

Loo, Bernard F.W., ed. *Strategy and Defence Policy for Small States: Problems and Prospects*. World Scientific, 2021.

Dovydas Rogulis

General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania
Doctoral student of Political Science
E-mail: dovydas.rogulis@gmail.com

Bernard F.W. Loo and contributors Alistair D.B. Cook, Weichong Ong, and Hikaru Yamashita bring us a collective monograph of strategy and defence policy for small states that mainly focus on the Southeast Asian region. Bernard F.W. Loo has been known since 2003 for his 50+ publications about strategy and military analyses of predominantly small Asian states. One of his most famous books, “Military Transformation and Strategy“ (2009), discusses the basis of the US military reform agenda which was influenced by the revolution in military affairs and examines reform’s implications for small states. Meanwhile Alistair D.B. Cook is known for being a Coordinator of the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Programme and Senior Fellow at the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies. His research interests focus geographically on the Asia-Pacific and Myanmar in particular and thematically on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The second contributor Weichong Ong is an Assistant Professor with the Military Studies Programme, the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies. Weichong is well known for being

the author of “Malaysia’s Defeat of Armed Communism: The Second Emergency, 1968–1989” (Routledge, 2014). Last but not least, Hikaru Yamashita is Professor in the Department of International Relations at the University of Shizuoka, Japan. He is the author of “Humanitarian Space and International Politics: The Creation of Safe Areas” (2004), “Evolving Patterns of Peacekeeping: International Cooperation at Work” (2017). For the last two decades, Bernard F.W. Loo and the contributors of this book have been speaking on defence and strategic issues in various institutions all around the globe and have consistently published articles about relevant cases.

Bernard F.W. Loo’s most recent book “*Strategy And Defence Policy For Small States: Problems And Prospects*” (2022) provides the biggest contribution to the Southeast Asian approach and empirical analyses which tries to supplement the recent decade of Western-style publications on strategies and defence policies of small states (mostly Western ones). This monograph perfectly fills in the information gap about a broader perception of Southeast Asian small states that hasn’t been fully elaborated on in similar literature,¹ which is frequently Western centric rather than unbiased.

The content of the book is broken down into an introduction and seven chapters that cover the necessity of geography, strategic culture, defence policy and strategy of small states; present emphasis of Singapore’s military history to a further development of its defence strategy; compare and contrast challenges and prospects of military modernisation in Southeast Asia; discuss the impact of technologies to the changing character of contemporary war; disclose the military involvement to disaster response in Southeast Asian region; and fo-

¹ Håkan Edström, Dennis Gyllensporre, and Jacob Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States: Responding to External Shocks of the 21st Century* (Routledge, 2018); Clive Acher, Alyson JK Bailes, and Anders Wivel, “Small States and International Security,” *Europe and Beyond, Milton Park: Taylor & Francis* (2014 Baldacchinoel, Godfrey, and Anders Wivel, eds., *Handbook on the Politics of Small States* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020)); Baldur Thorhallsson and Sverrir Steinsson, “Small State Foreign Policy,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017; Jeremy W. Lamoreaux and David J. Galbreath, “The Baltic States as ‘small states’: Negotiating the ‘East’ by engaging the ‘West’,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 1–14.

cus on peacekeeping dynamics in the emerging security environment of this century.

This publication consolidates a dynamic approach to a traditional comprehension of strategy and new technological features of the 21st century. It brings up the technology and social information domain to a level of defence policy and strategies that are still often missed in contemporary Western publications. It is undoubtful that social media and widely spread communications are intensively shaping the comprehension of war itself. Moreover, this book does a good job of tracking peacekeeping efforts that are partly forgotten among Western scholars. Mainly it has been due to the defence and security policies that most of the time small states orientated their attention towards a growing threat of Russia/China and a contribution to a fight against global terrorism. The empirical analyses of this book claim that peace operations have a bleak future due to major powers being preoccupied with their strategic competition and if, as a result, more and more conflicts become proxy wars, the space for peace operations will shrink correspondingly.

The most important aspect of this collective monograph is the empirical verification of military strategies and defence policies through the lenses of the Southeast Asian small-states approach. The Western standpoint towards the defence strategies of small states is not fully applicable when we look at the Southeast Asian region. It is perfectly illustrated by the application of the military in disaster response policies of small states. The case study proves that it is practically the opposite than in Europe where the military is used as a last resort. Meanwhile in Southeast Asia, military engagement is an acceptable option and is seen as lower cost. Moreover, when it comes to weapon dynamics, it ought to be clear that the domestic structures and action–reaction models can explain much about weapons dynamics in Southeast Asia, but it fails to capture the nuances and subtleties of the respective weapons dynamics in the various countries. Eventually, the Southeast Asian approach shows us that history and particularly strategic culture play a vital role in determining the defence strategy of a small state.

In this publication, Bernard F.W. Loo covers half of the topics particularly related to military and strategy issues while the other three contributors focus on specific examples of history, disaster response policies, and peace operations. Bernard F.W. Loo's theoretical part stresses the essence of history and strategic culture, but these factors are partly missing when contributors elaborate on history, disaster response, and peace operations. There are information gaps in the last chapter when Hikaru Yamashita elaborates on peace operations and military organizations where small states are barely noticed. His analysis is more applicable to big states rather than small ones.

Moreover, this collection of essays proves the fact that strategy's logic is universal, while its "grammar" reflects the unique geopolitical-cultural-historical conditions of its practitioners. However, this is a place where deeper consideration of principles is required. Looking at Colin S. Gray, Alan G. Stolberg, H. Richard Yarger, and Jeannie L. Johnson,² it is obvious that not only history, culture, and geography are crucial elements of "grammar", but also the political system, bureaucracy, resources, inter-institutional cooperation, economic factors, and identity play a significant role determining practical applications of strategy. These and similar thoughts come to the reader while analysing other essays of the book. For instance, in Chapter five Bernard F.W. Loo claims that wars in the 21st century are likely to become even more complicated due to self-mobilised people who are involved by online information sources. This shapes the perception of war and demands different strategic approaches to face multiple opponents to achieve victory and eventually defeat the enemy. However, the purpose of strategy is not only to bring the opponent to the point where the adversary concedes defeat, but the strategy could

² John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Jeannie L. Johnson, eds., *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (Oxford University Press, 2022); Alan G. Stolberg, *How Nation-States Craft National Security Strategy Documents* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2012); Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015); H. Richard Yarger, "Towards a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model," *US Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy* (2006): 107–112.

have various additional strategic ends. The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the Armenian–Azeri war in 2020 have shown that limited military operations could weaken opponents and stop them from reaching certain goals, but it does not necessarily require the total defeat of an adversary.

In conclusion, this study is trying to argue that differences emerge in how the strategy’s universal logic is translated or manifested, in the way policy-makers, scholars, and strategists approach the application and implementation of strategy from state to state. Moreover, this collection of essays attempts to focus on how small states can think about preparation for use of force. Despite that, there are some areas of improvement to reach these goals if several articles regarding relevant topics could be added. To explore other topics, authors need to bring up additional empirical data about Southeast Asian political systems, irregular groups, intelligence capabilities, cyber power, and strategic culture. Overall, this collection of essays is a good start to learn about the defence policies and strategies of Southeast Asian small states.