

Got it. Here is the **full Chapter 1 – Introduction**, written to your framework. It’s around 1,000 words, structured with PEEL-C discipline, five-effects framework signposted, and ends with Limit–Implication.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the debate on how small states can influence international security outcomes. It defines what it means to be a small state, explains why legitimacy emerges as the centre of gravity, and explores how myths and national history shape strategic identity. It also sets up Ireland and Israel as “problem cases” for the small-state category, before outlining the five-effects framework — niche specialisation, organisational agility, hybrid leverage, soft power synergy, and legitimacy — which structures the remainder of the essay. The purpose is to set boundaries for the argument and establish the hypothesis that small states are limited in their ability to dictate outcomes but may still shape them conditionally through legitimacy and institutional engagement.

Defining the Small State

The first task is to define what constitutes a small state. Scholars diverge in their approaches. A material definition stresses population, GDP, and military capacity as determinants of size (Waltz 1979). On this basis, states such as Ireland, Denmark, or Qatar are small because they cannot project power unilaterally. A perceptual definition stresses how states see themselves and are seen by others (Thorhallsson 2012). From this perspective, a state can be small in strategic imagination even if it has moderate resources, as with Finland during the Cold War. A systemic role definition stresses position within the international order (Keohane 1969). On this basis, small states are those that cannot shape structures but must adapt to them.

These definitional strands matter because they shape the scope of the debate. Material definitions highlight the limits on coercion. Perceptual definitions highlight reputational resources. Systemic definitions highlight dependence on institutions. For the Defence Forces and Irish policymakers, the systemic perspective is the most relevant: Ireland’s influence derives not from raw capacity but from positioning within multilateral institutions.

Limit. Definitions are often applied inconsistently, producing overlapping categories. Implication: To remain credible, any analysis of small states must state clearly which definition is applied and why.

Legitimacy as the Centre of Gravity

Turning to the core hypothesis, legitimacy emerges as the true centre of gravity for small states. Military means are marginal: token contributions cannot alter balance of power. However, legitimacy allows small states to frame actions as consistent with norms and institutions. This is visible in Ireland's participation in United Nations peacekeeping. Though materially limited, Ireland gained disproportionate recognition by presenting its forces as impartial and committed to collective security (Rothstein 1968).

Legitimacy functions in two ways. Externally, it amplifies small-state voice within institutions. Internally, it sustains domestic support for engagement abroad. Bailes and Thorhallsson (2013) show that legitimacy derives from alignment with international law, credible delivery of commitments, and consistent political narratives. Without legitimacy, small-state influence collapses into symbolism. With it, even modest contributions can shape debates.

Limit. Legitimacy depends on perception and can erode rapidly if rhetoric diverges from practice.

Implication: For the Irish Defence Forces, the preservation of legitimacy requires constant adaptation to shifting international expectations.

Myths, History, and Strategic Identity

National myths and history further shape small-state strategies. Ireland's wartime neutrality under Éamon de Valera has long been mythologised as a moral stand. Fanning (2015) demonstrates that this neutrality was framed as independence from Britain, while concealing material weakness. Ayiotis (2023) argues that Irish neutrality evolved through phases — necessity, expediency, convenience — each shaped by external pressures rather than moral choice. Fleming shows that Ireland's post-war policy was essentially hedging, seeking to balance neutrality with selective engagement in UN peacekeeping.

These interpretations highlight that neutrality, often claimed as principle, was in fact a realist adaptation to survival pressures. Mythologised narratives, however, created a strategic identity that endures. Neutrality became part of Irish self-understanding, sustaining legitimacy abroad and reinforcing domestic support for limited defence spending. This illustrates how myths and history can lock in strategies that may be at odds with structural realities.

Limit. Historical interpretation risks imposing coherence on what were pragmatic and inconsistent policies.

Implication: When using history to frame current strategy, policymakers must separate myth from structural necessity.

Ireland and Israel as Problem Cases

Ireland and Israel present challenges to the small-state category. Ireland masks realist hedging behind the rhetoric of neutrality. Israel, by contrast, blends small size with hard realism and alliance shelter. Both cases show that smallness is not a uniform condition.

Ireland's neutrality gave it reputational capital, but this was dependent on UN legitimacy. As UN peacekeeping declines, Ireland faces erosion of its niche. This raises the question whether neutrality without credible contributions still generates influence.

Israel demonstrates how small states may escape limits through exceptional strategies. Despite limited population and territory, Israel leverages nuclear deterrence and U.S. shelter to exert coercive influence. Hirst (2010) shows how Israel defies the typical small-state profile by combining hard realism with great-power backing. This suggests that the small-state category must be applied carefully: some states are small in size but large in coercive capacity due to external alignments.

Limit. Treating Israel and Ireland as outliers risks diluting the analytical clarity of the small-state category.

Implication: Comparative frameworks must acknowledge exceptional cases while focusing on general patterns of constraint and conditional influence.

The Five-Effects Framework

To structure the analysis, this essay applies a five-effects framework. First, niche specialisation: small states exploit specific roles such as peacekeeping, cyber defence, or mediation. Second, organisational agility: small states can reform institutions more rapidly than large powers, as seen in the Commission on the Defence Forces (2022) reforms. Third, hybrid leverage: small states use interdependence, networks, and regulatory influence to amplify voice, particularly in areas like cyber and AI (Raska 2022). Fourth, soft power synergy: small states combine diplomacy, identity, and neutrality to enhance credibility (Nye 2008). Fifth, legitimacy: the ultimate centre of gravity, sustaining all other effects.

This framework allows systematic interrogation of both the positive case for small-state influence and the critical counter-arguments. It links theory to practice, aligning international scholarship with Defence Forces challenges. It also provides continuity across chapters: Chapter 2 applies the framework positively, Chapter 3 critically, and Chapter 4 tests it against comparative cases.

Limit. The five-effects framework risks overstating coherence across diverse cases.
Implication: The framework must be applied critically, highlighting fragility as well as promise.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has defined the small-state category, highlighted legitimacy as the centre of gravity, and shown how myths and national history shape strategic identity. It has introduced Ireland and Israel as problem cases and outlined the five-effects framework to be applied throughout the essay. This matters because without conceptual clarity, analysis of small states risks collapsing into description. The next chapter examines the reasons supporting the hypothesis, showing how the five effects can generate conditional influence for small states.

Limit. Evidence in this chapter is drawn only from the sources provided and excludes broader small-state literature.

Implication: For the essay to reach distinction level, further integration of comparative scholarship will be necessary.

Here is **Chapter 2 – Reasons For the Proposal**, written in full (~1,050 words). It applies the **five-effects framework positively**, follows PEEL-C discipline, keeps British English, and closes with Limit–Implication.

Chapter 2 – Reasons For the Proposal

This chapter applies the five-effects framework positively to show how small states can exercise conditional influence in international security. It argues that niche specialisation, organisational agility, hybrid leverage, soft power synergy, and legitimacy provide small states with tools to amplify their limited material capacity. These mechanisms are illustrated with examples drawn from Ireland and comparator states such as Estonia and Qatar. The purpose is to demonstrate that, under specific conditions, small states can influence security debates and outcomes in ways disproportionate to their size.

Niche Specialisation

Small states can leverage niche specialisation to carve out roles valued by others. This concept is evident in Ireland's long-standing focus on United Nations peacekeeping. By contributing disciplined, impartial units to missions such as UNIFIL, Ireland earned

international credibility and secured a diplomatic platform far greater than its material weight would suggest (Rothstein 1968). Such contributions reinforced the perception of Ireland as a neutral peacekeeper, sustaining legitimacy at home and abroad.

Other states illustrate the same effect. Estonia has developed a cyber defence niche since the 2007 cyberattacks, hosting NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. This role generates international visibility and integrates Estonia into broader strategic debates. Qatar has used mediation and financial resources to build a niche in regional diplomacy, positioning itself as a broker in conflicts where larger powers lack neutrality.

Nevertheless, Flynn (2019) cautions against tokenism. He argues that influence requires contributions that cross a threshold of credibility. A single platoon cannot shift outcomes, but a reinforced company or battalion may. Ireland's contributions risk falling below this threshold as resources decline. Despite this, niche specialisation remains one of the clearest ways small states can make a mark in collective security.

Limit. Niches are vulnerable to erosion through technological change or political shifts. Implication: The Defence Forces must continually reassess niches to ensure they remain credible and valued.

Organisational Agility

Small states can also adapt more quickly than larger powers. Organisational agility is evident in Ireland's defence reforms. The High-Level Action Plan (2022) responded to the Commission on the Defence Forces report with proposals to restructure forces, reform governance, and modernise capabilities. While implementation challenges remain, the speed of review and the willingness to consider radical change contrasted with the inertia common in larger militaries.

Estonia again provides an instructive example. After the 2007 cyberattacks, Estonia rapidly developed a whole-of-society cyber defence model, integrating civilian volunteers with military structures. This agility allowed Estonia to set the agenda in NATO debates, despite its small size.

Agility also flows from political culture. Metz (2000) argues that states that suffer defeat or face existential shocks often innovate faster. For small states, the margin for error is narrow, which encourages experimentation. Ireland's ability to adapt to shrinking peacekeeping demand by investing in EU security roles shows agility, even if still incomplete.

Limit. Organisational agility can be constrained by resource scarcity and cultural inertia, as Murray (2011) argues.

Implication: For small states, agility is an opportunity but not guaranteed; leadership must sustain reform momentum despite institutional resistance.

Hybrid Leverage

Hybrid leverage refers to the use of interdependence, networks, and regulatory influence to shape outcomes indirectly. Small states cannot dictate rules, but they can exploit interconnectedness to amplify voice. Raska (2022) highlights how cyber and artificial intelligence offer asymmetric multipliers. For Estonia, integration into NATO cyber policy exemplifies this. For Ireland, regulatory power within the European Union offers leverage in areas such as data protection and financial oversight.

Constructivist perspectives emphasise that norms and narratives amplify hybrid strategies. Small states can frame their regulatory or technological contributions as global public goods. Ireland's role in advancing internet governance norms illustrates how even modest interventions can shape debate. Nye (2008) shows that hybrid strategies combine elements of hard and soft power to produce synergy.

Realists caution that hybrid moves may provoke escalation by great powers. However, when aligned with institutional frameworks, hybrid leverage offers small states a way to be agenda-setters rather than passive rule-takers. For the Defence Forces, developing cyber capacity could provide a hybrid niche, moving influence beyond traditional peacekeeping.

Limit. Hybrid strategies depend on technological investment and may overreach capacity.

Implication: Ireland should target regulatory and cyber niches carefully, avoiding overextension while maximising visibility.

Soft Power Synergy

Soft power synergy combines diplomacy, identity, neutrality, and institutions to enhance credibility. Nye (2008) argues that the ability to attract and persuade is as important as coercion. For small states, soft power is often their most abundant resource. Ireland has long cultivated a reputation as a neutral peacekeeper, a promoter of disarmament, and a champion of international law. This reputation increases its influence in multilateral forums.

Tonra (1999, 2011) demonstrates how EU membership amplified Ireland's diplomatic reach. Europeanisation allowed Irish diplomats to speak with a collective voice, magnifying their influence. Bailes and Thorhallsson (2013) emphasise that institutional

alignment makes small-state claims of neutrality more credible, embedding soft power within structures.

Qatar's cultural diplomacy illustrates the same effect. By investing in education and media, Qatar projected influence far beyond its size. Denmark has leveraged development aid to shape debates on humanitarian policy. These cases show that soft power synergy enables small states to frame issues, set agendas, and build coalitions.

Limit. Soft power is vulnerable to contradictions between rhetoric and behaviour.

Implication: Ireland must ensure that neutrality, once central to its soft power, remains credible in light of EU integration and overflight controversies.

Legitimacy as the Centre of Gravity

Legitimacy is the decisive effect because it sustains all others. Without legitimacy, niches lack recognition, agility appears opportunistic, hybrid strategies provoke suspicion, and soft power collapses into propaganda. Thorhallsson's shelter theory shows that legitimacy often derives from alliance structures. Keohane (1969) emphasises that institutions confer legitimacy on small states by embedding their participation within accepted frameworks.

For Ireland, legitimacy has been rooted in consistent UN engagement. Participation in peacekeeping created a perception of impartiality and solidarity with collective security. Even when material contributions were modest, legitimacy amplified their significance. Legitimacy also sustained domestic support for defence policy, allowing limited investment to be politically justified.

Constructivist scholars such as Wendt and Finnemore highlight that legitimacy is socially constructed. It depends not only on law but on shared norms. Small states that align with prevailing norms can extend influence beyond their weight. For Ireland, legitimacy remains the ultimate centre of gravity, though increasingly fragile as peacekeeping declines and EU integration deepens.

Limit. Legitimacy is contingent on perception and external recognition, not internal claims.

Implication: To sustain influence, Ireland must anchor legitimacy in new niches, such as cyber security or regulatory governance, rather than relying solely on peacekeeping.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has applied the five-effects framework positively to show how small states can influence international security. Niche specialisation allows them to contribute valued capabilities. Organisational agility enables rapid reform. Hybrid leverage exploits

interdependence and regulation. Soft power synergy amplifies reputation and credibility. Legitimacy, as the centre of gravity, sustains all other effects. Together these mechanisms show that small states are not irrelevant actors but can exercise conditional influence when contributions are credible and consistent with norms.

Limit. The analysis has emphasised success stories and downplayed failures.

Implication: The next chapter will apply the framework critically, testing whether these mechanisms can withstand realist scepticism, structural decline in peacekeeping, and the erosion of neutrality.

Here is **Chapter 3 – Reasons Against the Proposal**, written in full (~1,050 words). It applies the **five-effects framework critically**, integrates realist and sceptical perspectives, and closes with Limit–Implication.

Chapter 3 – Reasons Against the Proposal

This chapter applies the five-effects framework critically to test the limits of small-state influence. It argues that niche specialisation risks tokenism, organisational agility is often constrained, hybrid leverage can provoke escalation, soft power is fragile, and legitimacy is unstable. Realist scholars such as Waltz, Mearsheimer, and Gray stress that small states remain structurally marginal. Evidence from Ireland, Israel, and the wider peacekeeping context suggests that the promise of influence may collapse into symbolism, dependency, or irrelevance.

Niche Specialisation under Strain

Although niche specialisation can amplify small-state influence, its effectiveness depends on credibility. Flynn (2019) argues that small-state peacekeeping must cross a threshold of scale and capability to matter. A reinforced company with air and maritime enablers may influence, but a platoon contribution cannot. Ireland's peacekeeping footprint has declined to the point where its niche risks appearing tokenistic. Without scale, the perception of reliability erodes.

Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara (2024) show that United Nations peacekeeping itself is in structural decline. With the Security Council paralysed, missions are underfunded and politically constrained. Even states that maintain niches cannot translate them into meaningful influence if the institution underpinning them is hollowed out. This undermines Ireland's traditional pathway to legitimacy.

By contrast, Israel demonstrates how small states can defy the niche logic by pursuing coercive strategies under great-power shelter. Its nuclear deterrent and U.S. backing

enable influence that no niche contribution could provide. This underlines Waltz's (1979) neorealist point: structure and material power ultimately determine outcomes.

Limit. The critique risks conflating the decline of peacekeeping with the impossibility of all niches.

Implication: Small states must innovate new niches rather than relying on those tied to declining institutions.

The Limits of Organisational Agility

Organisational agility is often presented as an advantage of small states, but it is constrained by culture and resources. Murray (2011) stresses that military organisations resist doctrinal change, regardless of size. Even when reforms are attempted, vested interests slow implementation. The Irish High-Level Action Plan (2022) is ambitious, but recruitment shortfalls and limited investment have already delayed delivery.

Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism highlights that even adaptive reforms cannot overcome the pressures of great-power competition. Small states may modernise, but their strategic environment is set by larger actors. For example, Estonia's cyber reforms drew attention, yet their deterrent effect relies entirely on NATO guarantees. Without alliance backing, organisational agility would not suffice to deter adversaries.

Metz's optimism about adaptation after defeat must also be tempered. Small states may innovate, but they also lack redundancy. A failed reform can cripple their limited forces. Organisational agility therefore risks becoming a double-edged sword: potential for influence exists, but fragility increases.

Limit. This critique assumes inertia dominates, while some small states do innovate successfully.

Implication: Ireland must weigh reform ambitions against realistic resource ceilings and external structural constraints.

Hybrid Leverage and the Risk of Escalation

Hybrid leverage through interdependence and regulatory power can be a source of influence, but it also carries risks. Betts (2015) argues that the misuse of technology and networks often creates vulnerabilities greater than advantages. For small states, adopting hybrid tactics may expose them to retaliation by larger powers. Estonia's cyber role raises its profile but also makes it a target.

Realist sceptics stress that small states cannot set the rules of competition.

Mearsheimer (2001) argues that great powers respond aggressively to attempts by small states to shape norms or regulations when core interests are at stake. Small states may

use EU regulatory platforms to amplify their voice, but if these challenge U.S. or Chinese interests, the risk of coercion rises.

Ireland's potential to use EU cyber or regulatory niches is therefore double-edged. Influence may increase in Brussels, but dependence on U.S. technology and markets constrains how far such leverage can go. Hybrid strategies may create visibility but not sustainable influence.

Limit. Not all hybrid strategies provoke escalation; some quietly embed influence.

Implication: The Defence Forces must pursue hybrid niches cautiously, aligning them with EU structures to avoid unilateral exposure.

Fragility of Soft Power

Soft power is often presented as the strength of small states, yet it is fragile and conditional. Realists argue that outcomes are ultimately driven by force, not attraction. Waltz (1979) insists that military and economic capacity determine the hierarchy of influence. Gray (2005, 2018) highlights continuity over novelty: soft power cannot substitute for hard capabilities when interests clash.

Ireland's reputation as a neutral peacekeeper illustrates the fragility of soft power. Neutrality is undermined by participation in EU security initiatives and reliance on U.S. overflight permissions. These contradictions erode credibility. Tonra (2011) shows that Europeanisation amplified Irish diplomacy, but this amplification cuts both ways: integration dilutes claims of neutrality.

Qatar's cultural diplomacy also illustrates fragility. While projecting influence through education and media, Qatar remains dependent on U.S. military shelter. When under pressure from neighbours, soft power alone offered no protection. Small states can frame debates but cannot resist coercion through soft power alone.

Limit. Soft power may not shape outcomes directly but can still condition debates.

Implication: Ireland must accept that soft power cannot substitute for credible material contributions if influence is to endure.

Legitimacy under Pressure

Legitimacy, the supposed centre of gravity, is also vulnerable. Realists argue that legitimacy without capability is hollow. Gray (2005) insists that strategy must serve political ends; without credible means, legitimacy collapses into performance.

For Ireland, legitimacy derived from UN peacekeeping. As peacekeeping declines, so too does the platform sustaining legitimacy. Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara (2024) show that

UN missions are shrinking in scope and credibility. Without this anchor, Ireland risks losing the recognition that underpinned its diplomatic voice.

Israel presents the opposite case. Hirst (2010) describes Israel as small in size but realist in strategy, sheltering under U.S. power. Its legitimacy is contested, yet its influence is undeniable because of coercive capacity. This suggests that legitimacy alone may not be sufficient; material power and alliances remain decisive.

Ayiotis (2023), Fanning (2015), and Fleming show that Ireland's neutrality has always been a form of hedging, not pure principle. By framing realist adaptation as moral identity, Ireland sustained legitimacy, but this legitimacy was built on myth. Cottey (2022) adds that underinvestment and hedging persist even after systemic shocks such as the Ukraine war. These continuities suggest that Ireland's legitimacy may be more fragile than often assumed.

Limit. The critique risks understating the residual power of legitimacy even when material capacity is low.

Implication: Ireland must diversify the sources of its legitimacy, anchoring it in EU and regulatory roles rather than relying solely on peacekeeping myths.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has applied the five-effects framework critically to show the limits of small-state influence. Niche specialisation risks tokenism and is undermined by the decline of UN peacekeeping. Organisational agility is constrained by resources and structural dependence. Hybrid leverage may provoke escalation by larger powers. Soft power is fragile when contradicted by behaviour or when hard power dominates. Legitimacy, though central, is vulnerable to erosion and myth. Together these critiques support the realist view that small states cannot dictate outcomes and may struggle to sustain even conditional influence.

Limit. This analysis may overemphasise structural constraints at the expense of agency.

Implication: The next chapter tests these debates against comparative cases, weighing whether small states can still reconcile fragility with influence.

Here is **Chapter 4 – Back-up / Present Argument**, written in full (~1,080 words). It tests the framework against comparative cases (Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Qatar) and balances positive and negative readings.

Chapter 4 – Back-up Facts / Present Argument

This chapter tests the five-effects framework against comparative case studies. It considers Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, and Qatar, alongside lessons from Israel,

to examine how small states balance promise and fragility. The purpose is to demonstrate that while small states can exercise conditional influence, their success depends on context, institutions, and credibility. These cases reveal the tensions between realist scepticism and institutionalist optimism, particularly as traditional niches such as UN peacekeeping collapse.

Ireland: From Neutrality to Performative Liberalism

Ireland illustrates both the potential and fragility of small-state influence. During the Second World War, Éamon de Valera presented neutrality as moral independence. Fanning (2015) shows that this was a realist survival strategy, necessary to preserve sovereignty in the face of overwhelming British power. Ayiotis (2023) traces neutrality's evolution from necessity through expediency to convenience, highlighting its adaptive rather than principled nature. Fleming emphasises that Ireland's policy was essentially hedging, aligning discreetly with Western interests while sustaining an image of independence.

This historical neutrality provided Ireland with legitimacy in the UN era. By contributing to peacekeeping from 1958, Ireland built a reputation for impartiality. Rothstein (1968) highlights that Ireland's vote and voice within the UN were amplified because of this legitimacy. Yet, as Flynn (2019) warns, tokenistic contributions cannot sustain influence. With Ireland's peacekeeping footprint shrinking, the risk is that neutrality collapses into symbolism.

Cottey (2022) shows that underinvestment continues even after systemic shocks such as the Ukraine war. Neutrality, once Ireland's soft power asset, is now strained by EU integration, cyber vulnerabilities, and reliance on U.S. overflight permissions. Ireland's trajectory suggests that legitimacy remains central but increasingly fragile.

Limit. The Irish case is unusually dependent on UN legitimacy, which is itself in decline. Implication: Ireland must pivot from peacekeeping to new niches, such as EU regulatory power or cyber security, if influence is to endure.

Estonia: Cyber Niche and NATO Shelter

Estonia demonstrates how a small state can innovate by exploiting new domains. After the 2007 cyberattacks, Estonia invested heavily in cyber defence, establishing NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. This niche granted Estonia visibility and influence in alliance debates. Organisational agility enabled rapid reform, integrating civilian volunteers into national cyber defence.

Yet Estonia's influence remains conditional. Without NATO shelter, its cyber niche would lack deterrent effect. Waltz's (1979) structural realism suggests that Estonia's niche matters only because it is embedded in great-power guarantees. Hybrid leverage may increase visibility but also exposes Estonia to retaliation. Its influence is real but fragile.

Limit. Estonia's cyber role is highly specialised and may not be replicable for all small states.

Implication: Small states can innovate, but only when niches are institutionally embedded in credible alliances.

Finland: Hedging and NATO Accession

Finland offers a different trajectory. Long regarded as a model of small-state neutrality, Finland balanced Soviet pressure through careful hedging. Thorhallsson (2012) stresses that perceptual size matters: Finland was seen as a small state but acted with caution to preserve sovereignty.

The Ukraine war shifted this calculus. Finland abandoned neutrality and joined NATO in 2023. This demonstrates the limits of neutrality as a strategy when structural conditions change. Hedging was sustainable under Cold War bipolarity, but less so in an era of Russian aggression.

Keohane (1969) argues that institutions amplify small-state voice. For Finland, NATO accession embeds influence in collective structures. Yet this also dilutes independence. Legitimacy derived from neutrality is replaced by alliance solidarity. Influence is sustained but transformed.

Limit. Finland's trajectory is shaped by geography and proximity to Russia, limiting broader generalisation.

Implication: Hedging may provide temporary influence, but systemic shocks can force small states into new alignments.

Denmark: Niche within NATO and EU

Denmark illustrates the potential of consistent niche contributions within alliances. By specialising in maritime security and Arctic policy, Denmark has secured influence in NATO and EU debates. Unlike Ireland, Denmark embraced alliance membership early, embedding its legitimacy in collective frameworks.

Tonra (2011) shows that Europeanisation amplified small-state diplomacy. Denmark's consistent contributions reinforced its reputation as a reliable partner. However,

reliance on alliances also constrains independence. Waltz (1979) would argue that Denmark adapts within structures but does not shape them.

Denmark demonstrates that small states can sustain influence when niches are credible and embedded. Yet it also confirms realist critiques: such influence is conditional, not autonomous.

Limit. Denmark's model depends on alliance membership, which Ireland lacks.

Implication: For Ireland, the Danish case shows what is possible if neutrality evolves into deeper EU or NATO integration.

Qatar: Mediation and Wealth

Qatar exemplifies how wealth can buy soft power and diplomatic influence. By investing in media, education, and mediation, Qatar positioned itself as a broker in regional conflicts. Bailes and Thorhallsson (2013) highlight how such niches can amplify small-state visibility.

However, Qatar's influence depends on U.S. military shelter. During the 2017 Gulf crisis, soft power assets could not prevent coercive pressure from neighbours. Only the U.S. base at Al Udeid deterred escalation. This confirms Gray's (2005) argument that material power remains decisive.

Qatar illustrates both the promise and fragility of small-state strategies. Wealth provides leverage, but without great-power shelter, survival would be at risk.

Limit. Qatar's resource wealth is not replicable for most small states.

Implication: Soft power strategies must be anchored in structural protection to avoid collapse under pressure.

Israel: The Exceptional Case

Israel challenges the small-state category altogether. Hirst (2010) shows that Israel, though small in size, exerts influence through nuclear deterrence and U.S. alliance shelter. Its strategy is rooted in hard realism. Legitimacy is contested, but coercive capacity sustains influence.

For Ireland, the Israeli case is instructive because it demonstrates what small states cannot do. Without nuclear weapons or great-power sponsorship, coercive influence is not feasible. Waltz's (1979) structural realism is confirmed: only material power and alliances guarantee outcomes.

Limit. Israel is exceptional and cannot be taken as representative of small-state strategies.

Implication: Israel's case must be treated as an outlier rather than a model for Ireland.

Synthesis of Cases

These cases reveal a dual pattern. On the one hand, niche specialisation, organisational agility, hybrid leverage, and soft power can amplify small-state influence. Estonia's cyber role, Denmark's alliance niches, and Qatar's mediation illustrate this. On the other hand, structural dependence, fragility of legitimacy, and the decline of institutions constrain such influence. Ireland's neutrality erodes, Finland is forced into NATO, and Qatar survives only through U.S. shelter.

The five-effects framework therefore holds, but only conditionally. Each effect is double-edged. Niches can erode, agility can fail, hybrid leverage can provoke, soft power can collapse, and legitimacy can wither. The key lesson is that small states can influence, but they cannot dictate. Their influence is conditional on alignment with institutions and recognition by larger powers.

Limit. Case selection emphasises European and Middle Eastern examples, omitting other small states such as Singapore or South Africa.

Implication: Broader comparative research is needed to refine the framework and test its generalisability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has tested the five-effects framework against comparative cases. Ireland shows how neutrality provided legitimacy but risks decline. Estonia illustrates innovation through cyber but dependence on NATO. Finland demonstrates the limits of hedging under systemic shocks. Denmark shows the benefits of embedded niches in alliances. Qatar reveals the fragility of soft power without shelter. Israel, as an outlier, confirms that small states cannot escape structural constraints without exceptional strategies.

What was covered: comparative evidence testing both sides of the debate. Why it matters: it shows that small-state influence is conditional, fragile, and context-dependent. What comes next: the conclusion considers whether legitimacy endures as the true centre of gravity and whether Ireland can adapt its strategy to sustain influence.

Limit. Evidence is drawn from a narrow set of cases and does not include quantitative testing.

Implication: The framework must be supplemented by further research into non-European and non-Middle Eastern small states.

Here is **Chapter 5 – Conclusion**, written in full (~870 words). It wraps the essay, addresses the title directly, and follows your framework with Limit–Implication discipline.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This essay set out to evaluate the extent to which small states can influence international security outcomes through military and non-military means. It began by defining what is meant by a small state, drawing on material, perceptual, and systemic perspectives. It then established legitimacy as the centre of gravity for small states, particularly when military means are marginal. Chapters Two and Three applied the five-effects framework both positively and critically, while Chapter Four tested these arguments against comparative cases. This conclusion now draws together the findings, restates the hypothesis, and identifies what lessons emerge for Ireland and other small states.

The Extent of Influence

Small states cannot dictate international security outcomes. Their material limitations in population, GDP, and military capacity make coercive or controlling strategies infeasible (Waltz 1979; Gray 2005). They lack strategic reach, sustained expeditionary power, and credible unilateral deterrents. Ireland, Denmark, and Finland cannot alter the balance of power independently. This confirms the first part of the hypothesis: small states are limited by their small nature and cannot dictate policies unilaterally.

Yet the analysis also shows that small states are not irrelevant. Through conditional strategies, they can shape debates, frame norms, and amplify their voice. Niche specialisation, organisational agility, hybrid leverage, soft power synergy, and legitimacy provide avenues of influence. Estonia's cyber defence, Qatar's mediation, and Ireland's peacekeeping illustrate how small states can create visibility and gain recognition. However, these forms of influence remain context-dependent. They are effective only when embedded in institutions, aligned with larger powers, and sustained by credibility.

Limit. The extent of influence has been measured in qualitative rather than quantitative terms.

Implication: Further research should assess how often small states have measurably shifted outcomes in practice.

Legitimacy as Centre of Gravity

Across all cases, legitimacy emerged as the decisive factor. Without legitimacy, niches lack recognition, soft power collapses into propaganda, and hybrid strategies provoke suspicion. With legitimacy, even modest contributions can shape international debates. This was true of Ireland's long record in UN peacekeeping, where impartiality and consistency amplified influence disproportionate to size (Rothstein 1968; Bailes & Thorhallsson 2013).

Yet legitimacy is fragile. Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara (2024) show that UN peacekeeping is in decline, eroding the very institution that sustained Irish legitimacy. Contradictions between neutrality and EU integration further undermine credibility. Ayiotis (2023), Fanning (2015), and Fleming highlight that Ireland's neutrality was always a form of hedging, not pure principle. Legitimacy, once Ireland's greatest asset, risks collapsing into symbolic performance.

The implication is clear: legitimacy endures as the true centre of gravity but requires constant renewal. Small states cannot rely on past reputations; they must adapt to new institutional contexts and threats. For Ireland, this may mean shifting legitimacy from peacekeeping to cyber security, regulatory governance, or climate security niches within the EU.

Limit. Legitimacy has been treated as unitary, though in practice it varies across audiences.

Implication: Ireland must tailor legitimacy strategies differently for domestic, EU, and UN contexts.

Lessons from Comparative Cases

The comparative cases reinforce these conclusions. Estonia shows that niches can be innovative and valuable, but only when sheltered by alliances. Finland demonstrates that neutrality and hedging can provide temporary influence but collapse under systemic shocks, leading to NATO accession. Denmark illustrates that sustained niche contributions within alliances can preserve influence, though at the cost of autonomy. Qatar reveals how wealth can buy visibility but cannot replace great-power shelter. Israel, as an outlier, confirms that small states cannot escape structural constraints without exceptional resources or alliances.

Together these lessons suggest that the five-effects framework captures both the promise and fragility of small-state influence. Niche specialisation and agility provide opportunities, but they are double-edged. Hybrid leverage and soft power can increase visibility but also vulnerability. Legitimacy sustains influence but is easily eroded.

Limit. The case studies emphasised European and Middle Eastern states, excluding Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Implication: Broader geographical research is required to test whether these lessons are universal or region-specific.

Ireland's Trajectory

Ireland's trajectory from de Valera's wartime neutrality to today's performative liberalism illustrates the conditional nature of small-state influence. Neutrality began as a realist survival strategy masked as principle (Fanning 2015; Ayiotis 2023). It evolved into a source of legitimacy through UN peacekeeping, amplifying Ireland's international voice. Yet as peacekeeping declines, neutrality risks becoming a myth without substance. Cottey (2022) shows that underinvestment persists, even after systemic shocks. The Defence Forces face declining credibility unless niches are renewed.

This trajectory suggests that Ireland's influence has always been contingent. It could shape debates only when legitimacy was sustained by credible contributions. As legitimacy erodes, influence risks shrinking into symbolism. The lesson is that Ireland must redefine its niches within EU and global frameworks, aligning military and non-military means with consistent legitimacy strategies.

Limit. Ireland's case is heavily shaped by its unique neutrality narrative.

Implication: Other small states should adapt the framework cautiously, ensuring that their own histories and identities are accounted for.

Future Research Gaps

Three research gaps remain. First, hedging requires further theorisation. Ayiotis (2023) and Fleming suggest that hedging, rather than neutrality, best captures small-state strategies. Developing hedging theory could explain how small states balance survival, legitimacy, and influence.

Second, alliance dependency requires more systematic study. Shelter theory highlights dependence on great powers, but comparative work is needed to assess whether alliances constrain or amplify small-state agency over time.

Third, the small-state category itself requires refinement. Israel, Iraq, Syria, and others blur the boundaries between small and middle powers. New frameworks may be needed to capture states that are small in material terms but large in coercive or disruptive capacity.

Limit. These gaps reflect limits in the provided sources, which may not cover wider theoretical debates.

Implication: Addressing them would raise the analysis to publishable standard, ensuring both theoretical innovation and practical relevance.

Final Judgement

The central hypothesis is confirmed with modification. Small states are limited by their size and cannot dictate outcomes unilaterally. However, they can influence conditionally through institutions, alliances, and soft power. Legitimacy remains the centre of gravity, sustaining all other effects, but it is fragile and requires renewal. Ireland's trajectory illustrates both the potential and fragility of small-state influence. Comparative cases confirm that influence is real but conditional.

Taken together, this essay shows that small states can shape international security outcomes, but only within limits. They must invest in credible niches, sustain legitimacy, and embed strategies in institutions and alliances. Influence is not guaranteed; it is earned, conditional, and fragile.

Limit. The essay relies on qualitative sources and does not test influence empirically.
Implication: Future research should measure small-state impact quantitatively, assessing when and how influence is realised.