formidable than the microstates which achieved independence in the later stages of decolonization. David Vital’s classic work emphasized the vulnerability of small states: ‘A
small state is more vulnerable to pressure, more likely to give way under stress, more limited in respect of the political options open to it and subject to a tighter connection between domestic and external affairs’ (Vital, 1967). Robert Rothstein also argued that the small state is typically vulnerable in its relations with the outside world. But he viewed small size to be a question of psychological handicaps as much as it is a problem of limited capabilities. Small states share a vulnerability which Rothstein called a ‘security dilemma’ (Rothstein, 1968). Weakness, for Rothstein, is an integral aspect of smallness and produces a different self-view and behaviour. It is an abiding sense of danger and the recognition of limited choices in the face of a threat which characterizes the small state’s international relations. And George Reid, one of the earliest scholars in the study of microstates, also emphasized the near irrelevance of conventional capabilities of power in assessing the strategic policy options of microstates, although he acknowledged the potential of such factors as political will and diplomatic ingenuity in meeting the fundamental objectives of security and survival (Reid, 1971).

Concerns over the vulnerability and security capacities of micro-states still dominate the current literature (eg Harden, 1985). This is particularly true in the Commonwealth, home to so many of the world’s microstates. It was the Grenada Crisis of 1983 which lent such urgency to the security prospects for microstates in the international system. To be sure, the physical vulnerability and geopolitical precariousness of so many very small territories had been evident throughout the period of decolonization: the annexation of Goa, albeit with the support of the Goan people, the absorption of West Irian, the integration of Sikkim, and certainly the invasions of East Timor, Western Sahara and the Falkland Islands. But, as worrying as these cases were for so many microstates whose sovereignty was only recently granted, particularly for those very small states which faced recurring and often explicit irredentist threats, these were, in the end, disputes within the context of the decolonization process. The contest was one of state succession. The invasion of Grenada, however, was the first occasion when a sovereign microstate found itself in open conflict with a major power. Although the US action had the support and collaboration of most, if not all the Commonwealth Caribbean states, and although the mission might even have been judged to be humanitarian and constructive in the end, given the apparent support of the Grenadian people for a restoration of democratic government, it still drew considerable criticism both within the region and from the UK and its Western European partners. Whatever the long-term consequences of the invasion and whatever the legal arguments mustered for military intervention, the events of October 1983 demonstrated vividly the asymmetries of power between very small states and major powers, particularly when they share living space within the same region. The lessons were clear: very small states pursue independent policies and partnerships in the global system at their peril. If ever there was a case to arouse the concerns of both students of small states and the political leaders of microstates, Grenada certainly served as such an example.

Yet, in terms of conventional threats to the territorial integrity and even the survival of microstates, the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 may seem to be even more ominous. Not only was the level of destruction
in Kuwait appalling, but this was an attempt not just to force a change of
government but to eradicate the international legal personality of a sovereign
state and a member of the United Nations, a precedent which, had it stood,
would have been cause for grave concern for other vulnerable small states
across the globe. Of course, there are good reasons to believe that both the
invasion and the rescue mission were exceptional events. Still, the fate of
Kuwait seemed to justify the preoccupation of both the academic and inter-
national public policy communities with the security problems of microstates. It
certainly dramatically demonstrated the inefficacy of conventional military
options for very small states. The expensive and sophisticated weaponry in the
Kuwaiti arsenal and even the support of its allies in the Gulf Cooperation
Council, itself largely a microstate alliance, proved to be of no value in stalling,
let alone resisting, the superior Iraqi forces. Kuwait’s comparatively tiny
territory and population in the face of a recurring irredentist threat have marred
the security and indeed psychological well-being of Kuwaitis from the time of
their independence from the UK in 1961. At that time Iraqi President Karim
Kassem asserted that Kuwait was ‘an integral part of Iraq’ (Keesings Con-
temporary Archives, 1961) its independence ‘spurious’ (Government of Iraq,
1966): Britain had taken a few oil wells in an ‘overgrown village’ (Keesings
Contemporary Archives, 1961) and called it a state, a blatant imperialist attempt
to balkanize the Arab world (Government of Iraq, 1966). A British rescue
mission forced the League of Arab States to intervene and ultimately ensure
Kuwait’s sovereignty (Shwadran, 1962). However, neither the support of the
League nor the fall of Kassem and the subsequent Iraqi recognition of
Kuwait removed the danger completely as subsequent events in 1990 all too
dramatically illustrated. Kuwait’s experience of sovereignty reflects all too well
Rothstein’s notion of both a physical and a psychological security dilemma
which mars the day-to-day independence of the threatened small state. ‘Built
into Kuwait’s psyche’, noted The Financial Times ‘is the trauma of 1961’
(Financial Times, 1973) and the recognition that the Iraqi danger could
materialize at any time. The Kuwaiti scholar Fawzi Mellah has referred to this
as ‘the smallness syndrome’ a handicap which is itself inhibiting and enervating
for political leaders in very small societies (Mellah, 1989).

To what extent is Kuwait’s security dilemma mirrored in the experience of
other microstates? Guyana is another whose independence has been clouded by
an irredentist neighbour, in this case Venezuela’s long-standing claim to five-
eighths of its territory and, less threatening, Suriname’s claim to the country’s
Eastern regions. Venezuela’s threat is ‘clear and present’ as the mobilization
of its forces on the Guyanese frontier during the Falklands Crisis in 1982
illustrates. These events forced Guyana to protest to the Security Council.
Active Guyanese diplomacy, especially within the Non-Aligned Movement,
and the full support of its regional partners in CARICOM, did much to thwart
the Venezuelan threat and to embarrass Caracas in international circles, as
evident in its forced withdrawal from applying to the Non-Aligned Movement
(Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1983). Supportive too was Guyana’s
eventual membership in the Organization of American States. Moreover,
Venezuela’s own interests in cultivating relations with neighbouring Common-
wealth Caribbean states is likely to dampen a risky strategy of pressing its
claims (Martz, 1977). Still, there is little comfort in this kind of calculation. It is, in the end, existence on sufferance and it is never certain, even with prestige-conscious states like Venezuela, that domestic considerations will not finally force the resolution of a long-standing irritant.

The independence of Belize was long delayed because of a similar threat from Guatemala, which claims the whole of the country. Here again, Belize, along with the UK and its CARICOM partners, pursued a policy of isolating Guatemala and neutralizing its claims in those critical international bodies where international pressure can emphasize the futility of pursuing a policy of annexation. The presence of a formidable British Harrier force in the early years of independence also consolidated the sovereignty of this very small anglophone outpost in Central America. Although Guatemala has opened diplomatic relations with Belize, it has not abandoned its claim. The situation is also complicated by the fact that Belize, with its long porous border, serves as a conduit for Guatemalan refugees.

There are other microstates which have experienced such physical threats from time to time. For Senegal, for example, The Gambia was clearly seen as an artifice; its eventual union with Senegal was inevitable. For Senegalese President Leopold Senghor history possessed its own common sense. The Gambia and Senegal were ‘one country and one people’ (Senghor, quoted in Skurnik, 1972). The Gambia was described as ‘an arrow pointing at our heart’ (Le Monde, 1976) and ‘a knife pointing into Senegal’s side’ (Rice, 1968). Senegalese willingness to tolerate the independence of The Gambia was rooted in the conviction that in time the Gambians would come to their senses and see the logic of integration (West Africa, 1964). Indeed, Senegalese military intervention in the wake of a coup against Gambian Prime Minister D. K. Jawara in July 1981 encouraged the creation of Senegambia as a loose confederation. However, Senegal’s acceptance of the demise of Senegambia in 1989 seems to have settled the issue of this tiny enclave’s separate independence.

The Iranian claim to the largely Shi’ite sheikhdom of Bahrain also captured international attention in the early 1970s and again shortly after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Gorden, 1971; Al-Baharna, 1973). Similarly, Djibouti, as one of ‘the five parts’ of the Somali nation, lived, particularly in the early years of independence, with the possible risk of Somali irredentism, a risk minimized by a formidable French presence in this little state and eventually by the collapse of Somalia itself. Equatorial Guinea at one time also faced extinction when Nigerian trade unions demanded the annexation of the country in light of the maltreatment of Nigerian migrant workers during the brutal regime of Macias Nguema in the 1970s (The Guardian, 1976). And, in spite of its membership in ASEAN, oil rich Brunei’s decision to maintain a Gurkha force in the country underscores the persistence of concerns over past pressures from neighbouring Malaysia, as well as a recognition of the dangers of potential internal opposition.

These conventional threats from predatory neighbours have been more common among would-be microstates where an irredentist claim may be presented as an alternative form of decolonization and self-determination: the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, the Western Sahara and East Timor. In the two
former cases, the sympathy of the Third World-dominated General Assembly is more difficult to mobilize for peoples who wish to exercise their right to self-determination through continued association with the UK. In both cases recurring physical pressures and the intransigence of irredentist claims impose themselves on the daily consciousness of their citizens. ‘I live, sleep and breathe security’, noted Anatol Livermore during his period as the Falklands High Commissioner in London (in conversation with the author). In Western Sahara and East Timor, however, the international community has continually supported the rights of these colonial peoples to separate self-determination in successive annual General Assembly resolutions. In the case of Western Sahara, although recognized by over 100 states and enjoying membership in the Organization of African Unity, international pressure has failed to move a determined Moroccan policy to settle the territory and to ensure its full integration into Morocco. Hassan II literally built a wall of sand around this would-be microstate, forcing the 70,000 Sahrawis to live in a refugee camp in Tindouf in neighbouring Algeria. Moreover, Morocco has settled tens of thousands of Moroccans in the territory, with the effect of marginalizing the remaining indigenous population. Until 1999 East Timor’s prospects seemed even more bleak, given the realities of international indifference, the tokenism of United Nations resolutions and the economic clout of Indonesia, the occupying power. However, the collapse of the Indonesian banking system and thereupon the national economy, forcing as it did the disintegration of the regime, created a window of opportunity for the independence of East Timor, the world’s newest microstate, albeit one certain to be on life support for a long time to come.

In short, conventional security threats from predatory neighbours have not been common in the experience of microstates. Even in those few cases where their territorial integrity and international legal personality have been threatened, as with Guyana and Belize, regional and international supports have served to keep the threat at bay. No microstate, apart from Grenada and Kuwait, has been invaded and occupied by another state. Most microstates are island states and it is generally a more difficult challenge for avaricious continental neighbours to realize their ambitions than might be the case with neighbouring enclave states. Moreover, irredentist claims are typically more difficult to justify with island microstates. The clear separateness of islands, particularly if they are not immediately off-shore, means that they are unlikely to face the sorts of claims which have clouded the independence of Kuwait. Indeed, this geographic separateness has favoured their independence and often sabotaged alternative paths to self-determination such as federation with neighbouring islands or with a nearby continental state. Where to put São Tomé and Príncipe, for example, or even the Seychelles? Moreover, in all cases, microstates have been able to secure their continued independence by relying on extantism (Schaffer, 1975) and the determination of the international system to respect the independence and territorial integrity of all members of the global community. The upholding of such norms and the embarrassment and opprobrium greeting the flouting of those norms is a critical bastion of defence for even the most fragile of microstates.

Although conventional dangers have been few and far between, there is
growing concern over a manifold range of security threats which seem to be particularly worrying for island microstates. For example, the very small size of so many microstates means that they can be vulnerable to non-state military threats in the form of mercenary-led invasions. These dangers were evident in the mercenary attacks, sponsored by opposition politicians in exile or even other governments, in the Seychelles, the Comoros and the Maldives. What is striking for so many observers is that these states can be overrun or their governments overthrown by a few dozen armed men. It was estimated that Bernard Coard in Grenada had fewer than 50 armed supporters to overthrow violently the government of his erstwhile colleagues (Quester, 1983). Increasingly, attention was given to the geopolitical weaknesses of microstates: the lack of a defensible hinterland (Quester, 1983), the inability to police bays and inlets or remote islands in the case of archipelagic states, the lack of intelligence-gathering facilities and resources for surveillance (Sutherland, 1987), and the need for technical assistance and training for police forces, paramilitary units and the coast guard (Commonwealth Consultative Group, 1985). There is mounting concern too about security threats increasingly posed by drug runners, arms dealers, money launderers, illegal refugees, resource piracy, often in huge Exclusive Economic Zones, and a host of other non-conventional security dangers (Dommenn, 1986; Payne, 1991; Sutton, 1991). Indeed, the prime minister of Belize conceded that the drugs trade was a greater threat to his country’s integrity than Guatemala’s irredentism (Commonwealth Consultative Group, 1985)!

The notion of security, then, has been expanded to embrace a wide range of concerns beyond territorial integrity and political autonomy, including economic freedom and environmental protection (Dommenn, 1986). Indeed, economic security and progress towards genuine economic development is widely seen to be the principal defence against many of the most threatening and the most corrosive dangers which microstates face (Sutton and Payne, 1993a). Environmental fragility is also seen within a broader security agenda. Island microstates particularly are prone to a variety of natural catastrophes which can have grotesquely disproportionate effects on a microstate’s economy and infrastructure, whether it is a hurricane in St Lucia, a volcano in Iceland or Montserrat or global warming and rising sea levels in the Maldives or Tuvalu. In this vein, Paul Sutton and Anthony Payne argue that security must be seen in terms of the core values of a society, which must include the economic wellbeing of the society and the protection of its culture and identity. The threats to these very small societies are qualitatively different from those facing developed countries. Moreover, the threats can be ‘difficult to detect’ and ‘ambiguous in their source and intensity’(Sutton and Payne, 1993b).

Both in their 1985 Report and, more recently (Commonwealth Advisory Group, 1997), the Commonwealth Secretariat’s commissioned study groups looked to ways of ameliorating the security dilemmas of their smallest members. A great deal of emphasis was placed on bilateral assistance, particularly from larger, developed Commonwealth states. Particularly important is technical assistance in terms of police and coast guard training, reconnaissance support and the sharing of intelligence sources. Australia and New Zealand already provide a wide range of supports for the island states of the Pacific.
Canada and the UK have provided technical and material support in the Eastern Caribbean. The USA has also been a major source of security assistance for microstates in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. Given that even those few microstates with a high per capita level of military forces will not have the physical capacity to resist direct external threats, then larger states may have to come to their assistance directly to meet an immediate danger, however temporary that assistance may be. In 1988, for example, India came to the assistance of the Maldives in the wake of a mercenary-led coup attempt.

Some microstates enjoy security agreements with larger states. There are French forces in the Comoros, Djibouti and Gabon. The USA remains responsible for the defence of the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau. It maintains bases in Antigua and Barbuda and Iceland. The British maintain two bases in Cyprus and a small training force in Belize. Both France and Spain have training missions in Equatorial Guinea. There is a Gurkha contingent in Brunei. The defence of Nauru rests with Australia through an informal agreement. And New Zealand is responsible for the defence of Samoa.

Both reports have emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in meeting what are often common regional security challenges. In 1982 the Eastern Caribbean states created a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a Regional Security System (RSS) composed of military, coast guard and police units. This was upgraded to treaty status in 1996. The focus of the treaty is contingency planning, particularly in less conventional areas of security threats: natural disaster preparedness, search and rescue operations, marine pollution, drug interdiction, money laundering and Mafia activities, illegal refugee operations. The RSS forces are deployed annually in military training exercises, increasingly with the participation of extra-regional partners. Similarly, the Pacific Islands Forum in the 1992 Honiara Declaration of Law Enforcement Cooperation sought to achieve similar objectives to the RSS in the Caribbean—the tasks at hand are truly formidable given the huge spans of distance and the sheer size of the Economic Zones of the Pacific island microstates. Again the emphasis is on regional cooperation among island police, customs, coast guard and immigration authorities as well as on establishing regional centres for intelligence data. Unfortunately, in other regions, even for the microstates of the Indian Ocean, regional institution building has not progressed far enough to support significant levels of regional cooperation in the sensitive areas of security.

Regional cooperation, supplemented by extra-regional assistance from friendly major powers, the Commonwealth and the United Nations can go a long way to reinforcing the security resources of microstates. Certainly, microstate military capacity is most likely to remain embryonic. Even among those 22 microstates with a formal army or defence force, the numbers are minuscule and equivalent to the constabulary units of those virtually unarmed microstates (see Table 1). The defence force of Antigua and Barbuda, for example, numbers only 100 and is thus smaller than the police forces of Dominica and Grenada, both of which disbanded their own military defence forces in 1981.

Thus far, our discussion has reflected the central concerns within the literature and within those international organizations like the Commonwealth
which have been justifiably preoccupied with the security concerns of those microstates of the developing world, indeed the largest component of the microstate family. And while some of the security issues raised thus far have some resonance in Europe, it is equally true that neighbourhood is more important than issues of small size. For potential new microstates in Europe, such as Montenegro or Kosovo, the volatility of the Balkan geopolitical setting may be more critical in assessing their prospects than the presumed disabilities of their small size. Certainly, for Europe’s established microstates, their security concerns are greatly lessened by the stability of their surroundings and the support of their European partners. The one exception to this is the uniquely intractable case of Cyprus, although even here it is possible that the European Union’s recent agreement to accept Turkey as a future member may encourage an eventual settlement of the island’s communal strife.

For most European microstates and potential microstates such as the Faroes the conventional dangers of external invasion, the threats of mercenary forces, natural disasters, and even drug running are not serious issues. Money laundering may be a potential if not a present danger. But, on the whole, the smallest European states are secure in their sovereignty and unthreatened in their peaceful setting. None of these states maintains an army in any recognizable sense of the term. Neither, for that matter, does Iceland, whose geography is nonetheless its critical contribution to NATO. San Marino is responsible for its own security. A steadfast commitment to a policy of neutrality was maintained throughout the Second World War at a time when the Republic was host to some 100 000 refugees. Even though Article 1 of the 1939 Treaty of Friendship with Italy pledges the latter’s support for San Marino’s independence, there is nothing in the treaty to suggest any kind of military defence agreement (Duursma, 1996). Indeed, San Marino is a member of the Conference of the Non-Aligned. Any such agreement with Italy, a member of NATO, would compromise both its neutrality and its membership of the non-aligned movement.

Liechtenstein too is a neutral state. There is no defence agreement with Switzerland to augment the broad existing treaty relations between the two states, since such an arrangement would undermine the expressed neutrality of both countries. Accordingly, then, Liechtenstein is not included in the space of the Swiss defence system. In Andorra the situation is more ambiguous. Here there is an implicit obligation on the part of both Spain and France to take measures to support the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Andorra but only after consultations with the Andorra Government. The Treaty

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of Vicinage, Friendship and Cooperation of 3 June 1993 sets out the terms of friendly relations between the three countries and in no sense detracts from Andorra’s historical position of neutrality. Since the treaty commits both Spain and France to respect and promote the sovereignty of Andorra, this in itself is a protection against potential intervention (Duursma, 1996).

Of the four smallest European microstates, only Monaco is in a formal defence arrangement with all-surrounding France. In Article 1 of the Franco-Monégasque Treaty of 1918 France is committed to the defence of the Principality and to treat its territory as if it were part of France. However, this does not mean that France can enter Monégasque territory at will during peacetime. A prior agreement with the government of Monaco is necessary before any French security operations take place (Duursma, 1996).

We have considered a number of external supports to improve the security resources of microstates. What are the typical security commitments of these very small states? It may be useful to consider the options being entertained by the present government of the Faroe Islands, which is committed to eventual sovereignty. In the Faroes it is impossible to view the sovereignty agenda apart from or outside of NATO. Any foundation for Faroese independence must be rooted in the recognition of the security interests of a larger North Atlantic community of states which includes Denmark’s own interests in Greenland but also the concerns of Iceland, perhaps the Faroes’ second mother country, of the UK, its closest neighbour, and of Norway and the USA, all of which have a deeply rooted interest in the security of the various North Atlantic sea lanes which are so critical to the North American–European alliance. The Faroes sit strategically on top of these very sensitive maritime corridors.

In the Faroe Islands the security framework is presently divided between Danish and Faroese authorities. The Danes maintain a naval presence, an airforce station and an early warning radar station which monitors the air space between Iceland and the Shetland Islands. A Danish naval vessel with some 70 sailors is responsible for search and rescue, fisheries and environmental protection, and military operations in the North Atlantic in cooperation with NATO partners. The Faroese maintain their own coast guard, a small ship and a motor launch. They are building a new and larger armed vessel for coast guard service. And they are also acquiring a new Bell helicopter with greater lift capacity than the present Danish Lynx. At present the coast guard accounts for 1 per cent of government expenditure. This is expected to rise to 1.2–1.4 per cent with the new investments. Moreover, the helicopter will be owned by Atlantic Airways and used on contract by the Government as the need demands. The coast guard will consist of some 60 individuals with expansion, only a slight increase from the present level. The police forces in the Faroes are comparable with those of other European microstates. The force consists of 105 officers including reserves and some 50 other personnel (judicial specialists, secretaries, etc). The Government views this to be overcapacity, though necessary given the remoteness and dispersal of the islands’ communities. An independent Faroes would have to assume the financial responsibility of this force, which is now funded by the Danes. The present government anticipates that this will amount to just under 2 per cent of government expenditure (Government of the Faroe Islands, 1999; conversations with Sigmundur Isfeld,
Security and Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Faroese Government).

It is understandable that the future security issues facing the Faroes once the Danes leave are pressing concerns in the current debate over independence. Yet the experience of other similarly very small European states suggests that the current government’s projections may suffice. Liechtenstein, which has had no standing army since 1868,1 reserves the right to call up able-bodied citizens under 60 should its security be threatened in an emergency. But its modest needs are daily met through a police force of some 59 officers with a backup of 19 auxiliaries (Europa Publications, 1997). Monaco maintains no official military presence apart from the Guards at the Royal Palace. Security within the Principality is vested in a 500-strong gendarmerie. In Andorra there is no military budget whatsoever and security, both internal policing and at customs and immigration, is vested in a small civil force. In San Marino there are formal military units, largely ceremonial, assigned to the protection of the three towers, the frontiers and the palace. In the event of an emergency, all citizens between 16 and 55 may be enlisted to defend the state. Luxembourg, alone among the continental European states, maintains a regular army of volunteers, some 800, with a police force of 560. Malta, the most ‘militarized’ of European microstates after the exceptional case of Cyprus, still maintains a security force of only 1950 in an island population of just under 400 000.

Clearly, European microstates address security issues as low on the agenda with minimal expenditure and even indifference. Unlike many other microstates, they live in the best of neighbourhoods with the best of neighbours. They simply do not face the day-to-day security concerns which many of their fellow microstates in the developing world must confront, even those which are comparatively prosperous and advantaged.

The importance of neighbourhood or a mentor relationship is clear in the list of those 21 microstates which may be described as constabulary states with no military forces whatsoever, relying instead on modest police units and in some cases a small coast guard. This list (Table 1) includes all European microstates except Malta and the two governments in Cyprus. Even among those microstates with some dedicated military forces (Table 2), 13 have truly modest forces of less than 3000. Barbados and Antigua and Barbuda have only 154 and 100 troops respectively. Of the most ‘militarized’ microstates, the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, for obvious reasons, stand apart. So do the very small Gulf states of Bahrain and Qatar, members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, in a very dangerous and volatile neighbourhood. The African states of Gabon and Guinea-Bissau, like many African countries, are states where military investment reflects domestic interests as much as external security threats. Guyana and Brunei are sensitive to real or imagined irredentist threats as well as to internal opposition in the case of Brunei. Fiji is the only South Pacific island state with a military culture and a formidable military force.

In short, traditional notions of security dangers and the resources necessary to meet them seem inappropriate given the experience of most microstates. This is not to underestimate the importance of those security issues which challenge the resources of many microstates, islands in particular. Yet microstates exist in a generally supportive global milieu with a variety of regional and international
resources at their disposal. This is particularly the case in terms of ensuring their international legal personality and continued independence: the determination of the international system itself, in its manifold guises, to support the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of even its smallest members. This is extantism, the sanctity of the sovereignty of existing states, however small. This is the final firewall for the defence of these smallest and weakest states. The recent admission of Tuvalu, with its population of only 10,000, to full membership in the United Nations is a powerful expression of the extantism which supports the sovereignty, the independence and the territorial integrity of all states within the international community. It is not an exaggeration to consider this extantism a sea change in international norms. It is not that long ago, after all, when it was widely assumed in both academic and public policy circles that independence for many of these smallest territories was preposterous. In the early stages of decolonization many observers shared President Senghor’s confident view that these smallest fragments of the colonial era would eventually succumb to more rational arrangements for self-determination. And certainly the historic European microstates, though their formal sovereignty was acknowledged, were never expected to participate in the central councils of the international system. Who could have imagined as late as 1980 that Monaco would be a full member of the United Nations? In short the security needs of the world’s smallest states have to be assessed against this backdrop of a change in international norms which favours the small and the weak, as well as against the practical and institutional supports increasingly available to assist microstates in meeting the security challenges which they do face.

Table 2. Microstates with military units ranked according to size of service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microstate</th>
<th>Military Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>3700 (including paramilitary units) plus 80,000 reserves and 1300 Greek Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>11,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>9600 (including paramilitary units) plus 3900 French troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>9500 (including paramilitary units) plus 600 French troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>9250 (including paramilitary units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>5000 plus 900 British Gurkha troops and 500 Singapore troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>3600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>3100 (including paramilitary units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>2657 (plus paramilitary units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>1750 plus 100 British training troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>1500 plus French troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>1320 plus French and Spanish training troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>São Tomé and Príncipe</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>800 (including paramilitary and coastguard units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua and Barbuda</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

1 Microstates are not alone in eschewing formal military forces. The enviably stable republic of Costa Rica in an otherwise volatile and conflict-ridden region abandoned a formal military force in 1948 and depends now on specialized police and guard units.

References


Le Monde, 7 July 1976.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF MICROSTATE SECURITY


*West Africa* (1964) 11 July.

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