

RSIS Seminar Series on Multilateralism Studies
“Small States and Alliance Strategies”

By

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Thursday, 10 January 2019
3.30 – 5.00 pm
Free Admission

(You are requested to be seated by 3.20 pm)

Dress Code: Office Attire

Venue: **The KeyPoint**
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B3
50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Click [here](#) for location map

Registration: Click [here](#) to register online

Limited seating available. Registration on first-come first-served basis.

(Kindly note that 'Identification No.' in the registration form is only mandatory for NTU Staff & Students)

Lecture Abstract

Small states are often regarded as the most insignificant amongst state actors when they are ranked in terms of land size, population profile and military power. Neorealist policymakers would advocate that alliances should be pursued with friendly great powers. Liberals might argue that instead of making alliances, small states stand a better chance of survival if they formed or joined coalitions that upheld international norms and rules binding strong and weak states alike. Constructivists and creative diplomats may however argue that joining alliances will ironically bring about the very insecurity they were meant to banish. Small states within an alliance system may tempt aggressors to conclude that their security concerns are completely aligned with the political preferences of their great power patrons, hence painting them as easy targets of opportunity for subversion and conquest by their great power patron's rivals. Additionally, small states' policy autonomy will quickly become constrained by their great power patron. These and other complications are examined by three country presentations offering diverse policy analyses of alliance shelter, abstinence from alliances, and possibly resort to virtual alliances. Different degrees of a non-aligned foreign policy may also prove to be a necessary tactical accessory for small states attempting to maximize alliance utilities.

Title 1: How do Small States Flourish? Small States' Relationships with Larger Powers viewed through the Icelandic Case.

The lecture will focus on the importance of small states to make particular domestic and external arrangements in order to prosper. It will in particular examine the importance of small states to seek political, economic and societal shelter provided by larger states and regional and international organizations. The lecture will present a new small state theory, the shelter theory, on the behaviour of small states in the international system recently published in the book titled 'Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs'. It will use the case of Iceland and its relations with its larger neighbouring states and international organizations in order to show the importance for small states to be provided with shelter by larger powers.

Title 2: Taiwan: An Unusual Small State and Its Unusual Alliance

Since 1949, the enduring hostility across the Taiwan Straits has made Taiwan depend on the United States (US) for balancing China. The defence treaty between Washington and Taipei shaped the triangular relations of extended deterrence. However, the Republic of China (ROC), the regime in Taiwan, gradually lost its diplomatic war with its Communist counterpart, People's Republic of China (PRC), in the 1970s, and it led the US to shift its official recognition to the PRC. Thereafter, the relations between Taipei and Washington became unofficial. Despite the Taiwan Relations Act, different American administrations have demonstrated diverse approaches to Taiwan. Vice versa, the ROC regime's democratisation also reshapes its relations with the US. Two volatile democracies conducting an unofficial relationship in the face of a rising China constitute the unique nature of Taiwan's alliance with a superpower."

Title 3: Polycentric Alliances: Economic Diplomacy, Regionalism and Multilateralism in Bangladeshi Foreign Policy

When Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971, very few observers thought the nation would survive. The country possessed a large population and a war-torn agrarian economy. For much of the first three decades of its existence the country made headlines only when there was a natural disaster. Today, nearly 50 years on, the country has not only survived, but is also rapidly transforming itself into one of the fastest growing economies in the world with its impressive annual economic growth rate of more than seven percent. This presentation argues that Bangladesh has pursued a "friendship with all and malice with none" strategy as enshrined by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding Father of the Nation. Well aware of its geographic location, Bangladesh emphasises a foreign policy reliant on regional and multilateral cooperation mechanisms. Bangladesh is also actively pursuing economic diplomacy in order to ensure its survival in the challenging global market. The presentation argues that alliances can no longer be seen in linear, monolithic

or absolute terms, but instead alliances can be polycentric based on a small state's functional needs.

About the Speakers

Baldur Thorhallsson is Professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Iceland. Baldur is also the Jean Monnet Chair in European Studies and Programme and Research Director at the Centre for Small States at the University. His research focuses primarily on small state studies, European integration and Iceland's foreign policy. He has published extensively in international journals. He has contributed to several academic books and written three books on small states. He holds a PhD (1999) and MA (1994) in Political Science from the University of Essex in England.

Wu Shang Su is a Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University. He is attached to the Regional Security Architecture Programme at the school's constituent unit, the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS). His research specialities include military modernisation, Taiwan issues, railway and international relations. Shang Su's articles, commentaries and op-eds have been published in *Naval War College Review*, *East Asia Forum*, *Defence Studies*, the *Pacific Review*, *Asian Survey* and *Contemporary Southeast Asia* amongst others." He is also the author of *The Defence Capabilities of Small States: Singapore and Taiwan's Responses to Strategic Desperation* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

Iftekhharul Bashar is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

He has obtained a Bachelors (Hons.) and Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Dhaka. Prior to joining RSIS, he worked with several think-tanks in Bangladesh including Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), and Bangladesh Institute for Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). Iftekhharul Bashar received two awards from the University of Dhaka for his essays.

His latest publication is a book chapter titled "Impact of the Rohingya Crisis on the threat landscape at the Myanmar– Bangladesh border" which is part of a joint Asia-Europe Counter-Terrorism Dialogue" project of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and RSIS.