

Part IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 10

Conclusions

A COMPELLING OBLIGATION

10.1 The conclusion of our preceding analysis is that, because of their intrinsic characteristics, small states need a special measure of support. In a loosely ordered international community of over 150 states varying in size, power, capacity and goals, they can easily be overlooked and left at a disadvantage. On the other hand, it is widely recognised that many small states have made a major significant contribution to the international community.

10.2 Most small states secured their independence within the past 20 years and the international system has not paid adequate attention to their special vulnerabilities and special needs. Moreover, in the last decade the deterioration in international co-operation, the widening range of conflict and disturbed world economic conditions have noticeably, sometimes critically, aggravated the disadvantaged condition of small states.

10.3 These factors, of course, affect all states in varying degree and even some larger states face critical problems as a result of them. We believe it to be indisputable, however, that the smallest and weakest within the international community, those with the least political clout, military strength or economic resilience, are among the ones who are likely to suffer most and whose special vulnerabilities are likely to go unnoticed and unrelieved for the longest time. We believe there are compelling obligations that derive from these realities: obligations on the international community, obligations on the Commonwealth itself—which has within its membership so many small states—and, of course, obligations that fall on small states themselves. All concerned must acknowledge and begin to fulfil these obligations.

10.4 If these obligations are not recognised and addressed, the prospects for small states could become serious; and those prospects will worsen if present trends towards self-interested bilateralism on the part of certain major powers continue and if, as well, the world economic situation becomes more disordered. The vulnerability of small states will then be even more critically exposed. Some may be forced to become unacceptably subordinate to large neighbours; some may even come under the influence and control of powerful corporate factors or criminal elements; others may have to live permanently with economic weakness and disability. Not all small states are equally susceptible to these dangers and we have in our analysis brought out the positive elements. There is a pressing need, however, one regrettably so far unrecognised, for the international community to face up to the special vulnerability of small states in both the economic and political dimensions. It is a task that must not be ignored—both in the interest of small states and in the interest of the wider international community with which their fate is so commingled.

ARENAS FOR ACTION

10.5 There is thus a compelling obligation at all levels—global, regional and domestic—to put the issue of the special needs of small states in proper perspective and having recognised it, to take appropriate measures. At the end of our Report we have put forward a number of specific recommendations in this respect; in brief, there are in our view eight broad arenas for action within which the special problems of small states need to be addressed.

1. Establishing a global environment of support and protection

10.6 It is a commonplace that our world is today interdependent. That interdependence demands continuous institutional innovation and response in circumstances that are constantly changing. At the core of the vulnerability of small states is the failure to implement an effective international collective security system as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations.

10.7 On the one hand major military powers have sought to pursue their own security through military pacts and alliances, while many medium powers have also sought to develop the means, including collaborative mechanisms, for protecting themselves. Small states are, however, unable to provide for their own security and there is little value in prescribing an exclusively self-reliant military answer to their security problems. It is therefore necessary to create an environment of support and protection for these states so as to supplement the measures which they themselves

are taking. The measures which we have advocated at the bilateral and regional levels assume some acceptance of responsibility by the international community for bolstering the sense of security of small states.

10.8 Within the Commonwealth community there is special scope and opportunity for taking a lead in creating such a protective environment for small states, both by building upon the arrangements that already exist, and by pressing for those incremental changes which, as we have indicated in the Report, can feasibly be achieved in the United Nations system. The defence network for these states would necessarily involve supporting arrangements with larger states and links at the regional level as well as with the broader international community.

10.9 The economic dimension is equally important. Small states need international economic policies which recognise their greater relative exposure to and dependence on external economic circumstances. This situation, combined with bilateral weakness, gives small states a substantial interest in a thriving system of multilateral co-operation. Recent erosion in multi lateralism is therefore of special concern to small states. In the economic sphere, the structural problems encouraged both by smallness and by the instability created by exposure to the international system require special measures, international and national, to promote self-reliant development. Small states also require safety-net measures to protect them against external and internal shocks which tend to fall on them with particular severity.

2. *Enhancing the regional infrastructure*

10.10 Contemporary regional initiatives amongst small states have largely centred on economic and developmental concerns and have only recently begun to focus on the area of security. As a consequence their regional structures are not, for the most part, geared to handling security issues. There is, therefore, much room for further action. Regionalism however is costly, particularly when the constituent countries are islands separated by wide distances. It also requires a strong commitment and a far-sighted approach, as it is a long-term process demanding great flexibility and tolerance as well as imaginative institution-building. Regional endeavours in pursuit of shared developmental objectives are themselves an important contribution to their common security. This provides an additional justification for sustained international financial and technical support for regional efforts.

10.11 In some areas international realities require a readiness to concede a degree of sovereignty as a concomitant to increased welfare for all. Regionalism is indeed one acknowledgement of this. Although

small states, many of which are newly independent, naturally tend to be very protective of their sovereign status, we would urge them to commit themselves to regionalism with vigour and regard it as a reinforcement of their sovereignty as much as it is an instrument for their further development.

10.12 The success of regionalism calls for the creation of a sense of enthusiasm, loyalty and common purpose amongst politicians and public servants, as well as the general public. To achieve this, we see great value in increased interaction, co-operation and consultation at all levels, including the non-governmental, and would emphasise the contribution such an approach could make towards improving participatory politics at the regional level, and in advancing the prospects of collective well-being.

3. Strengthening domestic security

10.13 The contemporary international environment requires that military security should be accorded higher priority by small states than they have so far done, and the major effort must be at the national level. There is much room for improvement in self-help measures, particularly in information and intelligence gathering.

10.14 Over and above this, there is need for imaginative approaches to the military establishment. It is not possible to fix a standard size for a security force in a small state; nor have we been able to study in depth the technical requirements at the military level. This remains an area where much work needs to be done.

10.15 In emphasising security, however, we do not intend to suggest that small states should become overly security conscious. They must beware of diverting a disproportionate share of resources from development to defence. Nothing could be more dangerous in such small entities. It would be all too easy, on the grounds of security, to establish a police state or seige mentality. Our concern rather is that governments should maximise their response capabilities in relation to their genuine security needs and that their peoples should become more aware of the international factors which can impinge in significant ways on their national life. If the 'paradise isle' image of many of these states is to remain credible, their security systems should not become disproportionate to their real needs.

4. Fostering participatory politics and a relevant state structure

10.16 The security of states at the domestic level is obviously tied to internal stability and the level of popular acceptance of the administration and of the legitimacy of the regime. Small states should have an

advantage over larger states on both these counts simply because of their limited size and scale of operations. It is obvious, for instance, that information can be disseminated more quickly and that the state organisation is comparatively easy to manage. Energetic leadership can also rapidly generate efficiency and enthusiasm. But these very characteristics can be used with equal success for ideological manipulation, propagandising, or even oppression.

10.17 Every effort should therefore be made to develop and encourage a participatory style of politics and to create a state structure to facilitate it. Regime legitimacy is central to the survival of democratic institutions and also very pertinent to perceptions, internal and external, of the acceptability of a particular administration. It is also a central consideration in influencing the behaviour of neighbouring, regional or extra-regional states, which could arrogate to themselves the right to intervene in situations of severe domestic disorder and turbulence. This is particularly possible in cases where there might be spill-over effects on other states. In a grouping of small states the accepted principles of legitimacy need to be clearly articulated and agreed upon at both the domestic and regional level so as to establish a workable basis for the maintenance of wider order and stability.

5. *Adopting a flexible and diversified approach to economic development*

10.18 The question of economic viability remains important especially for very small states. Since small states have been a reality within the international community for some time, this is no longer an academic question, and the highest priority should be given to determining how their viability could be bolstered.

10.19 The economies of small states have tended to be dominated by a single or very limited number of economic activities. However, while size is a limiting factor, experience indicates that there are significant possibilities for diversification and a major challenge is to devise a flexible and outward-looking approach to economic development.

10.20 Small states have a relatively greater need for a favourable and stable international economic environment and are powerless to influence adverse global economic movements, which often have a disproportionate impact on them. The international community should therefore assume special responsibilities for their development. Our recommendations are designed to create conditions in which these states can chart their economic destiny with greater effectiveness, predictability and confidence, and to secure greater recognition of their special needs by international institutions.

6. *Exploiting the patrimony of the seas*

10.21 Most small states in the Commonwealth are islands. In the current era of advanced scientific and technological development, the sea has assumed a new importance as possibly the last major frontier for resource exploitation. This provides a unique opportunity for many small island states to gain access to a resource base which can underpin their aspirations for self-reliant development. Conversely, their enlarged area of national jurisdiction has the effect of heightening their strategic relevance, which could project them more centrally into international resource diplomacy and power politics. This increases their responsibilities, underlining the advantages of regional co-operation and the requirement for international assistance. Small states with sovereign responsibilities over large areas of the ocean are a recent phenomenon, whose implications need to be more fully appreciated by these states themselves as well as by the international community. It calls for new perspectives and arrangements and a wide range of work needs to be done to explore the potential opportunities and latent difficulties.

7. *Reinvigorating Development Assistance*

10.22 We consider that there should be expanded assistance, both multilateral and bilateral, necessitated by the need to support specific measures to enable small states to overcome the problems which we have identified as deriving from smallness. The bilateral record of aid to small states has not been poor and should be maintained; however, multilateral provision has a special importance for these states, in large part because it carries less danger of political leverage being applied. One way to ensure that increased resources are made available expeditiously and in a manner responsive to the particular needs and circumstances of small states is to channel a larger proportion of them through regional or sub-regional development banks.

10.23 We believe, however, that aid, whether multilateral or bilateral, if it is to be effective in diminishing the vulnerability of small states and in promoting their development, should be provided in ways which respect their sovereignty and advance their nationally defined objectives. It should aim to strengthen their institutions and to increase the levels of expertise available to them by the use, wherever possible, of indigenous experts. Similarly aid should support regional institutions which small states have established as instruments for their development.

10.24 It is particularly important that security assistance should be sensitive to small states' need to continue to be seen as maintaining their full independence. Any measures which disregard this need and put in jeopardy the authority of the state are likely to provoke national and regional opposition and may thus increase vulnerabilities in the long run.

8. *A selective but active international role for small states*

10.25 It is somewhat ironic that so many small states have chosen to be active participants in international politics at a time when that arena makes much greater and more complex demands than ever before.

10.26 That more small states have not opted out of, or minimised their role in, international affairs is much to their credit and their tenacity and integrity deserve acknowledgement.

10.27 It is clear that small states appreciate the benefit they could derive from effective international institutions. Many however are not making full use of them; some of our recommendations suggest how they might be helped to do so. Small states have to face the fact that a full diplomatic role necessarily poses hard decisions in defining the range and limits of their involvement. Diplomacy is yet another area where scarce human resources prescribe the level and scope of options available to small states. Smallness need not, however, necessarily be a constraint in pursuing creative but judicious initiatives within the international setting. Precisely because small states have neither the multiplicity of interests nor the strategic and political ambitions of larger members, they are in a position to make a unique contribution to promoting international order, and indeed some are already doing so.

10.28 In identifying the arenas for action outlined above we have suggested the broad areas that need to be addressed. Our recommendations that follow set out a range of specific measures which in our view are practicable and can be taken up both by small states and the international community. All, however, depend in the last analysis on the political will to treat small states as credible and sovereign members of the world community and as an enduring feature of contemporary international relations.

10.29 In the light of the complexities of the current international milieu we have not called for any major restructuring or accommodation for small states within the world order. Indeed the implications of what the Commonwealth Secretary-General has characterised as a “retreat from internationalism” have imposed a restraint upon the nature of our recommendations for international action, and have been one reason for the consistent emphasis in our Report on more self-help measures by small states, through regional endeavour wherever feasible.

10.30 We are very conscious that this Report is by no means the last word on the question of the special needs of small states, but we hope that it will help to bring their problems more centrally and urgently to the attention of the international community.