Review: Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics
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Lilliputians' Dilemmas:

Small States in International Politics

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Liska, George. *Alliances and the Third World.* Studies in International Affairs, No. 5. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968. ix + 61 pp., $1.75.

Osgood, Robert E. *Alliances and American Foreign Policy.* Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968. x + 171 pp., $6.50.

Rothstein, Robert L. *Alliances and Small Powers.* New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968. xi + 331 pp., $10.00.

Vital, David. *The Inequality of States.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1967. 198 pp., $4.80.

ONE of the most striking features of contemporary international politics has been the conspicuousness of small states in an era marked by increasing military disparity between Great and Small. Using the United Nations as a forum and a force and claiming "nonalignment" as an important diplomatic innovation, small states have risen to prominence if not to power. With their emergence nonalignment has become a serious focus of scholarly research; some writers have considered it an institution of great importance.[1] Yet with the exception of Annette Baker Fox's pioneering work

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[1] J. W. Burton, *International Relations: A General Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) constitutes the most enthusiastic long discussion of nonalignment. See also, for more critical commentary, Cecil V. Crabb, Jr., *The Elephants and the Grass: A Study of Nonalignment* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965); and Laurence W. Martin (ed.), *Neutralism and Nonalignment: The New States in World Affairs* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger [for the Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University], 1962).

on five small states in World War II[2] very little systematic work has been done on small states' foreign policies. The discussion of nonalignment has sometimes seemed to be a substitute for the comparative analysis of specific policies and dilemmas of small powers.

If the books here reviewed do not provide the systematic comparative analysis for which we may eventually hope, they have escaped from the "nonalignment trap"—the tendency to study a vague category, used by policymakers for their own purposes, rather than to analyze the policies and decisions themselves.[3] Not only have these authors studied problems rather than a cliché; they have often considered the same problems. All are interested in alliances and nonalignment as foreign policy alternatives; all deal with nuclear proliferation, three of them at length. Vital and Rothstein contend with the problem of defining small states and determining whether they behave in distinctive ways; Osgood, Liska, and Rothstein all write extensively on the functions of alliances. This convergence of concerns makes a topically organized review article possible. We will begin with the problem of definition.

I

Robert Rothstein is concerned only with a limited category of small powers: those that "feel that they are potentially or actually threatened by the policies of the Great Powers" (p. 4). For these states he seeks to establish "one central proposition: that Small Powers are something more than or different from Great Powers writ small" (p. 1). This leads him (p. 23) to reject a definition of "small power" based purely on "objective or tangible criteria" since such a definition

> ends by aligning states along an extended power spectrum so that it can only be said that B is stronger than A but weaker than C. The result is that the significance of the categories "Great" and "Small" is effectually denied.

Yet,

> if there is a unique category of states called Small Powers, which possess distinct patterns of behavior, then it is clearly inadequate to describe them merely in terms of being less powerful.

(P. 23.) Thus, Rothstein is quite aware that if he is to argue (pp. 23–24) that Great Powers and small powers "develop behavioral patterns which decisively separate them from non-group members," he must provide a clear definition by which states can be categorized.

[2] Annette Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959).

[3] For a very critical view of nonalignment as a policy see Francis Low-Beer, "The Concept of Neutralism," *American Political Science Review,* June 1964 (Vol. 58, No. 2), pp. 383–391.

Rothstein therefore develops a definition (p. 29) with a psychological as well as a material dimension:

> *A Small Power is a state which recognizes that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognized by the other states involved in international politics.*

Rothstein illustrates the distinction he is drawing by contrasting the situations of Great Powers and small powers in otherwise similar situations of threat. Rothstein points to three unique aspects of the small power's situation: 1) Outside help is required; 2) the state has a narrow margin of safety, with little time for correcting mistakes; 3) the state's leaders see its weakness as essentially unalterable.

Rothstein does not specify which states in the contemporary world would *not* be small powers under this definition, but it would seem that only the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the People's Republic of China could possibly qualify. Certainly, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan all rely primarily on American protection for their security; for all four outside help is required when they are threatened by a Great Power and the margin of safety is narrow. And except for proponents of nuclear egalitarianism such as General Pierre Gallois few believe that any but the superpowers could alter a situation of military inferiority vis-à-vis the strongest power.

Yet Rothstein elsewhere mentions that "very few would deny" that West Germany and France are Great Powers; presumably, he would consider the United Kingdom to be one as well (p. 21). Rothstein has constructed a psychological-material definition taking into account the national "state of mind"; yet he continues throughout his book to rely implicitly on a conventional division between "small" and "great." The explicit definition regards almost all states in the current international system as "small," although it may serve well for earlier periods; the implicit definition rests either on traditional judgments or on simple material-strength calculations that Rothstein has himself shown to be unsatisfactory in such an argument. Rothstein's explicit definition is anachronistic in that it serves well only for those periods in the past in which obtaining "security primarily by use of its [a state's] own capabilities" was a live option for five to ten states in a system of limited scope. When only two or three states qualify for great-power status, with 130—from West Germany (or at least Italy) to Lesotho—categorized as "small," the definition becomes useless for analysis.

The source of Rothstein's difficulties is clear: In a nuclear age in which "defense" is impossible for all states and effective deterrence possible only for a few a definition based on capacity to obtain security must collapse. Where

insecurity is constant and all-pervasive, it cannot serve as a significant distinguishing variable.

The inapplicability of Rothstein's definition to contemporary world politics may indicate that we should categorize states into size-groups along intuitively acceptable lines without defining the categories in conceptually useful terms. In *The Inequality of States* David Vital takes this approach. With apparent diffidence he argues that "we recognize, *or find it convenient to posit,* that the world community is divided into certain, admittedly loose, groups" (p. 7). He then distinguishes three groups, great, middle, and small states, drawing the "rough upper limits" for the latter as "a) a population of 10–15 million in the case of economically advanced countries; and b) a population of 20–30 million in the case of underdeveloped countries" (p. 8). Admitting (p. 8) that such a categorization is "frankly subjective, if not arbitrary," Vital concludes (p. 9) that

> it should, perhaps, be stressed that these definitions are put forward to make clear the identity of the subject of this study, not with a view to the creation of a precise concept for manipulative analytical purposes.

He thus eschews Rothstein's objective.

We must then ask whether the objective is worthwhile. Should we attempt to develop a conceptually based definition of a term such as "small power" that is relevant to the nuclear age? This author's view is that precise analytical definitions are more likely than arbitrary or intuitive delineations to point out conceptually significant differences between categories of states and therefore to facilitate behavioral comparison. Thus a definition should be judged not only on the relevance of its categories but also on the power of the explanations that it suggests. An intuitive definition that makes clear and relevant distinctions is better than any definition that does not; but a clearly categorizing definition based on concepts that suggest valid explanations is best of all. The question then arises whether Rothstein's definition directs us toward effective explanations of behavior for the period in which it does create relevant categories.

Rothstein deals at length with two types of small-state behavior that demand explanation: attitudes toward international organizations and actions taken in "balance-of-power" situations. In explaining small states' support of international organizations, particularly between the wars, Rothstein mentions three attributes of international organizations that may appeal to these countries: their formal equality; the potential security of membership; and the possible capacity of the organizations to restrain Great Powers. The stress on security as a small-power motivation is clear. Yet, having cited these supposed virtues, Rothstein undertakes a trenchant critical analysis of recent and present international organizations arguing that the "defects [of collective security] submerged its virtues" (pp. 44–45). Thus, we are left less with an explanation

of small-power support for international organizations than with a judgment that such support has often been misguided; if security is not achieved and Great Powers often not effectively restrained, is the pursuit of formal equality of status sufficient explanation for the energies small powers have devoted to these institutions? The reader is left to wonder at the dubious perspicacity of small-state leadership.

Rothstein repeatedly writes of the "vaunted irresponsibility" of small powers which he attempts partially to explain on the basis of the temptations of appearing insignificant (p. 27) and the "imperatives of immediate security" which may preclude consideration of long-range problems. Thus, in discussing Rumania before World War I, Rothstein says (p. 215),

> Rumania chose to ally with what clearly seemed to be the stronger side. It was a tactic which, though sanctioned by all the canons of traditional diplomacy, merely increased the imbalance of power, a condition detrimental to Rumania's long-range interests. The Rumanians were too preoccupied with immediate problems to consider the long-range. However, even if they had, the imperatives of immediate security would probably have prevailed.

Yet weak Great Powers may also face such imperatives; if they behave differently, is their obvious inability to become insignificant sufficient reason for the differentiation? Perhaps a different set of criteria for grouping states by size, replacing the small-great dichotomy with a fourfold division, could contribute to more convincing explanations.

I suggest that instead of focusing on perceptions of whether security can be maintained primarily with one's own resources we should focus on the *systemic role* that states' leaders see their countries playing. Systems theorists have on occasion been criticized for assuming that a particular international system rigidly dictates the behavior of states within it. However cogent this objection may be to the work of particular authors, the critics have emphasized the valid point that state behavior determines the nature of international systems as well as vice versa. Going further, analysts have argued that systems themselves can be classified as "system-dominant" or "subsystem-dominant" depending on the extent to which the system determines state behavior.

But if such classifications are useful for systems, they may also be useful for states. A "system-determining" state plays a critical role in shaping the system: The "imperial power" in a unipolar system and the two Great Powers in a bipolar system are examples. In a second category are "system-influencing" states which cannot expect individually to dominate a system but may nevertheless be able significantly to influence its nature through unilateral as well as multilateral actions. Thirdly, some states that cannot hope to affect the system acting alone can nevertheless exert significant impact on the system by working through small groups or alliances or through universal or regional international organizations: These may be labeled "system-affecting" states.

Finally, most international systems contain some states that can do little to influence the system-wide forces that affect them, except in groups which are so large that each state has minimal influence and which may themselves be dominated by larger powers. For these small, "system-ineffectual" states foreign policy is adjustment to reality, not rearrangement of it. These four types of states can be referred to briefly, in conformity with traditional usage, as "great," "secondary," "middle," and "small" powers.

Thus in the contemporary international system the United States and the Soviet Union can be considered "system-determining"; the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Japan, Communist China, and perhaps India "system-influencing"; Canada, Sweden, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina, and comparable states "system-affecting"; and an array of other states—most of which would fall into Vital's population/development categories for small states—"system-ineffectual."

Yet if we rely purely on objective criteria, we will again encounter the spectrum that can only be divided arbitrarily, as Rothstein has so cogently shown for power-based analysis. A psychological dimension must therefore be added for the sake of clarity as well as in recognition of the fact that "objective reality" does not determine statesmen's behavior directly. I therefore suggest the following definition with the caveat that in all cases statesmen's attitudes must have considerable basis in reality: *A Great Power is a state whose leaders consider that it can, alone, exercise a large, perhaps decisive, impact on the international system; a secondary power is a state whose leaders consider that alone it can exercise some impact, although never in itself decisive, on that system; a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution; a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system.*

How does this categorization contribute to an understanding of the behavior of small powers (or, in the above schema, small and middle powers) toward international organizations or balance-of-power politics? With respect to international organizations it draws our attention immediately to the fact that small states may promote international organizations quite rationally without believing that these institutions will promote their security in specific ways or restrain Great Powers from particular actions. The small and middle powers' leaders realize that although they may be able to do little together, they can do virtually nothing separately. Through an international organization they can attempt to promote attitudes favorable to their survival—to develop, as it were, an "international political culture" shaped largely by themselves. Rothstein, for instance, holds (p. 20) that in the twentieth century

> the less tangible elements of strength have become progressively more im-

portant, ranging from a good historical "record" to belief in the correct vision of the good life or merely to an unusual ability to foresee the opportunities in passing events.

This author would argue that this is true and significant and that a major function of international organizations—perceived by many small and middle powers—is to allow these states acting collectively to help shape developing international attitudes, dogmas, and codes of proper behavior.[4] Perception of systemic role, more than perception of need for external aid in security, seems to shape small powers' distinctive attitudes toward international organizations.

With respect to balance-of-power politics the issue seems simpler: As Rothstein mentions, "fearing risks, the Small Powers assert 'nothing we do matters very much'" (p. 28). Mancur Olson has shown that actors with large capabilities relative to a system are more likely than smaller ones to try to influence outcomes that may affect them, not because they have more at stake but because their contributions are more likely to be decisive.[5] Olson and Richard Zeckhauser have pointed out how this discrepancy may work to the benefit of the small in a discussion of burden sharing in NATO: In such a situation the large states have an interest in providing the "public good" (in this case, defense) regardless of what the small do.[6] This phenomenon is clearly crucial for balance-of-power politics: Since Rumania could not redress the imbalance of power in the years before World War I, there was no point in attempting to do so. Perception of inability to influence the system was more important in differentiating Rumanian behavior from that of, say, the United Kingdom, than was perception of ability to rely on its own resources for defense. Using the latter criterion, in fact, we might have erroneously predicted that Britain, more self-sufficient defensively, would remain neutral whereas Rumania would be forced to involve itself early in the fighting. Compared with a definition based on perceived security-capability, a definition in terms of perceptions of systemic role both differentiates more clearly between contemporary states and points to more cogent explanations of some important and distinctive facets of small-state behavior in international organizations and balance-of-power systems.

II

The Inequality of States fulfills the expectations engendered by its title: David Vital spares no effort to show the great disparities in political, economic,

[4] Consider, for example, the discussions and resolutions on "nonintervention" at the twentieth session of the General Assembly. Inis L. Claude has commented on one aspect of this phenomenon in his discussion of "collective legitimization." ("Collective Legitimization as a Political Function of the United Nations," *International Organization,* Summer 1966 [Vol. 20, No. 3], pp. 367–379.) The discussions and resolutions on "nonintervention" at the twentieth session of the General Assembly provide further examples of collective dogma creation.

[5] Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965).

[6] Mancur Olson, Jr., and Richard Zeckhauser, "An Economic Theory of Alliances," *Review of Economics and Statistics,* August 1966 (Vol. 48, No. 3), pp. 266–279.

and military power and potential between the Great and the Small. In examining the small state's situation he self-consciously chooses (p. 5) to consider the nonaligned state:

> It is only when acting alone—rather than in concert with other, greater states—that the small power can be said to be pursuing an external policy which is in any sense of a class with the external policies of great powers and capable of being compared with them. And it is only when the small power is unaligned and unprotected that the full implications of, say, maintaining or failing to maintain a modern defence establishment can be seen. In short, it is when the state is *alone*—not necessarily in all its affairs, but at least in the great and crucial ones—and is thrown back on its own resources that the limitations and, indeed, the possibilities inherent in its condition are best seen.

Vital is studying the small state that to Rothstein is by definition not a "Small Power." But he goes further in the next paragraph (p. 6):

> Nevertheless, if the rough limits of the isolated small power's strength can be delineated and its characteristic disabilities outlined, something that is typical of all small states will have been shown. For the unaligned state can best be regarded as a limiting case for the class of small states, one from which all other small states shade off, in varying and progressively lessening degrees of political and military isolation. What can be said of the limiting case is likely to be applicable *mutatis mutandis* to the others. It is of the unaligned power as the paradigm for all small powers that the present study is conceived.

Whereas Vital considers the nonaligned state as paradigm, Rothstein regards it as aberration: "It seems fair to conclude that neutrality or nonalignment is a dangerous security policy for Small Powers which are exposed to a Great Power threat" (p. 34). Even if one is not fully prepared to accept Rothstein's view, it is hard to know what to make of Vital's "limiting case" argument. One suspects that the deck has been stacked against the small state from the outset: If alignment is not to be considered, the small state's two most effective weapons—maneuver and exploitation of position—have been severely restricted. Clearly if one is bent on comparing the power of small states with that of any possible great-power opponent, it will be easy to show the small state's weakness. Yet this misses the point, for security and independence can be protected by situation as well as by sheer military or economic strength.

If Vital and Rothstein disagree on definition, categorization, and the analytical significance of nonalignment, they share some common ground regarding attributes of the small state. Both agree that advancing technology has reduced the relative military power of small states; Vital argues this convincingly and in detail (Chapter 4) whereas Rothstein refers to it at several points (for example, p. 20). Both argue that small states perceive themselves differently from Great Powers: Rothstein, consistent with his emphasis on alliances, focuses on needs for external assistance, Vital on *weakness* as "the most com-

mon, natural and pervasive view of self in the small state" (p. 33). Vital also considers the small power at a disadvantage due to its smaller foreign policy machinery, which Americans, appalled by the unwieldiness of the United State government, often envy! Vital also stresses the efficacy of economic coercion, using his own country, Israel, as an example of vulnerability; the American reader, remembering Cuba, Southern Rhodesia, and, earlier, Mussolini's Italy, may wonder about the emphasis placed on this argument.

A crucial difference between these two "realistic" and analytical authors lies in their conceptions of the role of intangible factors in international politics: attitudes summarized in phrases such as "liberalism" and "national self-determination"; international law; the importance to a Great Power of its image; and other culturally based factors that may smooth the path of the small state. Rothstein has a sophisticated view of the importance of these intangible elements; Vital, by contrast, persists in describing too narrowly only the stark essentials of power. But if clothes do not "make the man" in international politics any more than in personal life, neither does the skeleton alone. Rothstein contends that "the status and prestige of Small Powers has risen, while their relative strength in the traditional elements of power has actually declined" (p. 3) and that their influence has also increased since 1919 (p. 267). Vital's emphasis on the "traditional elements of power" limits his analysis to strength and therefore restricts the usefulness of his well-written and often cogently argued study.

One of Rothstein's most interesting theoretical arguments is his effort to describe the effects of various types of international systems on small-power situation and behavior. With the disdain for clichés and platitudes that marks his writing the author criticizes the proposition that the balance of power assured, in the past, the survival of small powers. Rothstein distinguishes three variants of the balance of power: the "conservative" balance-of-power system, occurring immediately after 1815 and 1919, wherein the Great Powers were most concerned with maintaining what they had; a fluid and competitive balance-of-power system, as in the 1850's and 1860's; and the bipolar bloc-balance system epitomized by the European system after 1871, and particularly after 1890 or 1905. In Rothstein's view the "conservative" balance protects small-power security at the expense of influence or opportunities for advancement; it is best suited to the satisfied small states and least to the revisionist ones. The fluid, competitive system presents the small powers with more room for maneuver, whereas the two-bloc system presents opportunities for maneuver and influence—due to the scramble for allies—but at the expense of security (pp. 186–191). Thus, in opening his chapter on contemporary small-power politics and alignment (p. 237) Rothstein can say:

> A functioning balance of power system, comparable to the one which existed throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, limits the ability of Small

> Powers to achieve their own goals. However, in compensation, it provides more real security for them—in terms of the maintenance of independence—than any other historical system, all of which offered the Small Power some elements of maneuverability, but to the detriment of long-range security.

In less systematic terms Vital seems to agree that great-power competition is the condition for small-power influence, if not security (pp. 190–191). In a brief comment Liska also argues that "small-state subsystems would enjoy a maximum of practically attainable autonomy in a multipower global system combining competition with concert" (p. 44). But only Rothstein carries out the analysis—supported by studies of Belgian-French relations, the Little Entente, and small states between 1815 and the present—needed to substantiate the argument.

In a fluid international system, however, the small state must still maneuver in order to prosper, if not to survive. Maneuvering involves making alliances —or finding an appropriate alternative policy. It is to the alliance decision that we now turn.

III

The imprecision of international relations terminology is nowhere more obvious or painful than in discussions of *alliances:* Although the three authors here considered who deal extensively with alliances (Liska, Osgood, and Rothstein) all teach at the same university (Johns Hopkins) and are in general agreement on most substantive issues, they differ on problems of definition. Osgood (p. 17) defines an alliance as a

> formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force, or to consider (unilaterally or in consultation with allies) the use of force, in specified circumstances.

Liska is less explicit although he notes that his "discussion will adhere to an extensive conception of 'alliance,' going beyond the hard core of an explicit, contractual pledge of military assistance" (p. 3). Despite his usual analytical care—as in his definition of a small power—Rothstein is even less precise: He seems to define alliances as formal ties (p. 49) but not to impose such strict conditions as Osgood does. But since Osgood himself acknowledges that "an alliance may be difficult to distinguish from other kinds of military contracts such as military subsidies, military assistance agreements or military base agreements" (p. 19) his definition seems to serve more as a point of reference (the "pure" alliance) than as a comprehensive delineation of the subject. Yet we are clearer on what constitutes an alliance than we are about a "small power" or "small state." Each author agrees that a special tie must

be agreed to by both parties; they merely disagree on how formal or explicit that tie must be to be considered an "alliance." Thus, the problem is chiefly semantic, in contrast to the small-power definitional dilemma, which was of substantive significance as well.

Osgood and Liska, both of whom list functions of alliances, agree on three: aggregation of power; interallied control or restraint of allies; and promotion of international order. Osgood adds a fourth, internal security, which he considers especially important for small states.[7] Rothstein, with small states particularly in mind, cites the bargaining advantages that may accrue from offering to dismantle a new alliance and the political and psychological advantages of allying with a prestigious and powerful state (p. 50). Liska takes account both of Osgood's "internal security" function and the political-psychological advantages when he characterizes special small-state interests in alliances under the headings of security, stability, and status (pp. 27–29). Thus there is general agreement on function, with Liska and Rothstein more sensitive to particular purposes of small states than Osgood, who writes from a great-power and alliance-wide perspective. Vital does not discuss alliances extensively, but whereas he might agree with these lists of functions, he would surely warn that the price of alignment is the loss of real independence and effective sovereignty (pp. 184–186, especially).

What policy toward alliances, then, makes sense for the small state? Of these authors only Rothstein considers this issue systematically. Using the case studies of the Franco-Belgian Military Accord of 1920 and the Little Entente, Rothstein devotes over 100 pages to the question of what types of alliances are most beneficial to small powers. Contending that (p. 170) "in theory, Small Power alliances are condemned; in practice, they remain popular," his most novel conclusion is his defense of these arrangements. He concludes (p. 177):

> Small Powers *ought* to prefer mixed, multilateral alliances. They provide the most benefits in terms of security and political influence. If unavailable, they probably should choose a Small Power alliance in preference to an unequal, bilateral alliance, particularly if the Small Powers do not fear an immediate threat to their security, and if their goals in allying are primarily political. An alliance with a single Great Power ought to be chosen only if all the other alternatives are proscribed, and if the Small Powers fear an imminent attack—and even then only in hopes of improving their deterrent stance.

Rothstein's dim view of alliances with a single Great Power applies not only to bilateral ties but also to alliances between several small powers and one Great Power (p. 127). The careful historical discussion and the convincing argument by which Rothstein supports these conclusions constitute highly recommended reading for all students of international politics.

[7] See Osgood, pp. 21–22; Liska, pp. 23–25.

This author's only major quarrel with the analysis is that its abstract quality blurs inter-great-power distinctions that may be highly relevant to the small state. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) may be highly deficient unequal alliances, but they do not operate like the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). The special case of such an alliance—that is, unequal alliance with a *contiguous, imperialistic* Great Power—does not receive adequate consideration. The Warsaw Treaty Organization, which Osgood discusses in straightforward fashion, might well be labeled an "Al Capone alliance" in which remaining a faithful ally protects one not against the mythical outside threat but rather against the great-power ally itself, just as, by paying "protection money" to Capone's gang in Chicago, businessmen protected themselves not against other gangs but against Capone's own thugs. What happened in August 1968 to Czechoslovakia is not so different from what would have happened to a recalcitrant Chicago bootlegger in the 1920's.

From the perspective of contemporary international politics the most interesting questions about the future of alliances concern the policies of African and Asian states, on which Liska, Osgood, and Rothstein all focus their attention. All three men agree that the zenith of nonalignment has been reached: Liska points to the danger that "a free hand might come to mean an empty and unarmed hand" (p. 20); Osgood writes of the decline of superpower ardor in courting the nonaligned (p. 91); and Rothstein, in an extensive discussion, concludes that "it is doubtful that nonalignment can ever be very much more than a tactical principle" (p. 254). As we have seen, Vital, although favorable to a policy of independence where power realities can be reconciled with it, emphasizes that "the price is rising" (p. 186).

Does the decline of nonalignment therefore presage a rise in alignment policies for states in the so-called "third world"? Vital, despite his pessimism about the power of small states, gives the most emphatically negative answer. In his view (p. 186)

> the coalition or alliance is not an effective unit of foreign policy and strategy at all, except in the narrow, if extremely important, respect that it can from time to time marshall great strength.

Thus he denies a significant political role for alliances: Their liabilities are such that many small states will continue to refuse to join available combinations.

Liska, Osgood, and Rothstein all give this question more extensive consideration, and each of them differentiates between small-state alliances and ties between a Great Power and small states. In contrast to Vital Rothstein argues that "from the point of view of Small Powers, alliances have increasingly become instruments designed to achieve nonmilitary goals" although this

holds, in his view, less for bilateral great-power/small-power alliances than for other forms (pp. 262–263). Small powers, he implies, will normally agree to unequal alliances only where a military threat is perceived. By contrast, in his view "an argument for the increased utility of alliances composed solely of Small Powers can be made" (p. 263). Admitting that "the record of the few regional groups which have been formed scarcely justifies optimism," he does not argue that the significance of small-power alliances is increasing, only that they should not necessarily be considered worthless (pp. 263–264).

Liska and Osgood both envisage the possibility of alliances between small states and what we have called "secondary powers"; both appear favorably disposed toward such a development. As Liska puts it (p. 29):

> To an increasing number of less developed countries, selectively disengaged ex-metropolitan powers may be more efficient and more tolerable great-power allies in the search for postindependence stability than superpowers without colonial antecedents, as long as the ex-metropoles retain the capacity and will for instant but limited re-engagement.

Osgood is quite skeptical that this will take place. Liska, who is more critical than Osgood of American "overinvolvement" (p. 35), seems to regard such secondary-power action as a more realistic possibility, citing Japan's relations with the Republic of Korea as well as British and French connections with Africa (pp. 49, 54).

Liska takes a dim view of pure small-power alliances, arguing that "the less-developed countries of today and tomorrow are unlikely to transcend the limitations inherent in small-state alliances as a category" (p. 57). Yet he argues (p. 49) that where combined with a great-power (or "secondary-power") tie, most desirably to an ex-metropole, and supplementing larger organizations such as the United Nations, such alliances could be useful:

> The alliances might bring latent conflicts among lesser states into the open, but they would not actually generate them; they might serve to contain and adjust these conflicts rather than treat them as nonexistent or illegitimate. They would thus lay the bases of an embryonic order for the less developed segment of the international system. If they proved workable, small-state alliances would be preferable to grand designs of regional or continental unity.

Osgood is once again more skeptical of the possibilities for change although he argues (p. 131) that

> In the long run, in two or three decades, this political introversion [of new states] might lead to loose regional and subregional groupings, which would provide the framework within which more coherent patterns of international politics and semiautonomous balance-of-power systems could emerge.

Liska's enthusiasm for small-state alliances when combined with a tie to a larger state and Osgood's emphasis on "coherence" raise the question of

whether clearly defined *structure* is necessary to insure *order*. One is reminded of some Marxists' inability to understand capitalist economic successes because of the assumption that the apparent confusion of decentralized market decisionmaking (Marx's "anarchy") must lead eventually to chaos. A considerable measure of regulation and control was essential to the survival of capitalism, but the imposition of centralized planning structures was not. It is not entirely clear that alliance structures are any more necessary (or even conducive) to order for international politics among the new states. There are, however, strong historical and analytical grounds—cited by Rothstein and Liska particularly—for believing that patterns of alignment will necessarily emerge in the competitive international subsystems to be expected in Africa as well as Asia. The degree to which they promote international order or disorder may depend as much on great-power as on small-power policies.

IV

Apart from future problems of nuclear proliferation, what policy should a Great Power such as the United States follow in an area of small-power confrontation, for which the Middle East may serve as a prototype? This problem is touched upon by Osgood and Liska but not given, in this author's view, the attention it deserves. Osgood states the problem as it relates to the Middle East without discussing it extensively. After describing a likely situation of Israeli military strength, an approximate balance of American and Soviet assistance, and superpower diplomatic intervention, preserving an uneasy peace, Osgood states (p. 131):

> Under these conditions the United States will be drawn, perforce, into more active intervention by one means or another in the internal and international politics of the area. Thus the United States and the Soviet Union will be major competitors in an international subsystem that will be neither independent of, nor determined by, the global sphere of politics. For this reason the Middle East will present the greatest danger of an American-Soviet crisis or war growing out of commitments to local states over which neither state has much control.

Osgood thus projects present (potentially disastrous) trends into the future with the air of a man who believes them to be inevitable. The reader is left to wonder about the fatalism of this paragraph which may be prudent as forecasting but which cries out for policy analysis. Why will the United States allow itself to be drawn into more active intervention? In the service of what national interests will this country become committed to supporting a state over whose policies it has little control? If the consequences of present policy are so hazardous, should the sources of that policy, and its moral and political justification, remain unexamined?

Broadly speaking, a Great Power can take one of three attitudes toward an area in which it has less than absolutely critical interests. It can actively *support* one power or set of powers in the policies which *those states* decide to pursue; it can intervene in order to *control* the international politics of the area, usually at the price of supporting one state or another up to a point; or it can *withdraw* partially from the region in the hope that a regional conflagration could thus be contained.[8] None of these policies is a priori either prudent or unwise, slogans about the "indivisibility of peace" and the evils of "appeasement" notwithstanding. The analyst must consider the gains and cost associated with support, against the costs of commitment in case of war; the likely efficacy of attempts at control; and the feasibility of limiting a conflict to the region.

If postwar American foreign policy has had one salient characteristic, it has been to regard the withdrawal-containment approach as unfeasible where important interests are at stake. We have followed a policy, in Asia particularly, that may have sought control and limitation of violence but which, failing that, furnished massive support for an uncontrollable client and increased the scale of violence manyfold. We have also supported the United Nations, as in the Congo, in more successful policies of control-by-intervention. Liska, aware of the positive functions of conflict in some situations, argues that "relatively uninhibited foreign relations encompassing conflicts and alliances may be the primary necessity in political development" (p. 47); he is also conscious of American overcommitment. Yet (p. 40) he sees limited support rather than withdrawal-containment as the solution:

> An outside power can often best influence the negotiations for peaceful settlement if it has previously guaranteed the lesser state against total defeat and obliteration even if not against all setbacks or against failure to satisfy maximum goals. Holding the ring for a lesser ally is to render him, and the alliance, better service on occasion than would be the case if he were held back at all costs. In the long run, this may prove to be a vital point for America's relationship with Israel.

This is dangerous counsel: It may be extremely difficult to limit one's commitment to a client state if one renounces control over the circumstances, nature, and timing of *its* initiative. Neither Liska nor Osgood considers whether a more restrained American policy, breaking the potential links between a fourth Middle Eastern war and a Third World War by reducing American involvement in the area, should be seriously considered. If grand visions of a *Pax Americana* were renounced, it might become clearer not only that the American interest in preventing a world war far outweighs our interest in

[8] Great Powers need not pursue any of these policies unilaterally. International organizations can often be used in the service of any of the three alternatives or, as in peacekeeping operations, in an attempt to combine policies of involvement and withdrawal.

preventing local fighting but also that pursuit of the two objectives may at times be contradictory. "Keeping the lid on" is an appropriate metaphor: If the lid flies off, the force of the explosion may be roughly proportional to the effort expended in keeping it on. The lack of an activist American policy toward Africa probably represents less an experiment with restraint than it reflects disinterest and preoccupation elsewhere. In the Middle East the current commitments of both superpowers would probably require an explicit agreement to become more disinterested; in Africa tacit consent to remain only marginally involved could be sufficient.

Yet it is unlikely that the United States will, in the next few years, limit its commitments in the Middle East or significantly alter its stance toward Israel.[9] Both major presidential candidates promised continued support for Israel during the 1968 campaign. The chief explanation for this phenomenon —Israeli political power in the United States—is well known. But, remarkably enough, neither Liska nor Osgood mentions this. They both write on the apparent assumption that Great Powers are the masters of their own policies: that (except for small, "penetrated" or satellite countries) modern states can be regarded as discrete decisionmaking entities. This conventional assumption has by now become an inconvenient fiction that hinders our understanding of great-power/small-power relations.

Contrary to this discrete-entity assumption "informal penetration" is a pervasive phenomenon in contemporary international politics which works in both directions: Small states can penetrate large ones as well as vice versa. Of the books under review, however, only Vital considers this tool of statecraft—which he designates as "subversion"—and he discusses it only in the context of small-state politics. Yet it is clear that a small power holding potential political assets in a Great Power, particularly if the Great Power has an open political system, may be able to exercise influence on that state's policy that could not be explained by the discrete-entity model. Furthermore, membership in an alliance with a "penetrated" Great Power may provide the small state with much more than "access" or "the right to be consulted":[10] It may increase already substantial influence by widening and deepening ties that contribute to the small power's political leverage. In the extreme case the small power may be able to exercise the function of "interallied control" with a vengeance by putting severe restraints on the Great Power's policy options.

This is true to some extent vis-à-vis the United States for a number of relatively small states although Israel is the most obvious example. Nationalist China, Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines, for instance, have all undertaken significant public relations and lobbying activities in this country with sub-

[9] This sentence may be taken to imply skepticism that the comments on "even-handedness" by William Scranton, then President-elect Richard M. Nixon's foreign policy envoy, foreshadow significant policy changes.

[10] These phrases are used by Rothstein, p. 49.

stantial if varying degrees of success. Where the small state's influence derives from the conjunction of low intensity of American interests and high intensity of small-state interests, it may be beneficial to the small state without seriously hampering United States policy. But where, as in the cases of Nationalist China and Israel, it virtually forbids official reconsideration of established policy in an area of critical importance and danger, the results may be disastrous and should certainly not be ignored.[11]

V

Osgood, Rothstein, and Vital all discuss nuclear proliferation at length; Liska refers to it only in a passing comment which indicates that he believes "orderly" acquisition of nuclear weapons by major industrial powers to be possible (p. 45). Of the three authors devoting attention to the problem only Rothstein seems particularly concerned: He regards proliferation as likely and dangerous, whereas Osgood views it as likely but not particularly perilous. Vital, interested in small-power policy rather than systemic effects, hardly considers the global results of proliferation.

Vital argues that although acquisition of nuclear weapons would be feasible for a number of states, it would "not automatically 'equalize' small and great nor even, necessarily, reduce the gap between them" (p. 166). Nuclear weapons would, in his view, have an "extremely limited" deterrent value against Great Powers (p. 173). Rothstein agrees: "It is not very difficult to explode a nuclear device, but it is extremely difficult to become an *effective* nuclear power" (p. 274). Osgood, consistent with his great-power emphasis, does not consider the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring nuclear weapons for the small state but rather assumes that "the balance of incentives and disincentives, unlike that in France, Britain and China, will be complex and delicate" (p. 144) and that it is likely that proliferation will proceed in limited and moderate fashion.

Vital, always ready to emphasize, ever to overstate, small-state weakness, contends that for defensive small states nuclear capability may be effective in rare but conceivable circumstances but that for active or aggressive small states "the acquisition of nuclear capability is likely to narrow their field of political maneuver and intensify their sensitivity to pressure. . . . The effect may be capital" (p. 180). Rothstein agrees that acquisition of nuclear weapons "may actually make Small Powers more, not less, dependent on the actions of the Great Powers" (p. 295) but he also argues that "a very rudimentary nuclear force can be an extremely persuasive military instrument against a very wide

[11] This emphasis on small-state influence on Great Powers' decisions may perhaps be explained by the fact that the author is currently working on a study of that problem and by authors' natural tendencies to assume the importance of questions that interest them.

range of states" (p. 284) as long as the small power "stays out of trouble with the Soviet Union and the United States" (pp. 283–284).

In response Vital would contend (p. 178) that a nuclear small state with an activist policy could not "stay out of trouble" with the superpowers:

> In so far as there can be a concerted effort on the part of the great powers to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons among the minor ones, it is here that it is most likely to be effective and straightforward.

The contrast of views is somewhat more apparent than real: Vital expects superpower policies for which Rothstein argues. Beyond this Rothstein is explicitly skeptical of the ability of small states to calculate their interests on nuclear-weapons questions rationally, taking into account reactions from the Great Powers and other states. Although he does not believe that small states will gain by acquiring nuclear weapons, he sadly concludes that "it is unfortunate, but undoubtedly true, that few if any Small Powers are likely to evaluate the decision" as he does (p. 293). He expects the siren call of great possibilities to outweigh listings of disadvantages unless explicit and forceful measures are taken by the Great Powers to prevent proliferation.

Rothstein's and Vital's analyses are therefore quite similar in essentials: Their differences arise because both men are pessimists, yet pessimistic from different perspectives. Rothstein sees great obstacles to the attainment of his desired objective, which is nuclear nonproliferation; Vital sees huge barriers in the way of attaining his objective, small-power independence, through proliferation or in any other way. Thus the "Cassandra syndrome" of the analyst!

Lacking a systemic orientation, Vital does not suggest what the Great Powers should do about proliferation; only Rothstein and Osgood consider that question. And here the differences are wide indeed. Rothstein does consider the possibility that in a nuclear-armed world Great Powers might take the option of "loosening the alliance commitment" (p. 288) although he considers the opposite alternative of quick, decisive intervention equally likely (p. 291). Yet Rothstein, despite his pessimism about stopping proliferation, believes that except in limited instances "the United States ought to try to prevent proliferation at all costs" (p. 323). Toward this end he proposes a policy that would combine nuclear guarantees to states promising not to develop nuclear weapons with military and economic aid to those states. He also suggests that the United States might, in certain circumstances, *give* nuclear weapons to a state suddenly threatened by a major nuclear power, arguing that "this promise might inhibit the whole process of proliferation."

> Any state intent on developing its own nuclear forces for security, prestige, to steal a march on its enemies, or whatever would presumably be extremely

> reluctant to do so if it knew that its competitors would simultaneously receive a nuclear force of its [sic] own, and a more effective one at no cost.

(P. 316.)

Osgood reveals a concern about overcommitments when analyzing nuclear weapons that is not evident in his discussion of nonnuclear problems. He attacks the solution of guarantees, arguing first that the protegé state might not accept a guarantee from a superpower in *lieu* of developing its own weapons and second that superpowers might be quite reluctant to guarantee states with which they were not allied. But further, in his view (p. 146):

> Countervailing guarantees by the United States and the Soviet Union to competing protegés might involve the superpowers too deeply in minor power politics and could even lead to a direct confrontation, which a more detached position might avoid.

Thus Osgood wonders (p. 149)

> whether the American interest in containing China may not be better served in the long run by encouraging, rather than trying to discourage, the creation of a nuclear multipolar balance of power in which American power is supplemented, and American commitments are somewhat relieved, by the power and commitments of others.

He makes it explicit that he has Japan and India in mind.

Through their disagreement Osgood and Rothstein clarify a central issue of American policy for the next decade or more: whether to deal with situations of local conflict through a policy of intervention, commitment, and control, as in the past, or through a new policy of restraint, partial withdrawal, and containment of such quarrels as arise. How much reliance can be placed on other states, and how much latitude should they be allowed? How high a price should be paid for control?

This review article is hardly the place to attempt resolution of the question although the point that restraint-withdrawal-containment should be seriously considered has already been made clear. But the question deserves extensive thought by analysts as well as vague if repeated mention in a Presidential nominating campaign. We will be lucky if the issue is not resolved by the bureaucracy or the public without regard to the requirements of a rational foreign policy (out of inertia on the one hand or impatience on the other): Specialists, through failure to confront the issue, should not allow such an outcome to occur by default.

VI

All four books under review deserve to be read by serious students of international relations. Rothstein's work, despite a certain lack of organizational

coherence and a complex style, is clearly the most important of the four. It is the most systematic theoretically and based on the most extensive research. Liska's brief work should be particularly appreciated for its conciseness as well as for the author's illuminating use of historical events of current relevance: Here we find references to fifteenth-century Venice, or to Anglo-Dutch union in the seventeenth century, that enhance our understanding of contemporary world politics rather than merely creating respect for the author's erudition.

The works by Vital and Osgood are well written and often cogently argued, yet they contain more serious deficiencies which have been touched upon above. Vital overemphasizes the weaknesses of small states largely by considering their worst possible situations. He also reduces the value of his argument by excessive reliance on tangible power and influence factors. Much of Osgood's book covers rather familiar ground in a somewhat conventional way, as in his discussion of contemporary alliance systems; only in the last chapter, on "the future of alliances," do his imagination and insight lead us down interesting and original paths.

These books perform valuable service to students of small states and alliances as much for the problems they raise but leave unsolved as for the solutions they offer. Critical issues of policy, as well as significant theoretical problems, remain unresolved and unexplored: Future work in this area, while building on these analyses, must go considerably beyond them. If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant.[12]

[12] For an excellent example of "giant study" see Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill [for the Council on Foreign Relations], 1968) which also provided inspiration for the title of this essay.