

Rethinking the Role of Small States in the Hybrid Era: Shifts in the Cypriot Foreign and Defence Policies, 2004-2019

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Abstract : In the era of growing hybrid threats, small states find themselves in need to re-evaluate existing foreign and defense policies. The pressure to establishing or maintain a status of a reliable partner in the community in which they belong to, vis-à-vis their multilateral relations with other organisations and entities, small states may need to shift their policies in the field to accommodate security needs that are not only pertinent to their security, but also to that of the organisations (bloc) in which they interact. Unlike potential shortcomings in a small state's mainstream security and defence framework where the threat would be limited to the state itself, in more contemporary times with dominating hybrid threats, the small states' security shortcomings may also become a security problem for the bloc in which these states belong to. An indicative example is small states like Cyprus and Malta, which belong and 'interact' in the European Union. As a result, the nature of hybrid threats can be utilised to hurt bigger states in a bloc by exploiting the small states' vulnerabilities and security gaps. Inevitably, both the defensive and foreign policy collaborations of small states with bigger states have been and are constantly re-evaluated to tackle and prevent such problems. In essence, the goal of this 're-evaluation' aims to achieve a twofold goal: The first is the small states' quest to appear as a reliable partner within the bloc, while the second is to avoid being the weakest security link in the bloc's defence against hybrid threats. Indeed, the hybrid arena is a security area where they can excel in the bloc, despite the potential and expected conventional military deficiencies. This new environment prompts us to think security from the perspective of small states differently and in relation to their role as members or big organisations. The paper focuses on the case of Cyprus following its accession to the European Union and examines how a country that has had a very focused security orientation -not least due to its ongoing security problems- altered its foreign and defence policies within the European Union to ensure compliance with the rest of the bloc, while at the same time maximizing its role as a security player. Specifically, it examines the methods through which the country shifted its policies as well as the challenges and opportunities that emerged from these security shifts.

Keywords : Cyprus, defence, foreign policy, hybrid threats, ontological security, small states

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