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## Smallness, islandness and foreign policy behaviour: aspects of island microstates foreign policy behaviour with special reference to Cook Islands and Kiribati

Ueantabo Fakaofu Neemia

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27 MAR 1997

**SMALLNESS, ISLANDNESS AND FOREIGN POLICY  
BEHAVIOUR:**

**ASPECTS OF ISLAND MICROSTATES FOREIGN POLICY  
BEHAVIOUR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COOK ISLANDS  
AND KIRIBATI.**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**from**

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**by**

**UEANTABO FAKAOFO NEEMIA-MACKENZIE M.A. (USP).**



**Department of History and Politics  
University of Wollongong.  
1995.**

I certify that the contents of this work have not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution.

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Ueantabo Fakaofu Neemia-Mackenzie

8 January 1996.

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Ueantabo Neemia-Mackenzie  
Christchurch, New Zealand.

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## ABSTRACT

As a subcategory of small states, island microstates are the smallest. Using the Cook Islands and Kiribati as case studies, this thesis examines the relationship and effect of small size on foreign policy behaviour. The thesis also examines the implications of the other key characteristic of island microstates, namely islandness, for foreign policy behaviour.

On the relationship between size and foreign policy behaviour, the thesis reveals two sides. First, foreign policy behaviour is conceptualised as one of the key areas through which the two island microstates respond and seek to manage problems, including economic dependence, which originate from their small size. In other words, the conditions and problems deriving from smallness motivate activities in the external environment which make up foreign policy behaviour. These external activities include the quest for increased international recognition as competent international actors, the maximisation of economic benefits in the form of increased aid and development assistance and improved returns from external trade and other forms of external relations. Second, small size and its correlates, also circumscribe and constrain foreign policy behaviour.

The two manifestations of the relationship between smallness and foreign policy behaviour are demonstrated in the two case studies, which comply broadly with the characteristics postulated by the main theories of small state foreign policy behaviour, particularly East's (1973) well-known model. The data from both case studies show some variations in detail from the main theories of small states' foreign policy behaviour, and qualify the postulates of these theories from the situations of smaller states.

In so far as islandness (the other key characteristic of island microstates) is concerned, data from Cook Islands and Kiribati show that islandness not only imposes difficulties over and above those of smallness *per se*, but also accord them with a specific set of options. The

evidence show that islandness has important implications for improving the instrumentalities and capacities of island microstates to manipulate their external environments. With the advent of the Law of the Sea, island microstates are now controlling vast expanses of ocean areas which not only increased their physical area, but more importantly redefined their economic prospects and, to a considerable extent, increased their external involvements beyond the restricted foreign policy behavioural patterns predicted by most theories of small states foreign policy behaviour, including the influential East model.

## INTRODUCTION

Using Cook Islands and Kiribati as case studies, this thesis examines the foreign policy behaviour of a subcategory of small states referred to as island microstates.<sup>1</sup> Because island microstates generally represent the smallest of the small states, the study of their foreign policy behaviour is primarily and inevitably an examination of the relationship between extreme small size and foreign policy behaviour. Equally as important as smallness in the study of island microstates' foreign policy behaviour is the other key characteristic, *islandness*, which not only distinguish them from other subcategories of small states, but also have significant effects on, and implications for, their foreign policy behaviour. Thus, the interests of this thesis are twofold: First, and based on the primary characteristic of island microstates, small size, the thesis examines the effect of small size on the foreign policy behaviour of island microstates. Second, an attempt will be made to examine the implications of the other key characteristic of island microstates -- namely, islandness<sup>2</sup> -- for foreign policy behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup>. This sub-category of small states are also referred to as small island developing countries. See, for example, A.J. Dolman. 1984. Islands in the Shade: The Performance and Prospects of Small Island Developing Countries. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies Advisory Service. The term, 'island microstate' is used in this study and by others (for example, John Connell. 1988. Sovereignty and Survival: Island Microstates in the Third World. Sydney: University of Sydney) to underscore the fact that within the small island developing countries, island microstates are the smallest.

<sup>2</sup>. The term, islandness is preferred over insularity because it connotes the entity's relationship with the sea (an important factor in so far as this thesis is concerned) more than the latter. The Oxford English Dictionary defines island as "a piece of land completely surrounded by water." In fact, the Old English term, ealand from which island is derived means "waterland." Insular is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "pertaining to island." It thus tends to emphasise the sense of isolation and remoteness rather than relationship to the sea.

## 1. SIZE AND FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOUR

Scholarly interest in the relationship between size and foreign policy behaviour has grown since the publication of Rosenau's seminal essay, Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy.<sup>3</sup> Two important observations can be made on the literature on the relationship between size and foreign policy which have proliferated following Rosenau: that they have invariably confirmed Rosenau's original conclusion that size is the most potent variable on foreign policy behaviour, and that there has been little attempt to differentiate behavioural patterns between gradations of small states.

Reid's (1974)<sup>4</sup> study, was the first attempt to look at the foreign policy behaviour of microstates as a specific subclass within the broader 'small states' category. Reid's study was concerned with the application of existing models of foreign policy analysis to newly-independent and smaller members of the international community. By deductive reason (there were no references at all in his study to specific microstates, but presumably since he was from the Caribbean his study must have been based on the Caribbean experience), he was able to generate a 'propositional inventory of hypotheses' on microstates foreign policy behaviour, and invited later students of microstates' policy behaviour to test them against hard facts.

Since Reid used prevailing approaches and models of foreign policy analysis -- among others, the International Systems and Decision-making approaches -- as lenses

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<sup>3</sup> J.N. Rosenau. 1966. "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy" in R. Barry Farrell, (ed.) Approaches to Comparative and International Politics. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

<sup>4</sup> G.L. Reid. 1974. The Impact of Very Small Size on the International Behaviour of Small States. London: Sage Publications.

through which he examined the experience of microstates, it is possible that his conclusions may have been heavily influenced by the approaches/models themselves against the situation of small states. After all, these approaches were originally developed in contexts where size was not seen as important, and their underlying assumptions were intended for countries different from microstates. This is not to say that existing approaches are not relevant to microstates. Rather, the point is, because the approaches were designed with states other than microstates in mind, with different circumstances (including size), they (the approaches) may not be able to adequately explain the reality of microstates' foreign policy behaviour. Reid's pioneering study, however, raised some useful working hypotheses on microstates' foreign policy behaviours -- which ranged from their foreign policy orientations, scope of foreign policy to their behaviour in the international system.<sup>5</sup>

Another very influential work on the relationship between size and foreign policy behaviour is East's (1973)<sup>6</sup> conventional model of small states' foreign behaviour. Using this model as a benchmark, the present thesis will look at the extent to which island microstates comply with, or differ from, the behavioural patterns characterised by the model, and provide the necessary explanation. Given that East's model have been used to account for the foreign behaviour of much larger 'small' states such as New Zealand<sup>7</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup>. *ibid.*, pp.45-49

<sup>6</sup>. M.A. East. 1973. "Size and Foreign Policy Behaviour: A Test of Two Models" *World Politics*, vol.25 no.4, pp.556-576.

<sup>7</sup>. See, for example, a discussion of New Zealand's foreign policy behaviour as a small state, and its compliance with the patterns predicted by the East model. John Henderson. 1980. "The Foreign Policy of a Small State," in J. Henderson, K. Jackson and R. Kennaway, eds., Beyond New Zealand: The Foreign Policy of a Small State. Auckland: Methuen Publications.

it would be expected that island microstates being the smallest of the small states would behave with extreme restraints and limitations. It may be necessary, in order to highlight the foreign policy behaviour of island microstates, for certain key hypotheses from Reid's inventory to be tested against the data from the case-studies so that the variations in the foreign behaviour of island microstates under study from other 'small states,' or even other 'microstates,' is established. If, indeed, there are clear-cut variations, an attempt will be made to identify the major underlying factors.

## *2. ISLANDNESS AND FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOUR*

Island microstates are not only characterised by small size, they are also islands or comprising islands. As a characteristic, islandness means being surrounded by water and situated away from bigger land masses or continents, often by considerable distances. Thus, islandness has two important aspects which may have important implications for foreign policy behaviour. First, the attribute of being surrounded by sea implied the importance of the sea to island microstates. The importance of the sea to the foreign policy behaviour of island microstates became evident in the mid-1970s following the advent of the United Convention on the Law of the Sea, when Pacific island states and microstates began to declare their 200-miles exclusive economic zones. The declaration of exclusive economic zones by Pacific island microstates has several implications for Pacific island states. First, it makes some of these very small states anything but small. For example, Kiribati which has a land area of 780 square kilometres, now has a total area including its 200-mile EEZ of 3.5 million square kilometres. Second, the Law of the

Sea regime and the sovereignty over a vast expanse of ocean area it gives the island microstates have redefined the economic prospects and potentials of island microstates, and to a considerable extent, increased their external involvements beyond patterns predicted by East's model of small states' foreign policy behaviour.

The other important aspect of islandness is the attribute of being removed by considerable distances from other landmasses, which may imply either a geographically disadvantageous or advantageous location. While distance or isolation from bigger landmasses may be disadvantageous in most cases, there are also cases where geographical isolation can be exploited to the advantage of island microstates. Such locational advantage may increase island microstates' external engagements as they seek to promote and exploit their splendid isolation.

In so far as this study is concerned, the interest on islandness is specifically to do with its effects on foreign policy behaviour, in particular the extent to which it accentuates or lessens the constraints of small size on foreign policy behaviour.

### *3. METHODOLOGY*

This thesis attempts to understand aspects of the foreign policy behaviour of island microstates as a special category of small states through a comparative study of two island microstates, Cook Islands and Kiribati. Although, it could be argued that ideally more island microstates case-studies are required if a more accurate picture of foreign policy behaviour for this particular subcategory of small states is to be developed. Still, the choice of two island microstates can be justified on the grounds that the present study

does not aim to develop a comprehensive model of island microstates' foreign policy behaviour (in the same way as East's model of Small States Foreign Policy behaviour). Rather the main interest of the present study is to examine the extent to which the behaviours of island microstates comply with, or depart from, conventional model of small states foreign policy behaviour. At the same time, the study is interested in examining the effect of the characteristic, islandness, on foreign policy behaviours, and in particular on the restricted behavioural patterns predicted by conventional small states model, the most influential of which is East's model.

To enable a comparative analysis, the two case studies need to share selected key attributes which will be treated as constants, but to be similar or dissimilar in other aspects. For the purpose of this study, extreme smallness in population and land area and islandness is taken as the main common attributes of the two case studies. At the same time, they vary in history, geography, achieved and potential economic development, resource endowments, culture, leadership styles and many other respects. Each case-study starts with a historical and geographical background, then the political system and the economy (including development objectives, constraints and potentials. These issues provide the domestic context and environment for the country's foreign policy behaviour. The discussion then proceeds to foreign policy behaviour under four broad issue-areas: Political-diplomatic, Military-security, Economic-developmental and Cultural.<sup>8</sup> Each case study provides insights into foreign policy behaviour of each country, on the basis of which comparison will be made.

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed theoretical discussion of the issue-areas see, Michael Brecher et.al. 1969. "A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behaviour" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. vol.XIII no.1, pp.75-101.

Cook Island and Kiribati have populations of less than 100,000, which a number of studies have proposed as the cut off point for microstates. They are both comprised of islands with a vast expanse of EEZ. They both, therefore, belong in the same subclass (in terms of population) within that heterogeneous, and imprecisely defined category, 'small states.' They are part of the same geopolitical region, thus the intervention of subsystemic factors on the impact of size is minimised. Consequently, the task of isolating the effect of smallness is made relatively easier.

But, the two case-studies are also different. In addition to differences already identified above, the two island microstates also differed in their external orientations: Cook Islands has a constitutional relation with New Zealand, Kiribati is not constitutionally tied to any country. This external orientation raises questions which will be borne in mind when comparison is made, such as: what implications do close association with a developed country or lack of it, have for foreign policy behaviour? Does the close relation with a larger, developed country or the lack of it, make the problems of smallness easier or more difficult to cope with in so far as the island microstate is concerned? Does close relation accentuate dependence? or conversely, does the lack of a close relation with a larger, developed country reduce dependence?

Overall, a comparative analysis of the foreign policy behaviour of the two island microstates will focus on the effects of smallness, dependence and islandness as independent variables on foreign policy behaviour. Comparison will also be made on the two island microstates' response to the range of issues and problems resulting from smallness, dependence and islandness, and what rooms for manoeuvre they have given

the constraints imposed by such independent variables.

In researching the data, interviews -- open-ended but focused on issues relating to foreign relations -- were conducted with key decision-makers and officials in both Cook Islands and Kiribati. These interviews supplemented data from official documents and published sources.

#### *4. STRUCTURE*

The thesis is organised into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1-4) examine the key concepts in the study and reviews the literature. Chapter One focuses on island microstates while Chapter Two looks at foreign policy behaviour. The literature on the relationships between smallness and foreign policy behaviour, and on dependence and foreign policy behaviour are reviewed in Chapters Three and Four respectively. Part II focuses on the case studies. Chapters Five and Six focus on Cook Islands, and the next two chapters, Seven and Eight, focus on Kiribati. In Chapter Nine, the case-studies are compared and analysed, and conclusions made on island microstates foreign policy behaviour.

Finally, as an attempt to test the assumption of the relationship between size and dependence on foreign policy behaviour, and windows of opportunities deriving from islandness, in a specific subclass of the small states. It therefore contributes to the corpus of work on small states by highlighting the gradations within the broader category 'small states,' and by furthering the understanding of the effect of size and dependence on foreign policy behaviour in a subclass which can be regarded as 'the smallest of small.'

The present study also makes an attempt to identify rooms for manoeuvre and windows of opportunity at the disposal of the microstates in breaking away from the constriction of small size and dependence.

The present study should also be seen as a contribution to the recent plea for what McCall referred to a 'nissological approach,'<sup>9</sup> which looks at the islands in their own terms, and not in terms of continental thinking. The plea is pertinent in International Relations as in other disciplines, for as Holsti (1985)<sup>10</sup> noted International Relations is dominated by the Anglo-American scholarship, which perceives smallness and islandness as inherently problematic in a world where the realism of Morgenthau and Bull<sup>11</sup> still remain. Hence, the concerns of the literature with issues such as viability and weakness, which hardly figure prominently on the minds of the island microstates' leadership however hopeless their situation might be in the eyes of others.

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<sup>9</sup>. See, Grant McCall.1992. Nisiology: The Study of Islands: Away with Continental Thinking, unpublished conference paper; and also, Epele Hau'ofa.1993. Our Sea of Islands, Suva: University of the South Pacific.

<sup>10</sup>. K.J. Holsti. 1985. The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory, Boston: Allen and Unwin.

<sup>11</sup>. Hedley Bull. 1977. Anarchial Society. London: Macmillan.