Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick

Foreign Policy Perspectives of a Small State: Brunei Darussalam

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Focus of Presentation

• Understanding Small States
  • Small State Identities
  • Peace and Development—twin pillars of national policy
  • External Strategies for Small States
  • Ideologue versus Pragmatism
  • Speak Softly — against complacency, towards confident foreign policy
  • Carry a Big Stick — Effective political, security, defence policies

• Special case
  • Brunei Darussalam
Small State Identity

- Demographic and physical limits
- Small is relative, across and within regions
- Within Southeast Asia, commonly accepted
- Brunei, Timor Leste, Singapore as ‘small’
- Population of 420,000, 1 million, 5 million, each
- Resource poor, externally oriented economy
- Priority for peace, stability and ec development
- Common feature – aware of vulnerability
External Strategies for Small States

- Alignment
- Alliance
- Non-Alignment
- Independent Foreign Policy
- Regional Cooperation/Integration
- Pragmatism in Foreign Policy
- Multi-dimensional Focus in Foreign Policy
- State and Community Roles
Diplomacy

- Political, economic, defence diplomacy
- Selective strategies in foreign policy
- Linkages with multi partners/platforms
- Small state strategy – non aggressive
- Active, participatory, prepared
- Speak Softly, but Carry a Big Stick
- Promoting confidence in nat’nl resilience
Brunei the Small Borneo State

- Hereditary Monarchy with written Constitution
- Political System built on Malay Islamic Ideology
- Size: 5765 sq km, 160 km coastline, bi-furcated
- Facing contested South China Sea; claimants
- Population: 420,000; 65% Citizens
- GDP Per Capita: US$30,000-35,000
- Welfare State; important role of public sector
- Hydrocarbon account for 90% of total exports
- Low Growth Rate: 1.5% average; budget deficit
- Foreign investments in energy, infrastructure
Size, Geopolitics and Foreign Policy

- Brunei’s size, location, national ideology influence on external perspective
- Political history of small state survival – remains a determinant of strategic outlook
- Contested land and maritime borders temporarily settled with bilateral agreements
- ASEAN regionalism, a cornerstone for stability
- Collective strength in economy and diplomacy
- Absence of military skirmish with any neighbor
Strategy of Walking Softly

• Tendency to let bigger states take lead without compromising national ideals
• Participate within its physical (human) resources
• Diplomacy as the frontline of foreign policy
• Maintain close ties with traditional partners and establish diplomatic relations with over 100
• Membership in relevant international orgns.
• Leadership participation in important summits
• Responsible member of international system in financial, humanitarian and peace support
The Stick Must be Ready

- Diplomacy alone may not always prevail
- Guns are ready – national defence policy
- Brunei’s small but well trained forces
- Treaty with trusted partner, UK, for ext. defence
- Multilateral arrangements for defence and security cooperation, notably with ASEAN
- Strategies for traditional/non-traditional threats
- Comprehensive security; attention to vital needs, food security, human security
- Government views community support essential in national security strategy
Conclusion

- Brunei’s survival depends on skilful management of domestic and external policies
- Leadership involves its residents along its MIB ideology
- Brunei’s foreign policy has served it well – peace, stability and development, status quo for over a century
- Adopts quiet diplomacy, not megaphone diplomacy
- Walk Softly and Carry a Big Stick, a relevant approach