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External behavior of small states in light of theories of international relations

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the hypotheses of main international theories (realism, liberalism and constructivism) and the development of these theories toward the behavior of foreign policy of small states in the developing world. The theories of international relations, especially the realistic theory, face a theoretical debate and a fundamental criticism. The hypotheses of these theories are not able to explain the external behavior of some small states, especially those in the developing world such as Qatar. In particular, these small states do not have the elements of physical power through which they can play this role. However, they are based on the internal determinants (such as political leadership and the variable of perception) and non-physical dimensions of power to play an effective and influential external role.

Design/methodology/approach – This topic sheds light on the hypotheses of theories of main international relations, which explain the behavior of foreign policy of small states. This is due to the increased number of such states after the disintegration of Soviet Union, the practice of some countries an effective foreign role and the transformation of the concept of power from the hard power to soft power, and then to smart power

Findings – The theories of international relations, especially the realistic theory, face a theoretical debate and a fundamental criticism. The hypotheses of these theories are not able to explain the external behavior of some small states, especially those in the developing world such as Qatar. In particular, these small states do not have the elements of physical power through which they can play this role. However, they are based on the internal determinants (such as political leadership and the variable of perception) and non-physical dimensions of power to play an effective and influential external role.

Originality/value – The importance of the study comes from its interest in small countries in general and the Qatar situation in particular. The small country emerged as a player independent of the Gulf Cooperation Council, unlike what prevailed before, which led to the discussion of a regional role for Qatar despite its small power compared to the strength and size of other factions in the region such as Turkey, Israel and Iran.

Keywords International relations, Liberalism, Constructivism, Realism, Small states

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s marked a fundamental shift in the structure of the international system from the bipolar system to the unipolar one, and witnessed also a dramatic shift in its issues and tools affecting states' foreign policy. In consequence, the concept of power shifted from the material dimensions to non-material one, and small states'



foreign policies were affected by such shift. In particular, the number of small states has been increased after the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991. These countries have adopted an effective foreign policy by using non-material dimensions in a way that contradicts the theory of realism in international relations. According to this theory, small states cannot formulate a policy outside their borders because they do not possess the material power, especially the military one. By possessing this military power, the great powers can develop an effective and influential foreign policy while small states cannot develop this effective policy because they are non-actors in the international system.

Therefore, realism theory sees that the best behavior of small states is to be satellite states to the great powers. This resulted in insufficient studies in the field of international relations on the foreign policies of small developing countries. The researchers of international relations addressed only the impact of the transformations of international environment on the external behavior of small states and ignored the studies of the external behavior of small states. It was believed that the studies of small states are futile before the end of the Cold War because the policies of these states are not effective. In addition, non-material dimensions of power have not appeared yet. These dimensions allowed partially small states to play a key role outside their borders and to leave room for the impact of internal determinants, especially the two variables of perception and political leadership, on the external behavior of states.

The theoretical literature addressed this subject are divided into three groups, which will be dealt with in the following section:

The first group dealt with the theoretical dimensions of small states' foreign behavior. The studies of this group are divided into two sections. The first addressed the impact of internal factors on the external behavior of small states without determining what the most influential internal factors are. For instance, the study of Giorgi Gavalia titled "Thinking outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States" argued that ideas affect the process of foreign policy making of small states (Gavalia, 2013). The study of Miriam Fendius Elman titled "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard" concluded that the foreign policy of small states has its sources in domestic policies (Elman, 1995). The study of Peter R. Baehr titled "Small States: A Tool for Analyses" concluded that the intended size of the state is the size of power not space (Baehr, 1975). The second section includes studies which focus on the impact of international environment on small states' external behavior. For example, the study of Michael Handel titled "Weak State in International System" concluded that the international factor is the most influential factor in the internal behavior of small states (Handel, 1990, pp. 40-41). The study of Jeanne A. K. Hey titled "Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior" argued that small states are weak and ineffective in international policy and international system.

The second group of literature addresses the analysis of external behavior of some small states in the some Western countries. For example, the study of John Rogers Source titled "The Foreign Policy of Small States: Sweden and the Mosul Crisis, 1924-1925" concluded that the decisions of foreign policy makers of small states are affected not only by the international order but also by internal factors (Source, 2007). The study of Rober Lewis Rothstein titled "Alliance and Small States" argued that small states resort to alliances which affect their foreign policies. The study of Dana Marie Morris titled "Caribbean Arabian-China Relations: Foreign Policy and Small States" concluded that the economic factor affects small states' foreign behavior (Morris, 2008).

The third group deals with studies focused on small states in the developing world. For example, the study of Mohamed Shaleby titled "Foreign Policy of Small States: Jordan and

the Process of the Settlement of Arab-Israeli Conflict (1979-1994)" concluded that the foreign policies of some small states depended on forming a perceptual image and acting a mediator. The Study of Al-Ani titled "The Foreign Policy of Small states: The Foreign Policy of Kingdom of Bahrain as A Case Study from 2003 to 2009" concluded that small states formulate their foreign policy by making generous contribution to regional and international organizations (Al-Ani, 2013).

In general, most studies of small states are western. Western researchers analyzed the foreign behavior of small states according to their prevailing view about small states in Western countries. Studies did not distinguish between small states in the developed and developing countries in terms of their characteristics and the extent of the influence of internal and external factors on their foreign policy. Studies also did not mention to two elements of leadership and perception and their impact on small states' foreign policy.

Accordingly, the study seeks to give interpretations of how small developing countries are at odds with the hypotheses of the traditional perspective of small states. Small states has begun to formulate effective foreign policies and transformed from inefficient states to efficient regional ones by the perception element or the leadership variable, launching mediation initiatives, overcoming some postponed files, or giving considerable economic assistances. These matters resulted in an effective external behavior of small states. Due to the different external behavior of small states, the realist theory was unable to give explanations for this role. Therefore, political theorists addressed harsh criticism against realism. The study also seeks to reach a concept of small states in the context of their effective and influential external role based on non-material elements of power. It also analyzes the hypotheses of the theories of international relations concerning foreign politics of small states.

Being given an explanation for the effective foreign policies of small states, the study has adopted the analytical approach through which the study addresses a main question, which is the research problem. This question is: what does explain the difference between the international relations theories' hypotheses concerning the external behavior of small states? And what does explain the difference between the hypotheses of these theories and the international reality in which some small states formulate an effective and influential policy? Sub-questions arise from the main question: what does the small state mean? What are criteria and characteristics of small states? Why are the hypotheses of theories of international relations concerning the external behavior of small states different? Why are the foreign policies of small states different? Accordingly, the study is divided into three main parts. The first part deals with the theoretical approach to the definition of small states. The second analyzes the divergent hypotheses of the theories of international relations concerning the foreign policy of small states. The third examines the explanatory factors for the difference of external behavior of small states.

2. A theoretical approach to the definition of small states

By reviewing the literature of international relations on the phenomenon of small states and tracing its developments since the establishment of nation-state after the famous Westphalia agreement in 1648 in the light of the development of international system from multipolar to bilateral and then to unilateral system, it was found that there is a problem in defining the small state, which is at two levels. The first level is practical. The concept of small states can be traced according to the three following stages. The first stage begins from Westphalia Treaty in 1648 to Versailles Treaty in 1919 through which the concept of the state relied on hierarchy (small, medium, great, super). Each arrangement had a different role in international politics. The influence of the arrangement of small states was eliminated. The

dominant idea of the analysis was that the relative status of the state in the structure of the international system determines its external behavior. The small state at that period was simply regarded as a state that was not large (Abo Lila, 2017). Some small states isolated from conflict zones prevailed at that period such as Switzerland and Andorra, as well as small states, which were not incidentally subjected to process of unified joining of former kingdoms or disintegrated empires such as Denmark and Luxembourg (Inbebristein *et al.*, 2006). The second stage represented the period after the Versailles Treaty to the 1990s. This stage witnessed the birth of a set of small states in European, American, Asian and African continents as a result of the disintegration of the old colonial empires and adopting “the principle of the prohibition of the use of power in international relations” by the United Nations. At this stage, the small European countries had an active role in international politics. Also, they played a key role in international diplomatic negotiations (Kvlihan, 2019, <http://cutt.us/vlks>) with the establishment of the League of Nations. However, this role soon disappeared due to the global recession, the failure of the League of Nations to reduce the use of force in international relations, and the limited military capabilities of these small countries. Consequently, a trend emerged after the end of the World War II that focused on the ranking of countries in the international hierarchy based on the elements of their hard power, especially the military one. Then, small states of this stage are described as satellite states despite international legal equality between great states and small ones. In turn, the Cold War (1946-1991) did not provide an opportunity for small states to play an effective and influential external role in spite of the fact that the eradication of colonialism led to the increase of small states (Shapentokh, 2012). The third stage did not witness an agreement on the definition of the small state. There was a mixture between the definition of the small state and many other concepts that are sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes independently such as the microscopic state, the developing state, the weak state, the poor state, the failed state or the least developed country. This segment of countries is the weakest and poorest in the international community (Katzenstein, 2003).

The second level is academic. Studies, which addressed the analysis of small countries, were limited because most of studies focused on the role of the great states in international politics. Furthermore, these limited studies did not contain the basis of scientific analysis because there was no agreement about a specific definition of the small state on the one hand, and the absence of a dividing line between the small state and microscope one, and the small state and medium state on the other. Therefore, most of the studies of the first stage focused on the variable of size in terms of population, area and resources:

- *Population*: there are three groups for the optimal enumeration of small state. The first group was led by David Vital, the Canadian professor, who is specialist in demography. Vital identified the small state as “a state including population from 10 to 30 million people” (Vital, 1971). The second was led by Simon Kuznets, the Russian professor, who is specialist in demography. Kuznets identified the small state as “state including population from 5 to 15 million people” (Kuznets, 2019, <http://cutt.us/rrzzk>). The third was led by Eswar S. Prasad, the Indian professor who is specialist in economics and Ayhan Kose, the director of the World Bank’s Development Prospects. Both identified the small state as “a state including population from 1 to 1,5 million” (Prasad and Kose, 2002).
- *Area*: The United Nations Organization defined the small state as “a state of not more than 100,000 km²” (Shalaby, 2008). According to the UN data, the number of small states in accordance with this indicator is 85 states (23 in Asia, 28 in Europe, 16 in Africa, 16 in Caribbean America and 2 in Eurasia). UN’s definition illustrates

that the percentage of member small states in the UN is 43.8 per cent (<http://cutt.us/6rzmw>).

- *Resources*: According to Rothstein (1968), in his book entitled “Alliance and small powers”, small state is “the state that cannot obtain security by its own capabilities and relies on others primarily to protect its security in the event of any external threats. Therefore, it seeks to hold bilateral agreements with the stronger countries with the aim of ensuring its protection and independence”. Keohane agrees with Rothstein’s definition. Keohane defined the small state as: “a weak and inefficient state in the international code.

This variable has been criticized because it focused on quantity only. Also, it puts some countries in one basket although the two elements of perception and capabilities are different. For example, it classified the United Arab Emirates, Burundi, Singapore and Rwanda in one category. In fact, there is a marked disparity between these countries in terms of international activity and effectiveness. The criticism led to the addition of new variables such as geographical location, population homogeneity, political system, military capabilities and technical potential. These elements were given an equal 14 degrees except for the political system, which was given 30 degrees. According to theorists, the political system is the most important element. The degrees of the political system are distributed as follows: super states (90-100), great states (70-89), medium states (36-69), small states (21-35), smaller states (16-20) and microscopic states (1-15) (Anthony, 2014).

The second phase of the studies focused on the common characteristics of small states and made a comparison between small states and medium, great and super states. For example, the study of Maurice East has analyzed the behavior of foreign politics of 32 small states from 1959 to 1968 through four negative features: lack of population, limited space, low level of military capabilities, low Gross National Product (GNP) (East, 1973). This has led some analysts to deal with more balanced features of small states in the shadow of the success of some small states at the level of political practice. For example, the study of Katzenstein proved that some small states have positive characteristics such as flexibility and adoptability in times of economic crises. However, this study focused on small states in the developed countries and ignored small states in the developing countries (Katzenstein, 2010).

Some analysts argue that these studies did not provide an explanation for the divergence of external behavior of small states. This means that these studies did not provide a specific definition of small states and the behavior of their foreign policies. Therefore, studies in a third stage analyzed the strategies of small states as an input to the development of definition and interpretation of the effective foreign politics of some small states at that stage. This was coupled with three criteria to classify states in the hierarchy of international system, and to define the concept of small states. These criteria are as follows:

2.1 The criterion of capabilities variable

It focuses on national capabilities in the classification of international units in terms of the relationship between the possession and arrangement of power in the international system. In this vein, Morgenthau believes that the international politics is struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1972). Morgenthau classified the behavior of states, in light of the concept of force, into three categories. First, states seeking to possess power by adopting policies of the support of the status quo. Second, states that seek to improve their position in the international hierarchy by increasing external expansion. Third, states that are satisfied with the rate of their power and they do not care about

enhancing their power. These states review their power according to their international status.

Organski agrees with Morgenthau about the variable of power. Organski believes also that the variable of power is the main variable in affecting the international politics. According to Organski, the small states do not affect the other international units in the international system (Organski, 1966). Hence, there are two trends to analyze the power of states and to differentiate between them:

2.1.1 Power means possessing capabilities. This trend assumes that a state possessing the elements of power can affect the behavior of other actors that leads to the achievement of the desired results. It focuses on the material dimensions of two economic and military powers, especially the nuclear power. However, this did not address the problem of the definition of the small state. According to Vital, if two states, one is great and other is small, possess nuclear weapons, both will not be equal. Moreover, the possession of elements of power is not a basis for changing the behavior of others. If states have no ability to transform the elements of power to the tools of influence on the behavior of other states, these elements will not be influential as a result of misperception (Vital, 1971).

2.1.2 Power means the impact on the behavior of other countries. This trend differentiates between power as a means, which refers to the capabilities of a state, and power as an influence, which depends on the element of perception. If the decision maker is not aware of the capabilities of his country and is able to transform them to external influence, such capabilities will not produce the desired effect on the behavior of other countries. In addition, the great country may not be able to implement the objectives of its foreign politics because other countries may be wrong to recognize the national capabilities of the great state, and then these countries act as if the great state does not exist.

Raimo Väyrynen defines small states as “a state is of low rank or objective in the context in which it is active”. Decision maker’s perceptions in small states, which are prior to their role, are different from the perception of decision makers of the medium and great powers. This affects, in addition to their low rank, their external behavior (Väyrynen, 1997). While Glacienne Krimpekva defines small states as “it has limited influence in the international structure because its limited capabilities made it at the bottom of any classification of the order of states”. The small states also were defined from the perspective of influence by another scientist as “they are not only incapable to achieve the objectives of their foreign politics, but also they are incapable to face other states that are seeking to achieve their goals.

This trend is also criticized. It did not specify the actor who practices influence and the cost of influence of actor and receiver, as well as the impact is difficult to measure. It is not necessarily that the change in the behavior of state (b) is a result of the action of state (a). It is possible that the change in behavior (b) is due to its expectations of change of actions of (a) although the state (a) is not intended to change its behavior toward the state (b). This is called “silent power” that is difficult to measure and observe due to the absence of clear behavior or the attempts of the practice of influence.

This trend clarified the concept of smallness in terms of the impact on the international system through the indicators of area, population, national product and military power rate. However, the age of information and globalization made such indicators misleading. In fact, this age provided new non-material indicators such as effectiveness, legitimacy and the message of the foreign politics itself.

2.2 The criterion of perception variable

This criterion focuses on the variable of perception in the classification of international units, whether the perception of decision maker of national capabilities of its state and its ranking in the international system, or the perception of the other international units of ranking the state in the international system. According to Jean A.K. “the smallness of the state is based on the perception of its leaders of the role of the state in international hierarchy (Hey, 2003). Both Keohane and Jean agree that the small state is the one whose leaders realize that they cannot individually or collectively affect international system. Keohane classified states in term of their impact on international system into four categories. First, states that are not influential in the international system. The leaders of such states realize that their countries are not able to affect the international system, either through alliances or unilateral action. Consequently, they adjust their foreign politics according to the policies and strategies of the international system. Small states are a case in point. Second, states that are influential in the international system. The leaders of these states realize that their states affect the international system by joining regional and international alliances, not by their unilateral action. Medium states are a case in point. Third, state that have influence on the international system. The leaders of such states recognize that their states have no ability to control the international system, although they can only affect the nature of the international system through individual or collective movements such as great states. Fourthly, states that determine the rules of the international system. The leaders of these states understand that their states play a key role in shaping the international system and its rules such as super powers (Keohane, 1969).

Despite the importance of the classification of international units, it is not enough indicator of the power of state unless there are the variable of perception of political leader, and the ability of the leader to transform the capabilities of the state to influence. However, some scientists argue that the state’s behavior on the international arena is a necessary matter of measuring the power of the state, and not the element of perception

2.3 The criterion of international membership variable

This criterion explains how an international unit gains influence in a particular issue. It focuses on the division of international organizations of international units with regard to the hierarchy of the international system such as a membership in the Security Council, states possessing nuclear weapons and the Group of Seven (G 7). This criterion is criticized because it focuses on one indicator or one issue in classifying of states, which provides misleading results about smallness and bigness of the state’s size (De Rusett, 1954).

In the light of the previous concepts of the small states, which have been addressed in the context the previous three criteria; the following conclusions can be reached. First, the concept of the small state in the study refers to a small state based on its national capabilities and how to employ such capabilities in implementing its foreign politics when comparing them with the national capabilities of other countries that interact with it. Second, the indicator, which focuses on the definition of the small state in the light of the relationship between gaining power and its arrangement in the international system, provides a strong basis for determining what is the small state according to measurable indicators. Third, the element of perception is very important in the definition of small state. The state’s perception of its own capabilities and the perception of the other countries of such capabilities play a key role in defining the small state. The small state may play an influential role when it perceives the fear of the great country of the small country, and when it is ready to bear the sacrifices and losses caused by its policies toward great states, as well as when it possess natural resources which are important for great states and its threats the

great state to be biased to another competing states. Fourth, Western Studies focus on small countries in the developed world and do not distinguish between these countries and their counterparts in the developing world, despite the vast differences between them economically, militarily and culturally. Thus, this matter makes these studies misleading in the case of application to a state located in the developing world.

Accordingly, the small state can be defined as “the state which is characterized by limited national capabilities and the way by which it uses such capabilities in achieving the objectives of its foreign politics, with make a comparison between its capabilities and other countries’ capabilities. It must be perceived as a small state by its leaders and other states’ leaders in the international system.

3. Theoretical approaches to study foreign politics of small states

This topic sheds the light on the hypotheses of theories of main international relations, which explain the behavior of foreign politics of small states. This is due to the increased number of such states after the disintegration of Soviet Union, the practice of some countries an effective foreign role and the transformation of the concept of power from the hard power to soft power, and then to smart power. These hypotheses will be addressed in the following section.

3.1 Hypotheses of realist theory on the external behavior of small states

The roots of realistic vision back to the ideas of the Greek philosopher Tucydides, who argued that “the colonial expansions of Athens and its capabilities, and Sparta’s fear of conquest were the main motives for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war for more than a quarter of century. In addition, the ideas of Machiavelli in the 16th century and Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century, who agreed that the best description of international politics is “the jungle” and the rule of power logic (Morgenthau, 1972).

Classical realism emerged after the end of World War II as a theoretical premise to explain international developments that the hypotheses of idealism failed to explain them. For example, Hans Morgenthau suggested in his famous book “*Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*”, the principle of collective security by establishing organizations and concluding international treaties.

Realism is based on a main hypothesis, which is:

[...] international politics is full of conflicts and international wars for possessing power. Also, human nature seeking to possess power is the main motive of international conflicts. Great powers are seeking to possess power to achieve their international interests, which are security, survival and control over the chaotic international system (Rosenau, 1969).

The hypotheses of realist theory are as follow (Fearon, 1998):

- The state is the main actor in international politics.
- The international system is a chaotic and not a hierarchical system.
- The concept of interest is the main factor of the realist theory.
- Self-reliance is the best way to achieve security and survival.
- The objective of survival as a power is the main objective of great states.
- The mechanism of balance of power is the way to sustain peace and prevent the outbreak of conflicts and wars.

Despite the consecutive emergence of small states after the end of the Cold War, the new theoretical approaches of realist theory did not present a new dimension to the phenomenon of small states and the same traditional perspective of small states continued. The new approaches focused on the possession of great powers of the material dimensions of power and neglected the phenomenon of small states. The new approaches are divided into two sections. The first section is neo-realism or structural realism, which emerged in the early 1980s by Kenneth Waltz in his book "*The Theory of International Politics*" and by George Modelsky. The second is neo-classical realism that emerged in the 1990s by a group of theorists such as Randall Schweller and Jack Snyder ([Rittberger, 2004](#)).

Neo-realism focused on the element of chaos in the international system to interpret of international politics rather than the interpretation of human nature as in classical realism. Chaos forces nations to increase the sources of their power for survival. The pressures imposed by the international system on states are supposed to be so strong and direct that the movements of all states are similar regardless of their internal characteristics. Thus, the interpretation of the external behavior of states must be based on analyzing its relative power and how to render this power into the behavior of its foreign policy ([Abo Lila, 2017](#)). Also, the state's domestic and foreign policy must be separated, although the foreign policy is a natural extension of the domestic one ([Mattern, 2001](#)).

According to neo-realism, although restrictions imposed by international system have been realized by mediator variables such as political and bureaucratic structures, structural explanations are the main starting point in analyzing the state's external behavior. In fact, the relative status of states in the chaotic international system and states' material capabilities present a useful approach to understand their external behavior. In consequence, neo-realism suggests that the international system is the main analysis unit, and not the state as in classical realism. In the 1980s, the world witnessed the increase of neo-actors such as multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations, which represented a challenge for classical realism ([Waltz, 1979](#)).

Neo-realism is divided into two sections. First, defensive realism: It was established by Gilpin in 1981. Great powers depend on a defensive power, and then a defensive policy. Also, the structure of international system pushes the international units toward maintaining the existing balance of power, in other words preserving the status quo by balance of power rather than the extreme increase to power ([Gilpin, 1981](#)). Second, offensive realism: It was established by John Mearsheimer in 2001. In his book titled "*The Tragedy of Great Powers*", Mearsheimer sought to merge between Waltz and Morgenthau's ideas. According to Mearsheimer, "states depend on offensive power. Consequently, states seek to increase their power to ensure their existence in the chaotic international system to maintain their national security" ([Mearsheimer, 2001](#)).

In view of the emergence of new international developments during 1990s, classical realism and neo-realism failed to predict such developments. Neo-classical realism did not present a new matter for small states, despite the emergence of a new wave of small states as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Indeed, it added new variables which were consistent with the structure and facts of the classical theory and make them more comprehensive and accurate in the interpretation of foreign international politics. These new variables are the impact of the internal determinants and their importance in understanding the external behavior of the state and the impact of external determinants.

Thus, neo-classical realism combined the internal and external determinants in its explanation for the behavior of foreign policies of countries. It argues that the capabilities of the material state determine its status in the hierarchy of the international system. However, it sees that the pressures of international system affect indirectly the state's foreign policy

through a complex process where such pressures are to be rendered and addressed through intermediate variables linked to internal factors (Rose, 1998).

Thus, there is a difference between the classical theory and new approaches about the nature of the separation between internal determinants and foreign policy. The difference is in the sharpness of separation. It is a hard separation with the supporters of classical realism and neo-classical realism on the grounds that the international code determines the nature of external behavior of major international actors, while the proponents of neo-classical realism reduce the sharpness of this separation. According to them, the internal determinants affect understanding external behavior beside external determinants (Fearovoy, 1998).

In consequence, this theory examines and analyzes the foreign policy of great powers and neglects the study of small states in the international system because they do not have material power to develop an effective and influential foreign policy. Small states seek only to maintain their survival and avoid the attempts of great powers to control or occupy them (Schweller, 1997, pp. 33-34). They are usually ineffective in the international system and are not formulating independent foreign policies that ensure their effectiveness and continuity (Efral and Bencovitch, 1992, pp. 1-2).

Realist school has addressed barrage of criticism. It ignored the study of phenomenon of small states' foreign policy and its impact on the international system, though some small states formulated an effective foreign policy. In reality, the literature of realist school dealt with the explanation of the behavior and policies of the great powers, but literature aimed at examining small states' foreign policy were very rare. Indeed, some of the realist theorists such as Van Everia argues that small states have no importance theoretically and internationally in the post-Cold War world, despite the fact that most of the world's population live in small states.

According to realist school, small states have no the elements of the material power, and then they did not receive the attention of realism's theorists. The world will only care about the strong, though the relationship between power and poverty is not absolutely certain. All rich countries are not necessarily strong and all poor countries are not necessarily weak. Therefore, small states deserve further studies because they have the sources of power. These studies have been neglected by the American realist school. In fact, the theorists of realism claim that small states have no influence on current international interactions, but these claims became unfounded and unrealistic. This is at odds with universality and firmness of the reality school. According to Waltz, the realist school will remain as the most scientific method of explaining foreign policy phenomena as long as the international order is chaotic and the nation – state is existent. However, The Realists are still focusing on the concepts of material power (military and economic) that many small states lack.

3.2 Hypotheses of liberal theory on the external behavior of small states

Liberalism was first developed by Emeric Crosah in his book: "*The Speech of State*" issued in 1623. This book reflected the social changes occurred in Europe in the early sixteenth century as a result of the domination of the church and the uprising of the European peoples that advocated the slogans of equality, freedom and the just distribution of wealth. According to Liberalism, the spread of democratic values, interdependence and international institutions can achieve peace and security. Liberal values create democratic states, which are seeking to achieve peace and refuse the international conflicts. In fact, the values of cooperation and peace, and not conflicts, are the basis of international relations. Liberalism refuses the logic of the realists, which argues that conflicts prevail in international politics for power because human nature seeking to power is the main motive of international conflicts (Moravscik, 1997).

Liberalism interests in the study of international relations by tracing the effects of internal variables of the domestic actors, beside international ones, on the states' foreign politics. Unlike realism, liberalism indicates that states are not the only actors in international politics, but there are other actors such as individuals, lobbies and multinational corporations.

Therefore, the foreign politics of a state, in accordance with liberalism, is a set of external goals determined by the interests of internal social actors. Liberalism adopts the approach of ascending analysis which starts from the internal environment. According to liberalism, the performance of the state determines its status in the international system. In contrast, realism adopted the approach of descending analysis which starts from the international system (Rittberger, 2004).

The opponents of institutional liberalism believe that the institution plays a key role in determining the behavior of the state. The behavior of a great state is affected by institutions when it commits to the exchange of advice with smaller states. The criteria of behavior specify the obligations and duties of states within the framework of international system, and then determine their expected behavior (Hegemony, 1984).

As a consequence of the development of international politics after the end of the Cold War, neo-liberalism emerged by Robert Keohane, the author of the book: *"After Hegemony: Cooperation and Competition in the Global Political Economy"* in 1984, and Joseph Nye, the creator of new terms that are different from the terms of realism such as soft power in 1990, smart power in 2003 and virtual power. These terms came as a result of the emergence of new phenomena that realism and its theoretical developments and classical liberalism were not able to interpret them due to the emergence of the cultural dimensions in international relations, which led to the occurrence of revolution in the field of information and electronics (Nye, 2004).

Thus, the liberals began to talk about new concepts that prevailed in the last decade of the 20th century. These concepts are called "non-martial dimensions of power" such as soft power and smart power, which could increase the effectiveness of small states' foreign politics and could expand their roles in the international system. Nye defined soft power in his book titled: *"Binding to Leadership"* in 1990 as "getting what you want by attraction, persuasion and impact, rather than coercion and threat" (Nye, 2004). According to Nye, "smart power is the ability of the international actor to blend the elements of two hard and soft powers to achieve foreign policy's objectives provided that the goals of its use and the state's tools and capabilities must be recognized. Also, the strengths and weaknesses of the state should be specified, as well as the time of using it must be determined (Nye, 2011).

Liberalism was criticized because it dealt with the ideal world in which states are seeking to achieve peace, not conflict, by trade exchange and democratic and moral convergence. This may be true in some Western countries that are characterized by democracy, institutionalism, and political and economic stability. However, the countries of third world, mostly small states, have authoritarian regimes. In addition, international powers interfere in their domestic affairs and seek to control over their natural resources. There is also imbalance of power as a result of the different distribution of wealth between the two small and great states (Fearon, 1998). Therefore, the question is "how to apply the principles and values of liberalism to great and small states in the developing world?" In particular, some small states have authoritarian regimes and effective foreign policies toward the regional issues.

Small states in the third world live in aggression with their neighbors and unstable regional environments. These countries are still living in the state-building phase. Border problem and national and ethnic conflicts drain their political, economic and human

resources. In addition, decision makers in these countries take account of survival and wealth, and not public service considerations. According to realism, the countries of the third world seek to protect the life of their citizens rather than raise their standard of living. It is unaffordable luxury at the present stage.

Liberalism emphasizes the importance of the political and domestic system of states, which must be consistent with their counterparts in other countries to achieve cooperation and peace between them. Liberals believe that establishing peace depends on the existence of three attributes: economic liberalism, political democracy and international organizations. Thus, the absence of all or any of these attributes makes countries unable to achieve cooperation and establish peace.

Such claims have a clear bias in favor of Western ideas and philosophies. In essence, the condition of the existence of such features to achieve cooperation and peace is a precondition for their sovereignty internationally. This makes these features a kind of imposing of Western ideas on the rest of the countries of the world regardless of their circumstances and specificities. The universality of these ideas is not true where there are a close cooperation between non-democratic states such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASIAN) and the Shanghai Security Organization and other. The question is How does liberalism explain such cooperation between non-democratic states?

3.3 Hypotheses of constructivism theory on the external behavior of small states

New international variables emerged on the international arena according to the element of identity. These variables emerged after the end of Cold War and the outbreak of civil wars, and the development of European Union as a model of regional integration compared with the failures of other integration experiences at the global level. The hypotheses of realism were not to be able to explain such variables.

As a result of these variables, new contributions emerged from the beginning of the 1990s that led to the revival of the Constructivism theory. Constructivism is attributed to the classical theories of Kant, Hegel and Grotius that prevailed between the Two World Wars and was called the ideal school. In 1989, it was reemerged by Nicholas Onuf in his book titled: *"The World of our Making"* (Onuf *et al.*, 1998), and the contribution of Wendt on the impact of identity and perception on international chaos and foreign politics, as well as the contributions of Frederick Kertoschuel that focused on ideas, language and values and how they affect the process of foreign politics-making of states (Wendt, 1999). In addition, the events of September 11 affirmed the rise of constructivism, which focused on the importance of the role of ideology and identity in understanding the post-9/11 world.

Constructivism added new concepts such as ideas, values, identities, beliefs and perceptions. These concepts shape the motivations of the behavior of actors in the international system based on the constant interaction construction (international system) and actors, not only state actors but also non-state actors such as international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Constructivism did not neglect the role of the state, which is the main actor. Simultaneously, it did not neglect the role of the interest (Giddens, 2011). However, constructivism focused on the importance of interaction between these components, ideas and identities, and how ideas determine the interest. According to the structural perspective, the interest is a social component. The constructivists believe that identity and interest are closely linked to each other (Onuf *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, constructivism is a theory that studies international relations from a social perspective. This theory is based on two factors: construction and actor. Construction is common identities, values, ideas, perceptions and the preferences of the political leader. Actor is the units that interact with each other and with the social structures, and affect each other. Then,

constructivism rejects the arguments of realism based on the fact that chaos in international system is the constant truth of human reality. However, constructivism sees that facts are being constructed on a social basis by interacting values, identities and practices. Consequently, constructivism rejects the impact of the chaos of the international system on states' external behavior. It tended to interpret the foreign politics of states within the framework of its social context. Thus, identity becomes the main determinant of that politics. In a socially constructed political world, constructivism helps the actor to define the self and the other and to determine their preferences and interests.

Thus, constructivism refuses the perspective of both realism and liberalism. According to constructivism, the interests of the state are constant and predetermined by the state's national capabilities. These interests continue, in accordance with this vision, during the process of social interaction. Due to the change of these interests, reshaping the state's identity may lead to the change of national interests, and then the change of the state's external behavior. Paul Viotti and Mark Koby indicate that there are several hypotheses of constructivism in international relations (Viotti, 2012), which are:

- The social content of material power in international relations. For example, North Korea is a historical enemy of the USA. It is a material power that must be understood in the context of the differences of identities. (Dahl, 1966).
- The social content of interest in international relations. The example developed by Wendt illustrates that the USA must face North Korea due to its national interest. The US leaders are aware of hostile relations between the US and North Korea. However, the US is not in its interest to contain Britain because the US recognizes that the mutual benefits between them are based on identity not on interest according to realism (Wight, 2006).
- The international system is a social system rather than a realist fact. Therefore, the chaotic nature of the international system is a product of nation-states and not a hallmark of international system as realists and liberals believe.
- The structure of international blocs is to be formed by common ideas and identities, and not by material power as realism assumes, or common interest as liberalism assumes (Kubalkova, 2015).

3.3.1 Identity and ideas as Central concepts and their impact on foreign policies of states according to constructivists.

3.3.1.1 Identity. It is based on two types. The first is original (features that distinguish the actor from the other actors). The second is determined by the relationship with others. When we say that the USA is a democratic state, this is an original identity. However, when we say that the USA is a dominant state, this is identity determined by its relationship with other actors. Identity has several functions: identifying the self of actor and others, determining interests and preferences, and thus specifying behavior, expectations of international roles and the behavior of other actors.

3.3.1.2 Ideas. Constructivists defined ideas as:

[...] the beliefs of individuals that affect the results of foreign policies of states. In other words, ideas are independent variables that explain change and continuity in the external behavior of state.

Hence, the ideas and perceptions of political leadership are main internal determinants of foreign policy on the one hand, and are important to the decision-maker to understand the interests of its state and its foreign politics on the other hand. Constructivists focus on two

types of ideas. First, the ideas of the ruling elite about the shape of the best system of the state: Such ideas help the political leader to constitute the state's foreign politics and attitudes, to specify the possible challenges and threats, to present mechanisms and means that achieve the interests of the state and its national security, and to identify allies and adversaries (Mingest, 2011). Second, the ideas of elites about the purpose of the state: The political leader determines the purpose that the state is seeking to achieve. For example, the state may be an effective regional actor, active international actor, neutral regional or international mediator, or ally with regional or international powers (Mingest, 2011).

Accordingly, the question is:

Q1. What is the position of small states toward constructivism theory?

Q2. Is it possible to apply the arguments of this theory to small states in the developing world as applied to great countries?

The hypotheses and arguments of constructivists reveal that the constructivism is the closest theory to the treatment, analysis and interpretation of the behavior of foreign policies of small states, especially the countries developing world. In reality, identity, ideas and values have a priority for decision makers in these countries, and present an essential determinant in the behavior of their foreign politics. Furthermore, constructivism directed attention to small states and transnational actors. This is due to the fact that the role of ideas and identity in forming states' foreign policies has been increased. Consequently, many studies, which analyze the policies of small countries, have been released. According to constructivism, these small states do not belong to the major industrial countries, including developing countries.

The influence of the ruling elite of small states in the developing world is greater than that in the developed world. The governments of the developing countries are described as one of the most totalitarian regimes in the world where there is only one political party that has complete power and control over the people. If the ideas of ruling elite are divided and incompatible, the impact of these ideas will diminish. Also, the influence of ideas and perceptions is evident in supporting decision makers for their counterparts in other countries to take power. This support may take political, economic and diplomatic forms. It perpetuates the existing regime for a long time (Mingest, 2011).

However, constructivism is not to be able to explain the outbreak of conflicts between states or groups that share identities. How can constructivism explain the Gulf War II in 1991 between two Arab states that share one identity? And how can constructivism explain the continued refusal of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to join Iraq and Yemen for the membership of the Gulf Cooperation Council despite similar values and identities and ignoring material variables? According to constructivism, the study of the state's identity requires a deeper study of the nature of the political system and the ideology of the ruling party, while there is no agreement about the concept of identity, not to mention the fact that identity is difficult to measure.

Based on the hypotheses of the three theories mentioned above, the study concludes the following points:

- According to the opinion of the realists, the behavior of small states within the international system is formed as a result of the construction of the chaotic international system. It is formed, according to liberals, as a result of the internal structure of international units and their interactions. It is formed, according to the constructivism, as a result of the internal construction of units and its perceptive impact on the decision maker.

- Realism is based on the structural interpretations where the states' relative status and material capabilities provide a clear understanding of their behavior. Thus, realism focused on the great powers and ignored the small states because they do not have, according to the realists, the elements of material power, making them non-actors in the international system.
- Liberalism has ignored the small states in the developing world. It has focused on the internal determinants in the democratic countries, while most small states in the developing world are undemocratic states. Therefore, the impact of internal determinants of small states on their foreign policies does not exist. Although liberals focused on non-material dimensions of power, no new criteria have been introduced to study the foreign policies of small states. Thus, the concept of power, from the liberal perspective, became more complex and difficult. Unlikely to the realist perspective, power cannot be measured according to liberal perspective.
- Constructivism is close to the analysis of the phenomenon of small states in general and small states in developing world in particular. The influence of the leader's ideas and perceptions on small states' foreign politics in the developing world is significantly growing, but it is also difficult to measure identity.

However, is there an alternative framework for analysis that helps us understand the behavior of foreign policy of small states? Small states in the developing world are primitive countries that are a product of Western colonial period. They lack institutionalism in the process of internal and external political decision-making. They are governed by authoritarian political regimes and are controlled by one party, which monopolizes all sources of political power. They also lack political participation, multi-party system and popular control. In addition, corruption, violence, instability, political tension and economic stagnation are rampant phenomena.

The personality of political leadership plays a prominent role in determining and shaping the state's vision and perception of international system, and thus in shaping their behavior and external movement. Therefore, the element of perception plays a central role in determining the foreign policy of small states where non-democratic regimes in developing countries allow the political leader to play a greater role in specifying foreign policy priorities than institutional democratic systems that limit the political leader's role in determining the priorities of foreign policy.

Although political values occupy a great place in the identification, formulation, vision and perception of decision – makers when formulating their foreign policies toward other international units or when looking at the international system. However, some may see this as an unrealistic proposition because values are a non-material and normative variable that is contrary to the realistic vision. Realism is often seen as a material school that deals only with tangible material facts. It is possible to respond to this allegation from several aspects:

- The nature of small states in the developing world is very different from what is known in the Western countries. In fact, values continue to play a major role in the political life of these countries and affect the internal and external decision-making process. However, some ignore them like new realists and some other misinterpret them like neo-liberals and conservatives as Huntington did in his theory called the clash of civilization.
- International relations are originally a game of values balance. During the Cold War, the USA was urging the countries of the world to adopt the American and

Western values and standards. The USA sought to promote such values and made US aid contingent on the adoption of these values

4. Explanatory factors for the difference of external behavior of small states

A plethora of the literature on international relations agree on the existence of common characteristics of the foreign politics of small states, but in practice there is a difference between the foreign policies of small states due to the difference of goals and tools of small states. The study will review some variables that indicate to the difference of small states' foreign policies in the following points:

- Some small states are resorting to follow great powers or establish relations with them. They prefer to resort to great powers to maintain their security and survival as an existing international system, or resort to establish special relations with great powers such as the special relations between Israel and the USA. These relations made Israel able to achieve its objectives where the USA is seeking to preserve the qualitative superiority of Israel in the Middle East, to protect the security and survival of Israel, and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state ([Abo Lila, 2017](#)).
- Some other small states are seeking to create the hallmark. These states are providing a distinctive service or commodity for the public internally and externally to make the consumer interested in this service or commodity. For example, the small state may provide the service of mediation or provide foreign investments and aids in many sectors, which make the world aware of the importance of this country and the quality of its service. Thus, it can gain considerable in international politics ([Abo, Lila, 2017](#)). In this regard, analysts believe that the success of the state in creating its hallmark is not easy because this matter requires the state to maintain the hallmark. For example, it is possible to refer to Qatar's attempts to attract the world's attention by adopting an independent politics within the GCC since 1995 ([Roberts, 2012](#)). In addition, the countries of the European Union, especially Germany and France, have considerable impact on world politics due to the recovery of its economy. The Netherlands, for example, is now producing most of its goods outside its border.
- Some other small states are resorting to adopt the strategy of soft power. They are seeking to acquire both soft and virtual powers to be effective in their foreign policies at the two regional and international levels. Small states aim to compensate for the elements of material power, especially military power. These new forms of power have increased the chances of small states to implement effective and influential foreign politics, especially in the age of globalization and openness to the world ([Abo Lila, 2017](#)).
- Other small states use the elitist and societal cohesion as a defensive power. Thus, they can resist external pressures and compensate for the absence of its material power. They, therefore, adopt a foreign politics which is different from the foreign politics of states seeking to acquire soft or virtual power ([Abo Lila, 2017](#)).

5. Research findings

Based on the aforesaid analysis, it can be said that the theories of international relations, especially the realist theory, face a theoretical debate and a fundamental criticism. The

hypotheses of these theories are not able to explain the external behavior of some small states, especially the developing countries such as Qatar. In particular, these small states do not have the elements of material power through which they can play this role. However, they are based on the internal determinants (such as political leadership and perception) and non-material dimensions of power to play an effective and influential external role. By the end of the above analysis, several research findings could be made. Firstly, some small states were contrary to the hypotheses of the two realism and liberalism theories where realism focused on the influence of the international system on the foreign policies of small countries, and liberalism focused on the internal factors in general without specifying what are these factors and the nature of their impact. However, constructivism focused on the concept of identity because values and identity are convergent concepts. Therefore, constructivism is the closest to analyzing the behavior of foreign policy of small countries. Also, there are theoretical shortcomings in the content of the realist theory.

Secondly, the internal determinants, especially the variable of perception and the concept of identity, can play a key role in making an effective foreign politics of small countries where the ideas and perceptions of the leader have a significant impact on foreign policy in small states of the developing world. This explains the reason why do some small states in the developing world formulate an effective and influential foreign policy even though they do not possess the material and non-material capabilities, which some middle and great countries have.

Thirdly, despite the similarity between characteristics and standards of small countries, their foreign policies were different. Some small states are keeping peace with great powers. Other small states are seeking to create their hallmark internationally. Others are adopting the acquisition of soft power and the principle of social cohesion as a defensive power to face internal pressures. In essence, the difference of the tools and objectives of small states' foreign politics in the developing world has resulted in the difference of their foreign policies.

Finally, studying the foreign policies of small states by stressing on their differences rather than their common features is a theoretical effort still not exerted and that paying attention to differences between the foreign policies of small states might overcome many of the theoretical shortcomings of mainstream IR theories that treated small states as a package, thereby failing to explain important features of these states' foreign policies.

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