**Title**

Evaluate the extent to which small states can influence international security outcomes through military and non-military means

**Research Question (RQ)**

To what extent can small states shape international security outcomes through military and non-military instruments while balancing strategic effectiveness, ethical leadership, organisational adaptability, and civil-military legitimacy?

**Sub-questions**

1. How do mission command structures and ethical leadership practices enable small states to enhance military and diplomatic influence?
2. What organisational adaptations allow small states to optimise limited resources across military and non-military instruments?
3. How does the evolving character of warfare — including cyber, information, and economic coercion — expand or constrain small states’ influence?
4. What civil-military tensions arise from small states’ reliance on diplomacy, neutrality, and soft power to achieve security objectives?

**Analytical Framework (Effects / Pillars)**

* **Niche Specialisation Effect**  
  *Claim*: Small states achieve disproportionate influence through specialised military contributions (e.g. Ireland’s peacekeeping, Finland’s territorial defence, Singapore’s maritime security).  
  *Evidence*: Niche roles within UN, NATO, and EU frameworks amplify credibility despite small size.  
  *However*: Resource scarcity and dependence on partners limit sustainability.  
  *Implication*: Small states must embed niche contributions in multilateral structures to maintain influence.
* **Organisational Agility Effect**  
  *Claim*: Agile institutions and inter-agency coordination enable small states to adapt quickly to new security challenges.  
  *Evidence*: Estonia’s integrated cyber defence, Denmark’s joint civil-military structures.  
  *However*: High financial costs and cultural resistance slow long-term reforms.  
  *Implication*: External partnerships and innovation are essential to sustain organisational agility.
* **Hybrid Leverage Effect**  
  *Claim*: Hybrid tactics — cyber, information, and economic measures — provide cost-effective ways to counter stronger states.  
  *Evidence*: Lithuania’s anti-disinformation campaigns, Qatar’s economic statecraft.  
  *However*: Overstretch and escalation risks undermine resilience.  
  *Implication*: Hybrid strategies require robust defensive capacity and escalation management.
* **Soft Power Synergy Effect**  
  *Claim*: Neutrality, cultural diplomacy, and normative leadership enhance legitimacy and global standing.  
  *Evidence*: Ireland’s UN Security Council role, Denmark’s human rights advocacy.  
  *However*: Soft power is slow to deliver concrete security outcomes and vulnerable to counter-narratives.  
  *Implication*: Small states must integrate soft power with selective hard-power contributions.
* **Legitimacy Effect**  
  *Claim*: Civil-military legitimacy underpins both domestic support and international credibility.  
  *Evidence*: Ireland’s neutrality debates, Nordic consensus models.  
  *However*: Over-reliance on alliances risks eroding sovereignty and public trust.  
  *Implication*: Legitimacy requires balancing external commitments with domestic political culture.

**Key Authors & Sources**

* **Baldur Thorhallsson** – *Shelter theory*: alliances and institutions provide protection and influence for small states.
  + *Limit*: Overstates dependency, underplays independent action.
  + *Implication*: Small states must balance alliance shelter with autonomy.
* **Andrew F. Krepinevich** – *Asymmetric innovation*: small states can offset conventional weaknesses with cyber or niche military tools.
  + *Limit*: Underestimates financial/technological barriers.
  + *Implication*: Requires external support for sustainability.
* **Colin S. Gray** – *Sceptic*: geography and material power dominate; small states’ impact is marginal.
  + *Limit*: Ignores soft power and institutional leverage.
  + *Implication*: Small states must combine military and non-military instruments to mitigate limits.
* **Joseph Nye** – *Soft power*: culture and values as influence multipliers.
  + *Limit*: Influence is diffuse and slow to materialise.
  + *Implication*: Works best when combined with credible military contributions.
* **Robert Keohane** – *Institutions*: international regimes allow small states to amplify voice and constrain larger powers.
  + *Limit*: Access can be blocked by great-power dominance.
  + *Implication*: Small states must strategically select institutions to maximise leverage.
* **Ben Tonra** – *Ireland/EU*: neutrality, diplomacy, and peacekeeping as tools of soft power and legitimacy.
  + *Limit*: Focus on normative influence underplays military adaptation potential.
  + *Implication*: Ireland must balance neutrality with selective military engagement.