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

**Proposed Hypothesis:**Small states are limited in their influence by the small nature of the state. They cannot dictate policies unilaterally. They can only hope to influence those around them through a mix of engagement with international organisations, alliances, and soft power. Legitimacy is the centre of gravity for small states.

**Chapter 1 – Introduction**

 How should a small state be defined: material capacity, perceptual size (Thorhallsson), or systemic role (Keohane 1969)?

 How does legitimacy emerge as the centre of gravity for small states, particularly when military means are marginal?

 How do myths and national history shape strategic identity — e.g., De Valera’s wartime neutrality (Fanning 2015; Ayiotis 2023) and Fleming’s evidence of hedging?

 How do Ireland and Israel provide “problem cases” for the small-state category: Ireland by masking realism with neutrality, Israel by blending small size with hard realism and alliance shelter?

 How does the five-effects framework (niche, agility, hybrid, soft power, legitimacy) provide a structured way to interrogate these contradictions?

**Chapter 2 – Reasons For the Proposal (Framework Applied Positively)**

 How does niche specialisation remain relevant (e.g., Irish peacekeeping, Estonian cyber, Qatari mediation), despite Flynn’s (2019) warning against tokenism?

 How does Tonra (1999, 2011) show that EU membership reshaped Irish diplomacy and amplified small-state voice through Europeanisation?

 How does organisational agility, seen in HLAP (2022) reforms, demonstrate small states can adapt institutions faster than large powers?

 How can Ireland’s vote and influence within the UN (Rothstein 1966) and EU demonstrate that “perceptual size” matters?

 How does soft power synergy (Nye 2008; Bailes & Thorhallsson 2013) amplify Ireland’s international credibility when neutrality is embedded in institutions?

**Chapter 3 – Reasons Against the Proposal (Framework Applied Critically)**

Does Flynn’s (2019) threshold test suggest that Ireland’s peacekeeping is no longer viable as a source of legitimacy?

How do Hellmüller, Tan & Bara (2024) show the structural decline of UN peacekeeping, hollowing a traditional small-state niche?

How do realists like Gray (2005, 2018) and Waltz (1979) argue that small states’ gestures collapse without political ends and structural backing?

Does Israel, as Hirst (2010) describes, challenge the “small state” category by showing hard realism sheltered by a great power alliance (US State Department 2025)?

How do Ayiotis (2023), Fanning (2015), and Fleming demonstrate that Ireland’s neutrality has always been realist hedging — undermining its liberal self-image?

How does Cottey (2022) show continuity of underinvestment and hedging, even after systemic shocks like the Ukraine war?

**Chapter 4 – Back-up Facts / Present Argument**

 How do Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, and Qatar illustrate the dual promise and fragility of the five effects?

 How does De Valera’s WWII neutrality reveal a realist survival strategy masked by moralism (Fanning 2015; Ayiotis 2023; Fleming)?

 How do Israeli case studies illustrate Rothstein’s warning about dependence on a single great power?

 How does the UN Security Council’s paralysis erode the institutional platforms small states once relied on (Hellmüller, Tan & Bara 2024)?

 Can Ireland pivot from peacekeeping niches to EU cyber/regulatory niches, sustaining influence in a multipolar, fragmented order?

 Does legitimacy still reconcile realist scepticism with institutionalist/constructivist optimism, or is it now at risk of collapse into “symbolic performance”?

**Chapter 5 – Conclusion**

 To what extent can small states like Ireland still shape international security outcomes when traditional niches like peacekeeping collapse?

 Does legitimacy endure as the true centre of gravity, or has it become fragile in the face of UN paralysis, EU pressures, and domestic constraints?

 What lessons emerge from comparative cases — e.g., Israel’s realist shelter, Estonia’s cyber niche, Finland’s NATO accession, Qatar’s mediation?

 What does Ireland’s trajectory — from De Valera’s covert hedging to today’s performative liberalism — suggest about the limits of small-state influence?

 What future research gaps remain: hedging as a theory of small states, alliance dependency, or redefining “small power” categories (Israel, Iraq, Syria)?

**Framework for Analysis (Five Effects)**

1. Niche Specialisation – small states exploit specific roles (peacekeeping, cyber, mediation).
2. Organisational Agility – small states adapt and reform faster than larger powers.
3. Hybrid Leverage – using interdependence, networks, and regulatory power for influence.
4. Soft Power Synergy – combining diplomacy, identity, neutrality, and institutions for credibility.
5. Legitimacy – the centre of gravity; recognition and credibility sustaining all other effects.

**Possible Framework Reading Map**

**1. Niche Specialisation**

* **For**:
  + Krepinevich (asymmetric innovation; RMA potential).
  + Thorhallsson (shelter theory – alliances give platforms for niche roles).
  + Keohane (institutions amplify small-state voice).
* **Against**:
  + Gray (structural/material power dominates; niches are marginal).
  + Waltz (neorealist – small states adapt within structures, but do not shape outcomes).

**2. Organisational Agility**

* **For**:
  + Metz (adaptation after defeat; openness to reform).
  + Estonia case: cyber defence model.
  + Constructivist lens: identity/culture allow innovation (e.g., Wendt).
* **Against**:
  + Murray (doctrinal inertia; culture resists change).
  + Mearsheimer (offensive realism – great power competition sets limits, small-state reforms are constrained by external structures).

**3. Hybrid Leverage**

* **For**:
  + Raska (cyber and AI as asymmetric multipliers).
  + Nye (soft power + hybrid synergy).
  + Constructivists: norms and narratives amplify hybrid tactics.
* **Against**:
  + Betts (misuse of technology; risks outweigh gains).
  + Realists (e.g., Waltz, Mearsheimer) – hybrid moves may provoke escalation by great powers; small states cannot set the rules of competition.

**4. Soft Power Synergy**

* **For**:
  + Nye (soft power as influence multiplier).
  + Tonra (Irish foreign policy; EU legitimacy and diplomacy).
  + Constructivists (norms, identities, reputation shape outcomes).
* **Against**:
  + Realists: soft power lacks material weight; outcomes driven by force (Waltz, Mearsheimer).
  + Gray: soft power vulnerable to hard power pushback; “continuity over novelty.”

**5. Legitimacy *(centre of gravity)***

* **For**:
  + Thorhallsson (shelter theory – legitimacy via alliances).
  + Keohane (institutions confer legitimacy on small states).
  + Constructivists (Wendt, Finnemore – legitimacy is socially constructed, deeply influential).
* **Against**:
  + Neorealists: ambiguity/hedging undermines coherence (Mearsheimer, Waltz).
  + Critics of neutrality (Ireland/EU tensions; over-reliance erodes sovereignty).
  + Gray: without material power, legitimacy cannot substitute for hard capabilities.

**How This Fits Your Structure**

* **Chapter 2 (Reasons for)** → Use institutionalists, constructivists, and optimists (Thorhallsson, Keohane, Nye, Wendt, Krepinevich, Metz).
* **Chapter 3 (Reasons against)** → Use realists, neorealists, and sceptics (Waltz, Mearsheimer, Gray, Betts, Murray).
* **Chapter 4 (Back-up)** → Case studies (Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Qatar) to weigh both sides against your hypothesis.