

Resilience in Flux: Rethinking Small-State Strategy through Charles Lobell's *Small States in a Shifting International Order*

Christian Ilcus*

Gociu consult, Denmark.

*Corresponding Author: Christian Ilcus, MSc in political science IFSK Århus and MA in EU Studies, College of Europe, Bruges.

ABSTRACT

The review article on Charles Lobell's book "Small States in a Shifting International Order" explores how small states navigate complex global dynamics by focusing on the interplay of security, legitimacy, and influence. It highlights Lobell's innovative approach, which combines comparative case studies from various regions, including Europe and the Middle East, to identify strategic behaviors that small states employ to maintain their agency despite structural challenges. The article emphasizes the importance of governance, international partnerships, and economic diversification as key factors for small states to enhance their resilience and influence. It also critiques the book for underestimating domestic political dynamics and historical contexts that shape small-state strategies, suggesting that a more integrated approach could provide a deeper understanding of their roles in international relations. Overall, the review underscores the need for small states to adapt and innovate in response to ongoing global changes while balancing their internal governance challenges.

Keywords: Small states, Strategic behavior, Security, Legitimacy, Influence, Governance, Resilience, Economic diversification.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: 12 October 2025

Accepted: 30 October 2025

Published: 11 November 2025

Cite this article as:

Christian Ilcus. Resilience in Flux: Rethinking Small-State Strategy through Charles Lobell's *Small States in a Shifting International Order*. International Journal of Innovative Studies in Humanities and Social Studies, 2025; 1(6); 29-58.

<https://doi.org/10.71123/3067-7319.010603>

Copyright:©2025. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



Learn what you are, and be such. — Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, II.72

Lobell's Scholarly Approach: Analytical Foundations and Critical Perspective

Charles Lobell's *Small States in a Shifting International Order* (2026) presents a methodologically rigorous and theoretically ambitious framework for understanding the strategic behavior of small states in an era defined by uncertainty and flux. Departing from conventional small-state studies, which often adopt descriptive or inductive methods to catalogue historical instances of influence, Lobell combines comparative case analysis with a repertoires-of-strategy lens, aiming to discern generalizable patterns across disparate contexts. His approach is explicitly structuralist without being deterministic: he acknowledges the constraining influence of systemic volatility, the distribution of power, and regional hierarchies, but treats small states as agents capable of strategic recalibration, rather than mere victims of structural forces.

The analytical framework is built around three interrelated

dimensions: security, legitimacy, and influence. Security refers not only to traditional defense and alignment considerations, but also to the more complex forms of risk management that small states employ to buffer themselves from regional instability or shifts in great-power priorities. Legitimacy captures both external recognition—through institutions, international law, and diplomacy—and domestic cohesion, reflecting the idea that small states must project credible authority internally and externally to survive. Influence encompasses the ability to shape outcomes disproportionate to size, whether through normative leadership, diplomatic niche roles, or the cultivation of issue-specific authority in global governance arenas.

Methodologically, Lobell's comparative ambition is striking. By juxtaposing cases from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, he develops a typology of strategies that can be applied cross-regionally, moving beyond the Eurocentric focus that has historically dominated small-state literature. This comparative breadth enables him to illuminate common trade-offs and dilemmas: for example, a security-heavy alignment with a

great power may strengthen external guarantees but reduce normative credibility, while institutional embedding may enhance legitimacy but generate limited hard influence. These insights operationalize the broader theoretical claim that small states' agency is conditional, recalibrated continuously in response to structural shifts, rather than static.

From a critical perspective, Lobell's work has several strengths. First, it addresses a persistent gap in the field: the lack of a dynamic, process-oriented account of small-state strategy under systemic turbulence. Second, the book's explicit triadic framework—security, legitimacy, influence—provides a clear analytical grammar that can be applied to both historical and contemporary cases. Third, by including a geographically diverse set of states, Lobell offers a model that is transferable beyond European or Nordic contexts, making it particularly relevant for states in regions characterized by multipolar competition and regional instability.

However, there are also notable limitations. While the book foregrounds structural conditions and strategic repertoires, it sometimes underplays domestic political dynamics and historical path-dependencies, which are crucial in shaping the feasibility of any given strategy. For instance, elite cohesion, bureaucratic capacity, and societal legitimacy are treated primarily as enabling factors rather than variables requiring systematic analysis. Similarly, while the cross-regional comparisons are analytically rich, they can obscure local contingencies that may produce divergent outcomes, particularly in states facing acute internal fragility or asymmetric domestic power structures. Finally, the focus on generalizable repertoires risks glossing over the iterative learning processes that small states undergo when navigating volatile orders—a dimension emphasized in the Nordic and Icelandic small-state scholarship.

Despite these critiques, Lobell's framework sets the stage for a comparative examination of strategic repertoires, which is particularly useful for assessing how small states seek to balance security, legitimacy, and influence.

Reframing Scope and Purpose

Lobell situates small states within a global order no longer defined by stable hierarchies or predictable institutional routines. In contrast to the implicit equilibrium of much post-Cold War small-state literature, Lobell takes volatility as a structural given and asks how small states can operate within it. His selection of cases—ranging from Denmark, Sweden, and the Baltic states to Ghana, Jordan, Nepal, and Costa Rica—signals an ambition to move beyond regional clusters and develop a genuinely comparative typology of small-state strategies. This approach contrasts with

earlier European-focused scholarship (Ingebritsen et al., 2006) and marks a central analytical shift: the question is no longer whether small states matter, but how they can sustain security, legitimacy, and influence under conditions of systemic turbulence.

International order and the Middle East

International order is defined as structured interactions among states and actors. It is composed of rules, norms, institutions, and recurring behavioral patterns. Realists see order as stemming from the distribution of power among states. Liberals emphasize institutions, law, and cooperation as the foundation of order. Constructivists focus on shared norms, beliefs, and legitimacy as central to order. Practically, order is reflected in alliances, treaties, trade regimes, and diplomatic norms. It provides stability, predictability, and frameworks for conflict resolution. Compliance and recognition by states and actors are essential for its functioning. Order adapts through crisis management mechanisms like mediation, sanctions, and peacekeeping. Challenges include rising powers, non-state actors, and contested norms.

Small states in the Middle East, such as Jordan, Qatar, and Kuwait, operate in a highly volatile regional environment where they cannot rely on raw military or economic power to secure their interests. International order provides a framework of predictable rules, norms, and institutions that these states can leverage to enhance their security, legitimacy, and influence against the backdrop of ever changing alliances.

Michael N. Barnett, characterises Arab politics as “a series of dialogues among Arab states about the desired regional order — the ongoing debate among Arab states about the norms of Arab politics and the relationship of those norms to their Arab identities.” A constructivist analytical lens in international relations is a way of studying global politics that focuses on ideas, norms, identities, and social interactions rather than just material power or interests. It asks how the beliefs, values, and shared understandings of actors shape their behavior, define what is considered legitimate, and construct the very structure of the international system. In his constructivist analysis, Barnett argues that Arab politics is shaped less by mere power balancing and more by the shared identity “Arabism”—how Arab states define what being Arab means, what the region's order should be, and which norms should govern state relations. He also highlights that the tools of competition in this system were often symbolic (broadcasts, public declarations, alignment with the Arab nation) rather than strictly military or material.

Unlike Barnett's constructivist framing with the analytical lens on who we are by futile fumistes, Loebell would

emphasizes the pragmatic, interest-driven behavior of small states in the Middle East, particularly in a global and regional system characterized by asymmetries of power. While Barnett highlights Arab politics as largely a contest over norms, identity, and symbolic legitimacy, Loebell would argue that small states navigate both global and regional orders through strategic diplomacy, hedging, and alliance management rather than purely ideational concerns. In other words:

- Small states are pragmatic actors, prioritizing survival, security, and economic stability.
- They leverage regional institutions, multilateral frameworks, and great power competition to amplify their influence.
- Norms and identity matter, but they are tools rather than ends; small states manipulate them to secure material or security advantages.
- In a world of power transition and regional volatility, small states' actions are calculated to mitigate risk rather than advance ideological visions of Arab order.

So, while Barnett emphasizes symbolic and normative contestation within Arab politics, Loebell stresses strategic adaptation and institutional engagement as the defining feature of small state diplomacy in a turbulent regional system.

As the structure of global power transitions, the tremors extend far beyond distant capitals, cascading into regional fault lines where states large and small struggle to adapt. Great powers jostle for influence, reshaping alliances and economic corridors, while regional tensions flare as emerging actors seize openings left by the waning authority of established hegemonies. Every shift amplifies uncertainty: conflicts that once simmered quietly erupt into crises, trade and energy networks strain under competing demands, and smaller states are forced into a delicate dance of alignment and hedging. In this turbulent environment, the very rules of the state system—security guarantees, diplomatic norms, and economic interdependence—are tested, revealing how global transformations magnify local volatility across regions.

Loebell emphasizes that small states use strategic diplomacy, alliances, and multilateral engagement to navigate power asymmetries. By participating in regional and global institutions—such as the UN, Arab League, and various economic or security partnerships—they gain a platform to influence outcomes and protect national interests. Economic and security arrangements under the broader international order allow small states to mitigate risks posed by larger powers or regional conflicts, while diplomatic norms guide behavior and create opportunities

for mediation and negotiation. Small states often cultivate reputations as neutral, mediating, or reliable partners, using institutional engagement and norm compliance as tools of soft power.

In practice, this approach enables them to manage crises, attract investment, and maintain stability despite limited capabilities. Loebell highlights that understanding and navigating international order is central to small state survival and policy effectiveness in the Middle East, turning structural constraints into strategic advantages.

In the following we will examine in more depth how this has unfolded and could evolve in the most testing regional environment of the world, the Middle East, and how the heroic quest for international order looks like from the perspective of a small state like Jordan. I do so from the vantage point of having acted as Policy advisor for Her Majesty Queen Rania and Crownprince Alhussein in the period 2023.2025. My anchor is Salma BA, and that of Jordan the EU. We shape them, they shape us.

Evaluation of Lobell's Research Methods

Methodological Approach

Lobell primarily uses qualitative research methods, focusing on detailed case studies and theoretical analysis. This approach allows for deep contextual understanding of individual small states and their strategies. His framework emphasizes relational dynamics in international relations, showing how small states exercise agency despite material constraints. The integration of role theory helps explain how small states perceive their identity and responsibilities in the international system, linking national foreign policy elites to broader strategic behavior.

While qualitative methods provide depth, they may limit generalizability. Case-study findings can be context-specific and may not apply to all small states. Lobell's framework primarily focuses on external strategies and international engagement, with less emphasis on domestic factors such as political culture, public opinion, and institutional capacity that shape foreign policy. Additionally, the choice of specific cases can influence outcomes; if cases are not representative, conclusions may not be broadly applicable.

Combining qualitative case studies with quantitative analysis can provide a more comprehensive perspective. Statistical studies of foreign policy decisions can reveal patterns or correlations not apparent in qualitative work. Integrating domestic variables, including governance quality, political dynamics, and societal preferences, offers a more holistic view of small-state strategies. Studying a broader spectrum of small states enhances generalizability and reveals both common strategies and unique approaches, enriching theoretical insights.

Lobell's research provides valuable insight into how small states navigate international relations, emphasizing strategic agency, governance, and adaptation. However, combining qualitative depth with quantitative rigor, integrating domestic variables, and broadening case selection can further strengthen the framework and provide a more comprehensive understanding of small-state strategies.

Steven Lobell's research on small-state strategies predominantly employs qualitative methodologies, focusing on detailed case studies and theoretical analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how individual small states navigate international relations and exercise agency despite material constraints. By emphasizing relational dynamics rather than purely structural factors, Lobell challenges traditional assumptions that small states are passive actors. His integration of role theory further strengthens the framework by highlighting how small states perceive their identity and responsibilities in the international system, linking the orientation of national foreign policy elites to broader strategic behavior.

While Lobell's methodological approach provides valuable insights, it also presents certain limitations. The reliance on qualitative case studies, while offering depth, may limit the generalizability of findings. Observations derived from a small number of cases might not apply universally across all small states, potentially producing context-specific conclusions. Additionally, the framework primarily concentrates on external strategies and international engagement, giving less attention to domestic factors such as political culture, institutional capacity, and public opinion, which can significantly influence foreign policy choices. The selection of particular cases may also introduce bias, as conclusions drawn from non-representative examples risk overlooking variation across different small states.

To address these limitations, several alternative approaches could enhance the analytical power of Lobell's framework. Employing mixed-methods research that combines qualitative case studies with quantitative analysis could reveal broader patterns and correlations in small-state behavior, providing a more robust empirical foundation. Integrating domestic variables into the analysis would allow for a more holistic understanding of the internal and external factors that shape strategic decision-making. Expanding the range of case studies to include a diverse set of small states can also increase generalizability and highlight both common strategies and unique approaches, enriching the theoretical framework.

The practical relevance of Lobell's framework is evident

in how small states translate these theoretical insights into real-world strategies. Singapore, for instance, demonstrates strong, transparent institutions that support international trade, urban planning, and digitalization strategies, while Estonia's e-governance systems enhance efficiency and global competitiveness. In terms of strategic international engagement, Luxembourg leverages EU membership and multilateral frameworks to amplify influence in financial and policy domains, whereas Norway utilizes NATO membership and peacekeeping roles to strengthen security and Arctic diplomacy. Small states also exemplify economic diversification and fiscal prudence: Iceland, after the 2008 financial crisis, diversified into tourism and renewable energy, while Qatar expanded from hydrocarbons into finance, education, and technology, reducing reliance on a single resource. Adaptation and innovation are likewise central, with Malta investing in climate adaptation measures and New Zealand demonstrating nimble responses to environmental, economic, and trade fluctuations. Cross-cutting applications of these strategies show how governance, international engagement, diversification, and adaptation interact: Singapore's governance underpins credibility in ASEAN negotiations, Norway's institutions enable rapid Arctic response, Iceland's diversified economy allows quick adaptation to global shocks, and Estonia's e-governance strengthens participation in EU digital policy initiatives.

In conclusion, Lobell's research offers a compelling framework for understanding small-state strategies, emphasizing governance, strategic engagement, and adaptive capacity. Its explanatory power is enhanced when combined with empirical examples, showing how theory translates into practice. However, the framework's impact could be further strengthened through methodological pluralism, the integration of domestic variables, and broader comparative analysis. Incorporating these elements would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how small states navigate the complex and often asymmetric dynamics of international relations.

Challenges of Small States

Small states face a set of general challenges in international relations, and in the Middle East these are compounded by the region's particular dynamics. Across the board, their limited human, financial, and military resources restrict the scope of diplomacy, intelligence, and defense, curbing their ability to project power or sustain prolonged campaigns. Economic and security vulnerabilities create structural dependence on larger powers for protection, trade access, and technological inputs, often limiting autonomy. Operating in an international system dominated by great powers, small states must adopt survival strategies

such as hedging, neutrality, sheltering, or serving as honest brokers. Their diplomatic reach is constrained by smaller networks of embassies and alliances, reducing influence in multilateral forums and bilateral negotiations. While multilateral institutions provide a crucial platform for amplifying their voice, participation is resource-intensive and often stretches capacities. With limited military strength, small states rely heavily on diplomacy and the norms of a law-based international order to manage disputes.

In the Middle East, these structural challenges are sharpened by regional instability. Ongoing conflicts, proxy wars, and shifting great power competitions create volatile environments in which foreign policy requires constant adjustment. Small states must carefully balance relations with major regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, each with conflicting interests. For countries like Jordan and Lebanon, the disproportionate burden of hosting large refugee populations, coupled with fiscal stress and fragile economies, weakens foreign policy autonomy. Security remains heavily dependent on external guarantees, while limited military capabilities leave states vulnerable to external shocks. The pace of regional change demands agility: small states must craft multi-vector foreign policies that reconcile global alignments with delicate regional balancing acts.

In essence, while small states everywhere grapple with the realities of limited resources, dependence, and asymmetry, in the Middle East these challenges are intensified by chronic instability, economic fragility, and security dilemmas. Success depends on diplomatic flexibility, strategic multilateralism, and the capacity to adapt rapidly to an unpredictable regional environment.

Assesment of Jordan's Influence

Steven Lobell's assessment of Jordan's governance and influence in international relations offers a nuanced picture of achievement tempered by structural limitations. He highlights Jordan's ability to extract disproportionate diplomatic influence from its small state status, relying on close partnerships with Western powers, active mediation in regional disputes, and careful security alignments. In this way, Jordan has positioned itself as a stabilizing intermediary in a turbulent regional environment.

Yet Lobell underscores the governance challenges that limit the sustainability of this role. Weak enforcement of the rule of law, incomplete institutional effectiveness, and persistent corruption erode political stability and legitimacy. The centralization of authority in the monarchy constrains the development of democratic institutions, leaving elected bodies with little substantive influence over policymaking. Entrenched practices of clientelism and nepotism further

weaken administrative capacity and undermine public trust. Economic vulnerabilities, particularly heavy reliance on foreign aid, compound these governance issues and restrict the degree of autonomy Jordan can exercise in its foreign policy.

For Lobell, strengthening governance is key to sustaining and expanding Jordan's influence. Enhancing transparency, accountability, and regulatory quality would bolster both domestic resilience and external credibility. Equally important is the professionalization and strategic capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, enabling Jordan to coordinate policies more effectively and pursue longer-term diplomatic initiatives.

In sum, Lobell views Jordan as adept at navigating small state constraints through diplomatic agility, but vulnerable to governance shortcomings that could undercut its achievements. For Jordan to maintain and enhance its regional and international role, durable governance reforms are as essential as skillful diplomacy.

Beteven Lobell's assessment of Jordan's governance and influence in international relations presents a dual image of success and constraint. On the one hand, he emphasizes Jordan's ability to maximize its small state status through diplomatic agility. By cultivating strong partnerships with Western powers, maintaining working ties with key regional actors, and playing the role of mediator in conflicts, Jordan has secured influence that outweighs its size. Its strategic positioning, particularly in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and broader regional security issues, has allowed it to remain a relevant and often indispensable actor.

On the other hand, Lobell draws attention to governance shortcomings that threaten the sustainability of these achievements. Weak enforcement of the rule of law, limited institutional effectiveness, and persistent corruption erode the credibility of governance and undermine political legitimacy. The concentration of power in the monarchy curtails the role of elected institutions, restricting pluralism and accountability. Patterns of clientelism and nepotism remain entrenched, limiting administrative capacity and public trust. Economic vulnerabilities—especially dependence on foreign aid and remittances—further restrict Jordan's room for maneuver in foreign policy, creating a structural reliance on external partners.

In Lobell's view, governance reform is therefore critical to strengthening Jordan's international role. Improvements in transparency, accountability, and institutional professionalism would not only enhance domestic stability but also bolster external credibility. He places particular emphasis on strengthening the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

arguing that enhanced professionalization, coordination, and long-term strategic planning are essential to sustain Jordan’s diplomatic agility and ensure it can manage regional volatility.

Placed in the wider small states literature, Lobell’s argument highlights an important corrective. Much of the literature on small states emphasizes their ability to succeed through soft power, multilateralism, or norm entrepreneurship, underscoring their agility in adapting to systemic constraints. Jordan, in Lobell’s account, exemplifies this diplomatic nimbleness but also demonstrates the risks of overreliance on external positioning without a robust domestic governance base. His analysis resonates with scholarship stressing that small state influence depends not only on diplomatic strategy but also on the strength and credibility of internal institutions.

In sum, Lobell sees Jordan as a small state that has managed to “punch above its weight” in international relations through skillful diplomacy and strategic alliances. Yet its governance deficits and economic fragilities pose long-term risks to this role. To secure a durable influence, Jordan must match its diplomatic agility with reforms that strengthen the institutional and economic foundations of state power.

Success factors Across Handbooks

Success factors in small states share core themes, though nuances emerge depending on disciplinary focus and geographic scope. A recurring emphasis is placed on governance capacity and institutional strength. Effective governance—marked by robust institutions, transparency, accountability, and strong policy implementation—remains central to resilience, allowing small states to offset resource limitations.

Another common theme is the strategic use of international institutions and alliances. Small states often succeed by navigating asymmetric power relations through multilateral organizations and carefully chosen partnerships, which amplify their influence and enhance security. Economic diversification and prudent fiscal management also feature prominently, as reducing reliance on narrow income streams and developing innovative financing mechanisms help mitigate structural vulnerabilities. Complementing these

strategies is the capacity for adaptation and innovation, particularly in responding to climate change and global economic shifts, where small states can leverage their nimbleness and capacity for rapid policy adjustment.

Despite these shared foundations, different handbooks place varied emphases. One gives particular weight to governance across political, social, environmental, and economic dimensions, linking success to the ability to confront contemporary global challenges such as climate change and globalization with tailored policy approaches. Another focuses more explicitly on political economy, highlighting how capacity constraints and power asymmetries shape institutional design, and how small states can strategically turn material weaknesses into assets for negotiation and influence. Case studies in this perspective illustrate how historical legacies and regional institutional contexts produce different pathways to resilience and success, complementing the more universal goals.

Governance Framework - A common Denominator Governance & Institutional Strength

Robust institutions Transparency and accountability Strong policy implementation

Enables resilience despite resource constraints

Strategic International Engagement

Alliances and partnerships Leveraging multilateral organizations

Amplifying influence in asymmetric power relations Enhances security and diplomatic reach

Economic Diversification & Fiscal Prudence

Reducing dependence on narrow income streams Innovative financing mechanisms

Mitigates structural vulnerabilities

Adaptation & Innovation Capacity

Rapid policy adjustment to global changes Climate change and economic shocks Nimbleness as a competitive advantage

Core Factor	Key Elements	Strategic Advantage / Impact
Governance & Institutions	Robust, transparent, accountable Effective policy implementation Resilience despite limited resources	Ensures policy credibility, builds public trust, enables resilience despite limited resources . Translates strategies into outcomes, strengthens institutional capacity. Allows small states to absorb shocks and maintain stability

Strategic International Engagement	Alliances & partnerships Multilateral leverage Amplifying influence in asymmetric power contexts	Expands diplomatic influence, enhances security. Access to global decision-making, reduces vulnerability in asymmetric power dynamics. Turns limited material resources into negotiation power and strategic leverage
Economic Diversification & Fiscal Prudence	Innovative financing mechanisms Reduce dependence on single income streams	Access to global decision-making, reduces vulnerability in asymmetric power dynamics
Adaptation & Innovation	Rapid response to global shocks Climate & economic resilience Nimbleness as a strategic advantage	Enables agility in crisis situations. Minimizes impact of environmental and financial disruptions Allows rapid policy experimentation and early adoption of innovations

Explainer:**Governance ↔ International Engagement**

When a small state has strong, transparent, and accountable institutions, its international partnerships and alliances become more credible and effective. Other states and international organizations are more willing to collaborate, trust agreements, and support initiatives, which amplifies the small state's influence on the global stage.

Governance ↔ Economic Diversification

Clear and consistent policy frameworks encourage investment and economic experimentation. When governance is reliable, businesses and investors are more confident in supporting new industries, financing innovation, and expanding markets, which helps the state reduce reliance on a narrow set of economic activities.

Governance ↔ Adaptation

Robust institutions allow a state to respond quickly and effectively to environmental, economic, or social shocks. Well-established decision-making structures, clear chains of responsibility, and adaptive policy mechanisms enable rapid action in crises such as climate events, global market disruptions, or sudden fiscal pressures.

International Engagement ↔ Economic Diversification

Strategic international alliances and partnerships can open access to new markets, foreign investment, and financing opportunities. Collaborating with global partners can also provide knowledge transfer, technical expertise, and joint ventures, supporting the development of diverse economic sectors.

International Engagement ↔ Adaptation

Global partnerships give small states access to knowledge, technologies, and resources that improve their capacity to

adapt to change. For example, collaborations can provide early-warning systems for climate events, shared best practices in sustainable development, or financial support for economic recovery after shocks.

Economic Diversification ↔ Adaptation

A diversified economy is inherently more resilient. When a state relies on multiple sectors rather than a single income source, it can absorb economic shocks more effectively and maintain stability. Diversification also encourages innovation, allowing the state to pivot quickly in response to global changes, climate challenges, or unexpected crises.

Taken together, the literature suggests that while governance quality and strategic international engagement are universal success factors, some analyses foreground the integrative challenges of globalization and environmental stress, while others emphasize the political-economic dimensions of power, negotiation, and institutional adaptation within the constraints unique to small states.

Applications of Framework**Governance & Institutional Strength**

Singapore demonstrates strong, transparent institutions and effective policymaking, allowing it to punch above its weight in international trade and finance. Policies on urban planning, public health, and economic regulation show resilience despite limited natural resources. Its institutional capacity supports rapid implementation of national strategies such as digitalization and sustainability programs. Estonia's e-governance systems similarly reflect how strong institutions enable efficiency and global competitiveness, with transparent and accountable governance underpinning trust in domestic and international partnerships.

Strategic International Engagement

Luxembourg uses EU membership and multilateral

frameworks to amplify its influence beyond its size, actively engaging in financial regulation and European policymaking to shape EU directives. Norway leverages NATO membership and international peacekeeping roles to maintain security influence, while strategic partnerships allow it to play a significant role in Arctic policy and climate diplomacy.

Economic Diversification & Fiscal Prudence

Iceland, after the 2008 financial crisis, diversified its economy beyond fisheries and banking by investing in tourism and renewable energy. Fiscal prudence and innovative mechanisms, including capital controls and financial restructuring, helped mitigate vulnerabilities. Qatar diversified from hydrocarbons into finance, education, sports, and technology, using sovereign wealth strategically to reduce reliance on a single resource and enhance long-term resilience.

Adaptation & Innovation Capacity

Malta, as a small island state, invests in climate adaptation measures such as coastal protection and renewable energy adoption. Rapid policy adjustments enable responses to tourism fluctuations, EU directives, and regional security dynamics. New Zealand demonstrates nimbleness in climate policy, disaster response, and trade adaptation, with institutional flexibility allowing early adoption of innovative policies in environmental sustainability and digital governance.

Cross-Cutting Applications

Singapore's strong governance makes it a credible partner in ASEAN and global trade negotiations. Norway's robust institutions allow rapid responses to Arctic environmental and geopolitical changes. Iceland's economic diversification enables nimble adaptation to global market shocks, and Estonia's e-governance systems strengthen participation in EU digital policy initiatives. These examples show how small states translate Lobell's theoretical framework into practice, using governance, strategic engagement, economic planning, and adaptive capacity to overcome size constraints and exert influence internationally.

Jordan's Diplomatic Influence

What strategies can Jordan adopt to enhance regional influence?

Jordan can adopt a range of strategies to strengthen its regional influence, drawing on its geopolitical position, diplomatic traditions, and the evolving dynamics of the Middle East. It should continue leveraging its historic role as a mediator and stable moderate actor in regional conflicts, including the Israeli–Palestinian issue and the Syrian crisis. Maintaining constructive relations with rival

parties allows Jordan to act as a credible bridge-builder and peace broker.

Expanding dialogue with regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iraq—while preserving its traditional Western alliances—will further reinforce its political weight and open new avenues for economic and security cooperation.

Strengthening economic resilience is vital. Jordan can achieve this by implementing reforms to improve the business environment, diversify exports, and reduce dependence on foreign aid.

Parallel administrative reforms to enhance transparency, efficiency, and public-sector performance would not only support economic growth but also boost the state's legitimacy and credibility, thereby reinforcing its regional standing.

By taking leadership in regional economic initiatives—such as the Egypt–Jordan–Iraq partnership, free trade zones, and cross-border infrastructure in energy and transport—Jordan can generate tangible economic benefits and goodwill. Active participation in regional organizations and multilateral forums will also amplify Jordan's influence in shaping collective agendas.

To safeguard autonomy, Jordan should diversify its strategic relationships beyond reliance on any single actor. Expanding ties with China, Russia, the European Union, and emerging powers will provide greater balance and flexibility. Enhanced cooperation in security, counter-terrorism, and migration management with a wider set of partners will make Jordan an indispensable regional player.

Jordan's unique soft power assets—its rich cultural heritage, the Hashemite custodianship of Islamic holy sites, and its humanitarian leadership in hosting refugees—can be more systematically promoted to elevate its influence. Expanding educational, cultural, and technological exchanges with regional neighbors will also foster durable bonds that strengthen Jordan's long-term position.

Jordan's regional influence depends on a carefully balanced approach that combines diplomatic outreach, economic modernization, governance reforms, diversified partnerships, and the effective use of cultural and political assets. By pursuing this strategy, it can consolidate its role as a stabilizing and influential actor in an increasingly complex regional environment.

Policy Recommendations to improve governance

Policy recommendations to improve governance performance in small states emphasize the importance of

building capacity, enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, and ensuring adaptability to external shocks. A central priority is the development of professional, merit-based public administrations that minimize personalism and patronage. By fostering specialization and efficiency tailored to the scale of small states, governments can deliver more effective policies and services.

Equally important is the promotion of transparency, rule of law, and robust anti-corruption mechanisms. These measures not only improve governance effectiveness but also reinforce public trust and political stability, which are critical for long-term planning and investment. Stable political environments enable small states to implement consistent policies and to weather economic or security shocks with greater resilience.

Multilateral cooperation provides another avenue for strengthening governance. By pooling resources, sharing expertise, and engaging in collective initiatives through international organizations, small states can amplify their voice and access the technical support needed to manage complex challenges. Openness to trade and capital flows also plays a vital role, particularly when coupled with sound domestic macroeconomic policies that build resilience to global volatility.

Effective reform requires tailoring governance models to the unique realities of small states rather than importing institutional frameworks designed for larger countries. Recognizing scale limitations while fostering innovation allows for more sustainable and context-appropriate solutions. Investing in capacity building, knowledge sharing, and collaborative policymaking further enhances adaptability and supports governance innovation across small state contexts.

Taken together, these strategies—strong institutions, transparent governance, economic openness, multilateral engagement, and context-specific reforms—allow small states to overcome structural vulnerabilities and improve governance performance despite the pressures of size and external shocks.

Which strategies could Jordan adopt to enhance regional influence ?

Jordan's path to greater regional influence lies in weaving together its geopolitical position, long-standing diplomatic traditions, and the shifting dynamics of its neighborhood. By leaning into its role as a trusted mediator, Jordan can continue to stand as a voice of moderation in a turbulent region. Its history of bridging divides—whether in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or the Syrian crisis—demonstrates the value of maintaining relations with all sides, even when their interests collide. Extending this outreach to powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt,

and Iraq, while keeping firm to its Western partnerships, allows Jordan to deepen its role as both a peace broker and a strategic partner.

This diplomatic stature, however, must rest on firmer domestic foundations. Economic reform is essential—diversifying exports, improving the business climate, and reducing reliance on foreign aid would enhance resilience and project an image of stability across the region. At the same time, governance reforms that strengthen transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public administration would reinforce Jordan's credibility and legitimacy, making its voice more persuasive abroad.

Regionally, Jordan has much to gain from championing economic cooperation. Leadership in initiatives such as the Egypt–Jordan–Iraq partnership, the development of free trade zones, and cross-border infrastructure projects promises not only material growth but also the goodwill of neighbors who benefit from shared prosperity. Active engagement with organizations like the Arab League, the GCC, and other multilateral platforms can amplify Jordan's influence, allowing it to shape regional agendas rather than simply respond to them.

Jordan's future also depends on broadening its strategic horizons. Reducing dependence on any single actor—most notably the United States—by cultivating ties with China, Russia, the European Union, and emerging powers will provide greater autonomy and leverage. Deepened cooperation in areas such as security, counter-terrorism, and migration management will make Jordan an indispensable partner to many, rather than a client of a few.

Yet perhaps Jordan's greatest resource lies in its soft power. Its cultural heritage, its Hashemite custodianship of holy sites, and its humanitarian leadership as a refuge for displaced peoples endow the kingdom with moral authority in a region often defined by hard power. By investing in cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and technological cooperation, Jordan can strengthen ties that endure beyond politics and crises, creating networks of trust across generations.

In the end, Jordan's influence will not be measured by military strength or economic might alone, but by its ability to balance diplomacy with reform, alliances with autonomy, and tradition with innovation. Its enduring strength lies in the unique combination of moderation, resilience, and cultural capital that, if fully harnessed, can secure its role as one of the Middle East's most indispensable actors.

Dialogue with the Nordic–Icelandic Tradition

Comparing Lobell's work with the Scandinavian and Icelandic literatures highlights both continuities and departures. The 2006 volume *Small States in International*

Relations consolidated the field, arguing that small states are capable of shaping norms, mediating conflicts, and innovating institutionally (Ingebritsen et al., 2006). Similarly, the University of Iceland's Centre for Small State Studies advanced "shelter theory," showing that small states seek protection—security, economic, normative—from larger powers or multilateral frameworks, and that such strategies are often path-dependent (Centre for Small State Studies, 2010–2023).

Lobell inherits this concern with agency but reorganises it in a typological and comparative frame. Where the Icelandic literature foregrounds historical trajectory, Lobell treats small-state strategies as consciously selectable repertoires, applicable across diverse regional and political contexts. His inclusion of non-European cases demonstrates the portability of small-state theory beyond the Nordic context, though at some cost to the domestic and historical specificity emphasized by earlier scholarship.

Analytical Contributions: From Agency to Recalibration

Lobell treats small-state strategies not as fixed destinations but as instruments of perpetual recalibration, a choreography of adjustment rather than a march toward permanence. He identifies three broad repertoires—coalitional alignment, institutional entrepreneurship, and normative signalling—that together form the grammar of survival and influence for small states. Each is less a doctrine than a maneuver, less a final stance than a way of buying time, space, and leverage in an unforgiving system.

This perspective unsettles the linear narratives of earlier scholarship, which often depicted small states as progressing neatly from dependence to autonomy, or from adaptation to influence, as though their journeys were plotted on a single line. Instead, Lobell paints a picture of circular motion and constant rebalancing, where today's alignment may be tomorrow's liability, and yesterday's weakness may be refashioned as tomorrow's asset.

The reframing is not merely theoretical but deeply attuned to the temper of the times. It acknowledges the erosion of unipolarity, the fragmentation of multilateral institutions, and the resurgence of coercive statecraft as the defining features of the contemporary landscape. Where older literatures assumed the backdrop of a stable liberal order—an arena in which small states could patiently accumulate influence—Lobell insists that turbulence is the point of departure, not the exception. Order is not the canvas upon which small states paint their strategies; disorder is the very medium in which they are forced to sketch, erase, and redraw their lines of survival.

In this light, small states emerge not as passive recipients of

system pressures but as agile actors engaged in a perpetual art of adjustment. Their strategies are less about the luxury of choice than the necessity of improvisation, a ceaseless balancing act in a world where the ground beneath them is always shifting.

Jordan in the Framework of Small-State Strategy

Jordan exemplifies the condition of the "permanently vulnerable" small state (Lobell, 2026). Its geography—bordered by Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq—exposes it to regional instability and great-power rivalry (Ryan, 2021; Yom, 2022). Jordan's survival and stability since 1946 have relied on strategic repertoires identified by Lobell.

Careful alignment: Jordan has sought security guarantees from external patrons, especially the UK and the US, while avoiding entanglement in conflicts that could threaten regime stability (Robins, 2004; Ryan, 2018). This balancing has allowed Jordan to remain anchored to major power networks without becoming a direct proxy (Yom & Al-Khatib, 2019).

Institutional embedding: Jordan invests in multilateral forums—the Arab League, OIC, UN—not primarily for material gain but to reinforce sovereignty and moderate credibility (Barari, 2015; Tell, 2014). This aligns with Lobell's concept of "legitimacy shelters," providing insulation from external pressures.

Normative signalling: Jordan projects an image of moderation and stability, exemplified by the Amman Message and hosting interreligious summits (Abu-Rumman, 2020). Humanitarian diplomacy on refugee issues secures international support while enhancing Jordan's influence (Achilli & Fargues, 2021).

Despite these strategies, vulnerabilities remain. Alignment carries risks if patrons shift priorities, institutional embedding offers symbolic but limited security, and normative influence depends on underlying stability (Ryan, 2021; Yom, 2022). Jordan illustrates the triangular tension among security, legitimacy, and influence: each strategy reinforces one dimension but can constrain another. Lobell's framework suggests resilience emerges not from maximising a single repertoire, but from **diversifying and layering strategies** across multiple arenas.

Where does the Volatility of the Middle Eastern State System Come From ?

The volatility of the Middle Eastern state system arises from a deep and interwoven set of structural, political, and historical factors. The boundaries and institutions of many

states were drawn and built under colonial or mandate conditions that did not reflect local realities, leaving behind fragile governance and contested legitimacy. Rentier economies, overdependence on external powers, and uneven development have reinforced fragility, while unresolved conflicts and rivalries continue to draw states into cycles of confrontation and proxy competition. Sectarian and ethnic divisions, compounded by rapid demographic change, unemployment, and environmental stress, further undermine the social compacts that hold states together. The result is a regional system that remains exposed to both internal shocks and external manipulation, with volatility serving as both a symptom and a tool of political contestation.

Within this environment, Jordan occupies a distinctive position. Though geographically small and economically constrained, it has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for resilience, balance, and constructive engagement. Jordan's political stability, its Hashemite legitimacy, and its web of relationships with Arab, Western, and international partners give it a degree of credibility unmatched by most of its neighbours. A refined and adaptive diplomacy—what might be called a “turn-key” diplomacy—could enable

Jordan to play a moderating and connective role, activating mediation channels, hosting discreet dialogue formats, and serving as a hub for humanitarian coordination and regional technical cooperation.

Such a diplomacy would not rely on grand declarations, but on readiness, continuity, and trust. Jordan could use its convening power to link humanitarian relief with security guarantees, to host structured discussions on water and energy interdependence, and to broker quiet understandings that prevent local crises from spiralling into regional confrontations. In doing so, it would strengthen its own security and demonstrate that small, strategically placed states can anchor stability through the intelligent use of networks, legitimacy, and foresight.

Loebell's reflections on the role of small states in times of power transition provide a useful frame for understanding this potential. He argues that small states can act as hinge actors when the international order is in flux, provided they combine credibility, adaptability, and anticipatory strategy. Their influence lies less in material weight than in the ability to translate uncertainty into initiative—to mediate between competing powers, to uphold norms when larger states

Cross-Tabulation: Likely Impact of Jordan's Trilateral Frameworks

Trilateral Format	Regional Order	Inter Arab State System	Levantine Politics	Euro-MED Partnership	Great Power Alignment
Egypt – Jordan – Iraq	Establishes a stabilising, developmental axis linking the Mashreq with North Africa; diversifies Arab centres of initiative beyond the Gulf; adds a civilian-economic layer to regional order.	Revives the idea of functional Arab cooperation centred on reconstruction, logistics, and energy interdependence; reduces fragmentation of the Arab League.	Creates an east-west corridor of coordination that reconnects the Levant with Mesopotamia; lowers border tensions through economic interdependence, CI.,-	Provides the EU with a reliable counterpart for trade, green energy, and connectivity under the Global Gateway; enhances Euro-Arab infrastructure integration.	Offers a Western-compatible model for reconstruction that balances Chinese Belt-and-Road offers and complements US/EU engagement; strengthens Jordan's bridging diplomacy.
Saudi Arabia – Jordan – Syria	Marks a controlled reintegration of Syria into the Arab system; shifts regional order from punitive isolation to conditional rehabilitation.	Demonstrates Arab conflict management capacity; signals preference for regional solutions over international tutelage.	Re-stitches the northern Levant's border economies and security arrangements; may reduce illicit flows and displacement pressures.	Opens cautious pathways for European participation in post-conflict reconstruction and migration partnerships, subject to sanctions regimes.	Balances Iranian and Russian influence in Syria through an Arab-led, Saudi-financed mechanism in which Jordan acts as guarantor; aligns reconstruction with broader multilateral standards.
Jordan – Palestine – Israel	Introduces a functionalist layer within the regional order based on shared resources and crisis prevention; embeds conflict management in cooperation.	Sensitive but precedent-setting example of Arab coordination that includes Israel while safeguarding Palestinian interests.	Provides institutionalised channels for water, energy, and humanitarian coordination; mitigates flashpoint dynamics in the Jordan Valley.	Connects local cooperation to Euro-Mediterranean environmental and climate agendas; allows the EU to re-engage through technical diplomacy.	Creates a venue where Western, Arab, and regional security interests intersect; demonstrates Jordan's capacity to mediate amid major-power rivalries.

hesitate, and to turn positional vulnerability into diplomatic leverage. In the Middle East's fractured landscape, Jordan embodies precisely this possibility. By exercising a patient and forward-looking diplomacy that links security with cooperation and national interest with regional good, it can moderate volatility, reinforce multilateral habits, and project the stabilising qualities of small-state leadership into a wider regional and international context.

Formalising the trilaterals would transform Jordan from a buffer into a connector, embedding its diplomacy at the junction of three strategic circles — the Arab system, the Levant, and the Euro-Mediterranean rim. Collectively, they would deepen institutional habits of cooperation, create economic interdependence across conflict lines, and provide the EU and global partners with credible regional entry points.

In Loebell's sense, Jordan exemplifies the small state that shapes transition: a mediator using its legitimacy, flexibility, and strategic location to turn systemic volatility into structured equilibrium.

Implications

Seen together, Jordan's trilateral formalisation represents not a new alliance system but a web of stabilising interfaces that link regional recovery to global transition management. Each axis — economic with Egypt and Iraq, rehabilitative with Saudi Arabia and Syria, and functional with Palestine and Israel — strengthens a different layer of order. Their success would hinge on Jordan's ability to maintain equidistance, to embed each arrangement in international

law and donor mechanisms, and to deliver tangible benefits to its citizens. If sustained, these trilaterals could gradually transform the Middle East from a zone defined by volatility into one defined by managed interdependence, and in doing so, they would illustrate Loebell's broader thesis: that in periods of power transition, it is the well-positioned small state — adaptive, credible, and anticipatory — that often sets the tone for regional equilibrium.

This has to be compared to the additional room of maneuver following the fall of the Assad regime and the key role Jordan has in resocialising Syria undertaken on the assumption of the evolution of the Syrian civil war on the one hand, on the other the duration order building moment lasts and the wider impact on any region anywhere in the world. If the EU and Jordan combined managed to establish an all contestants Syria transition group, it is not difficult to predict what will happen next again with Jordan in a key role, something that is now increasingly recognized.

Euro-MED FTA and PAFTA

The Pan-Arab Free Trade Area (PAFTA) represents an established commitment among Arab League members to reduce tariffs and facilitate trade. Its strength lies in its wide membership, which covers most Arab economies from the Maghreb to the Levant. PAFTA can generate economies of scale by linking smaller markets and allowing firms to access a larger consumer base. It establishes a normative framework for dispute resolution and regulatory harmonization, which can reduce transaction costs. The agreement creates incentives for

Cross-Sectoral, Cross-Framework Trade Facilitation Matrix: PAFTA + EU-Mediterranean FTA

Dimension / Sector	PAFTA (Intra-Arab Trade)	Euro MED FTA	Mutualisation / Combined Effect
Trade & Goods	Reduces tariffs and facilitates trade across Arab League members; encourages integration of agriculture, basic manufacturing, and light industry.	Provides preferential access to EU markets; enforces alignment with EU product standards; incentivizes diversification toward high-value exports.	Linking PAFTA production and supply chains to EU FTA rules can expand market reach; joint rules approximation allows Arab producers to qualify for EU preferential access, enhancing regional export competitiveness.
Services & Digital Trade	Slowly liberalizing professional services and limited digital trade; regulatory frameworks remain fragmented.	Supports services liberalization, digital trade, and cross-border data flows in line with EU regulations; promotes standards and intellectual property alignment.	Mutualisation can allow PAFTA countries to adopt EU-compatible regulatory frameworks incrementally, easing the entry of Arab firms into EU services markets; also encourages regional digital interoperability.
Infrastructure & Logistics	Promotes intra-Arab transport corridors and connectivity, but with gaps in standards, customs, and interoperability.	EU-supported projects improve ports, roads, energy grids, and transport connectivity toward Europe; incentivizes modernization through funding and technical support.	Combined approach can coordinate Arab corridors with Euro-Mediterranean networks; integrating logistics and customs rules enhances efficiency, reduces bottlenecks, and links local producers to European supply chains.

Investment & Finance	Encourages regional investment and cross-border capital flows, but limited by risk perception and legal fragmentation.	Attracts EU FDI and development finance; provides legal guarantees and risk mitigation; strengthens market predictability.	Mutualisation can pool Arab capital with EU-backed investments to finance joint infrastructure and industrial projects; co-financing reduces risk and encourages private-sector engagement.
Regulatory & Standards Approximation	Promotes harmonization of customs, product certification, and basic technical standards within Arab markets; full convergence is incomplete.	Strong EU-driven regulatory alignment across products, services, and quality standards; encourages transparency and compliance.	Progressive alignment of PAFTA rules with EU norms allows Arab producers to access EU markets without full bilateral negotiation; facilitates cross-border trade and creates incentives for deeper regional integration.

investment in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and agriculture by signaling predictability. By promoting trade among members, PAFTA reduces overreliance on external markets, reinforcing regional resilience. It also provides a platform for infrastructure integration, including transport corridors and digital connectivity. The agreement encourages private-sector integration across borders, fostering cross-border value chains. PAFTA enhances collective bargaining power in negotiating with external partners, including the EU, China, and the United States. It can also support economic diversification by incentivizing the development of non-oil sectors.

The EU–Mediterranean FTA provides a complementary framework by linking southern and eastern Mediterranean countries to the EU market. Its strength is the scale and purchasing power of the EU, which offers preferential access to one of the world’s largest consumer bases. It provides technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and regulatory alignment, which strengthen domestic institutions. The agreement encourages standards harmonization in agriculture, services, and manufacturing. EU engagement promotes transparency and good governance, creating a policy environment conducive to investment. It can catalyze infrastructure projects such as ports, energy grids, and transport networks connecting North Africa, the Levant, and Europe. The FTA encourages knowledge transfer, including digitalization, climate adaptation technologies, and logistics optimization. It serves as a mechanism to attract foreign direct investment by offering a gateway to EU markets. The agreement can enhance competitiveness of regional firms by exposing them to EU regulatory and quality standards. It also provides a framework for cooperation on environmental and energy transitions, leveraging EU financing.

Observations on Historical Limitations

The mutual effect of PAFTA and the EU–Mediterranean FTA has historically been limited due to partial implementation, weak enforcement of standards, and regulatory gaps in Arab markets. Arab firms often face administrative and certification barriers that prevent them from fully leveraging EU market access. Logistics corridors

within the Arab world remain fragmented, limiting the ability to move goods efficiently from production hubs to European ports. Services and digital liberalization have lagged in most PAFTA members, constraining trade in knowledge-intensive sectors. Political instability, conflict, and governance deficits have further slowed integration and mutualisation effects.

Emerging Opportunities

Recent reforms in customs and standards in several Arab countries, combined with EU technical assistance programs, have created openings for deeper mutualisation. Coordinated regional corridors, particularly in North Africa and the Levant, can link PAFTA networks directly to Euro-Mediterranean trade routes. Regulatory approximation—especially in standards, certification, and digital compliance—can now allow Arab producers to access EU markets more systematically. Cross-border investment funds and infrastructure projects can leverage both PAFTA’s internal market and EU preferential market access, reducing risk and maximizing return. Services liberalization and digital trade adoption present untapped potential, where gradual alignment with EU norms can create regional hubs that serve both intra-Arab and Euro-Mediterranean markets.

Mutualising PAFTA and EU–Mediterranean FTA links the strengths of regional Arab integration with the scale, standards, and financial leverage of the EU, creating a structured trade and investment environment that benefits both South-South regional trade and North-South Euro-Mediterranean relations. The historical limitations are now being addressed through regulatory reform, corridor development, and investment cooperation, making this the most promising moment for operationalising a mutually reinforcing trade framework in the Middle East and Mediterranean.

Theoretical Appraisal

Small-State Diplomacy in Volatile Systems

Loebell emphasizes that small states are most influential during periods of systemic transition, when established

powers are recalibrating and regional orders are unsettled. Their potential is not in raw material or military power, but in credibility, agility, and networked leverage. Volatility in the Middle East—driven by weak institutions, inter-state rivalries, sectarian fragmentation, and external intervention—creates precisely these transition moments. Lobell theorizes that small states can “act as hinge actors”: they moderate disputes, fill gaps in communication, and transform uncertainty into operational opportunity.

Unlike larger states, which may be constrained by bureaucratic inertia, domestic factionalism, or grand strategic commitments, small states can experiment with low-cost, high-leverage diplomatic interventions, deploying them quickly to stabilize or shape outcomes. For example, Jordan can act simultaneously as mediator, humanitarian coordinator, and infrastructure facilitator, roles that exploit both its credibility and its limited but focused capacity.

Interaction Between Volatility and Small-State Agency

Lobell highlights a subtle dynamic: volatility is both a constraint and an enabler. In highly volatile systems, traditional state hierarchies and alliances are weakened, creating opportunity for nimble actors. Small states can sense where shocks, gaps, or coordination failures are likely to produce cascading instability and intervene preemptively.

However, the effect is conditional: volatility alone does not guarantee leverage. A small state must combine anticipatory strategy, credible networks, and functional expertise. In the Middle East, Jordan's combination of Hashemite legitimacy, refugee-management experience, and cross-regional partnerships allows it to exploit moments of volatility that might paralyze larger actors. Lobell stresses that small states gain leverage in shaping outcomes when they can convert volatility into structured cooperation, rather than merely reacting to shocks.

Order-Building Moments and Their Duration

Lobell's framework suggests that order-building in transitional periods is episodic rather than continuous. Moments of systemic recalibration—whether after conflict, regime change, or external power realignment—are windows of opportunity that are time-bound. Their duration is variable, often lasting months to a few years, before either larger powers reassert dominance or structural conditions solidify.

Small-state diplomacy can extend these windows by:

-Institutionalising cooperation (e.g., trilateral frameworks, corridor management, shared technical platforms).

-Providing credibility and continuity, which mitigates uncertainty and encourages external support.

-Aligning incentives so that larger and smaller actors perceive gains from cooperation.

In effect, small states stretch the duration and intensity of these “order-building moments”, increasing the chance that systemic arrangements become self-sustaining.

How Sophisticated Small-State Diplomacy Makes a Difference

Sophisticated small-state diplomacy matters because it transforms structural vulnerability into strategic influence:

-Network leverage: Small states can connect otherwise isolated actors and channels, acting as mediators or convenors.

-Functional credibility: By offering operational, tangible deliverables—humanitarian corridors, water-sharing agreements, joint infrastructure projects—they make their interventions concrete rather than symbolic.

-Anticipatory strategy: Skilled diplomats can anticipate cascading risks and deploy solutions before crises escalate.

-Norm entrepreneurship: Small states can introduce new norms—e.g., standards harmonization, environmental cooperation—that larger actors may then adopt.

-Iterative influence: Each successful intervention builds reputation, enlarging future leverage in subsequent transitions.

In Jordan's context, this means linking PAFTA and EU–Mediterranean frameworks, stabilizing Levantine politics, and managing refugee and border crises not just reactively, but in ways that create durable structures. Lobell would argue that this is precisely how a small state shapes the trajectory of volatility: by creating pockets of order that larger actors are compelled to respect.

Theoretical Takeaways

1. **Volatility is opportunity:** Small states exploit moments of transition, not static systems.
2. **Influence derives from functional capacity and credibility, not material weight.**
3. **Order-building is episodic:** small states extend windows of opportunity, but cannot impose permanent stability alone.
4. **Sophisticated diplomacy translates episodic opportunity into structural leverage**, creating lasting norms, institutions, and cooperative routines.

5. Reputation compounds influence: repeated success increases the ability to mediate in subsequent crises.

In short, Lobell’s theory frames small states as strategic accelerators of order in volatile regions. Their effect is not deterministic—they cannot fully control systemic volatility—but they can shape its trajectory, prolong windows of opportunity, and embed functional rules that endure beyond immediate crises.

This has to be compared to that the EU cannot do everything, that the Casino Royale in Club Med is quite considerable and that there are a good many low hanging fruits in the League of Arab States as well.

Small states gain strategic leverage in volatile systems not through material power but through credibility, agility, and networked influence. Volatility itself creates opportunity, as larger powers are constrained and regional orders are unsettled. Small states can act as hinge actors, connecting isolated parties, mediating disputes, and converting uncertainty into structured cooperation. Order-building moments are episodic and time-bound, often lasting months to a few years, but skillful small-state diplomacy ensures their perpetuation and impact the more institutionally anchored and endorsed by top decision makers our interventions are. Functional credibility—through tangible initiatives like infrastructure, humanitarian coordination, or regulatory frameworks—amplifies influence. Anticipatory

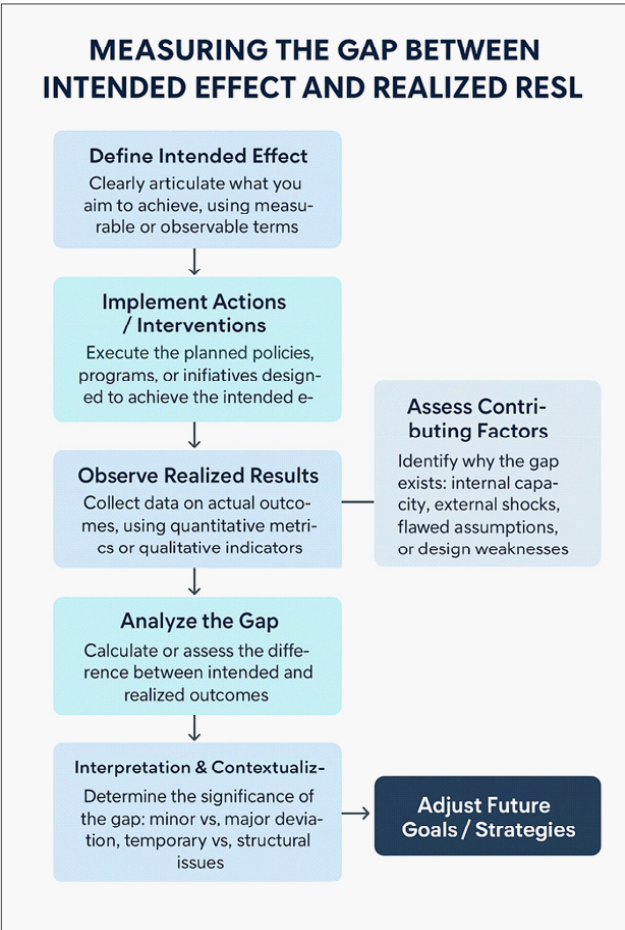
strategy allows small states to preempt crises, stabilize interactions, and embed norms that larger actors may adopt. Each successful intervention builds reputation, enhancing the small state’s future leverage in subsequent transitions. In sum, sophisticated diplomacy transforms structural vulnerability into actionable influence, shaping the trajectory of volatility and creating pockets of enduring order.

After all, wearing a bear skin might make you feel fierce, but it’s also the only outfit where people will both admire your style and quietly hope you’re not actually a bear in disguise even of you stink like one and come across as Lady and the Vagabond. The ingratitude could be better disguised.

Evaluating Success

In strategic management, the concepts of intended effect and realized results are central to understanding how strategies are formulated and executed within organizations. The intended effect refers to the goals and outcomes that a strategy is designed to achieve, typically articulated during the planning phase. These intentions are based on forecasts, competitive analysis, and organizational objectives, and they represent the strategic vision of leadership.

Realized results, by contrast, are the actual outcomes that emerge once the strategy is implemented. These results may align with the original intentions, but often they diverge



due to a range of internal and external factors. Market dynamics, competitor behavior, regulatory changes, and organizational constraints can all influence the trajectory of a strategy, leading to outcomes that were not anticipated during the planning stage.

The distinction between intended and realized strategy is useful for evaluating strategic effectiveness. By comparing the two, organizations can identify gaps in execution, assess the validity of their assumptions, and refine their strategic processes. This comparison also facilitates organizational learning, as it highlights areas where adaptation or responsiveness played a critical role in shaping outcomes.

However, the use of these concepts is not without limitations. The unpredictability of external environments can make it difficult to attribute outcomes solely to strategic intent. Moreover, emergent strategies—those that arise spontaneously in response to changing conditions—often play a significant role in shaping realized results, complicating the evaluation of planned strategies. Measurement challenges also arise, as it can be difficult to isolate the impact of a specific strategy from other concurrent influences.

Despite these limitations, the framework of intended effect and realized results remains a valuable tool in strategic analysis. It encourages organizations to balance deliberate planning with adaptive execution, fostering a more resilient and responsive approach to strategic management.

Thus to evaluate the effects of Jordan's small state diplomacy—particularly through the Royal Hashemite Court (RHC)—one must assess both intended strategic goals and realized outcomes across regional influence, bilateral relations, and global positioning. This requires a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, grounded in strategic management theory.

Evaluating the effectiveness of Jordan's diplomacy as a small state involves understanding how its limited material capabilities are offset by strategic positioning, leadership diplomacy, and alliance-building. The Royal Hashemite Court plays a central role in shaping and executing foreign policy, often through personal diplomacy, mediation efforts, and symbolic leadership in regional affairs.

A strategic evaluation framework should begin with identifying the intended effects of Jordan's diplomacy. These may include goals such as maintaining regime stability, securing foreign aid, mediating regional conflicts, enhancing international visibility, and preserving sovereignty amid regional pressures. These intentions are often articulated in royal speeches, policy documents, and strategic partnerships, such as Jordan's alignment with Western allies and its role in Middle East peace initiatives.

The realized results must then be measured through observable outcomes. These include shifts in foreign aid levels, changes in regional alliances, invitations to global forums, successful mediation efforts, and international recognition of Jordan's diplomatic role. For example, Jordan's consistent engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and its strategic balancing between Gulf states and Western powers are key indicators of realized influence.

For the EU it is about an increase in market shares in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East and competing with China in Algeria, Egypt, KSA and Iran. The European Union's strategic posture in the Mediterranean and Middle East focuses on expanding economic influence, countering China's growing presence in key regional states, and preserving its normative leverage—particularly by managing Israel's regional integration in ways that align with European interests, something it has a shared interests with Jordan on.

The EU's engagement in the Mediterranean and Middle East is shaped by a blend of economic ambition, geopolitical competition, and normative diplomacy. The European Commission's Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf (DG MENA) has prioritized building stronger partnerships with countries in these regions to promote mutual prosperity, resilience, and stability. This includes leveraging trade, investment, and development tools to deepen ties with Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—countries where China has significantly expanded its economic and strategic footprint.

Economically, the EU remains the largest trading partner for many MENA countries, accounting for over 30% of trade flows in the region. However, China's Belt and Road Initiative and its aggressive infrastructure and energy investments have challenged the EU's traditional dominance. In response, the EU has increased financial aid packages (e.g., €1 billion each to Egypt and Lebanon) and is considering a dedicated Mediterranean portfolio to enhance its strategic visibility and competitiveness.

Politically, the EU's approach to Israel's regional integration is more nuanced. While the Abraham Accords and normalization trends have opened new diplomatic pathways for Israel in the Arab world, the EU remains cautious. There is concern that Israel's deeper integration into Middle Eastern alliances—especially those aligned with U.S. or Gulf interests—could reduce its alignment with European norms, particularly on issues like human rights, democratic governance, and the two-state solution. Thus, the EU seeks to maintain its normative influence by anchoring Israel within a Euro-Mediterranean framework, using trade agreements, research partnerships, and diplomatic engagement.

In sum, the EU's strategy in the region is not only about market share but also about shaping the geopolitical architecture in a way that preserves its influence, counters rival powers like China, and ensures that regional realignments do not erode its normative leverage.

Jordan navigates the EU's strategic ambitions in the Mediterranean and Middle East through a careful balancing act of diplomacy, economic cooperation, and regional mediation. As a small state with limited material power, Jordan leverages its geopolitical location, royal diplomacy, and reputation for stability to remain relevant amid great power competition.

Jordan aligns with the EU on key issues such as regional peace, refugee management, and counterterrorism, securing aid and trade benefits while reinforcing its image as a moderate partner. At the same time, it engages with China through infrastructure and investment projects, especially under the Belt and Road Initiative, without compromising its Western alliances.

To manage EU concerns over Israel's regional integration, Jordan maintains its role as custodian of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites and advocates for a two-state solution, preserving its diplomatic weight in both Arab and European circles. This allows Jordan to act as a bridge between competing blocs, positioning itself as a pragmatic mediator and strategic partner.

Jordan's navigation is thus defined by strategic flexibility, symbolic leadership, and a commitment to multilateralism, enabling it to extract value from both EU ambitions and regional shifts without alienating key allies.

Neutrality

Neutrality, as a principle of international relations, denotes the abstention of a state from participation in wars or political-military alliances between other states. In theory, it is rooted in the legal frameworks established by the Hague Conventions of 1907, which define the rights and duties of neutral powers. Classical neutrality rests on three tenets: non-participation in conflicts, impartiality toward belligerents, and the inviolability of national territory. It also implies a commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and adherence to international law. In practice, neutrality is not absolute but situational, often shaped by geography, security pressures, and the international system's balance of power.

States such as Switzerland or Austria illustrate "permanent neutrality," where neutrality becomes a core part of national identity and foreign policy doctrine. Other states, like Sweden or Ireland, maintain "policy neutrality," allowing flexibility while preserving independence in security

decisions. Neutrality also entails diplomatic engagement, as neutrality does not equate to isolation but rather active mediation and bridge-building. Economically, neutral states often benefit from trade diversification and stable international relations.

Applied to Jordan, neutrality is pragmatic rather than doctrinal. Jordan's geographic position—bordering Israel, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—necessitates a balanced approach to avoid entanglement in regional conflicts. Its neutrality is underpinned by strategic moderation and careful alliance management with both Western and Arab partners. Jordan maintains strong security cooperation with the United States and Europe while preserving diplomatic relations with regional actors, including Iran and the Gulf states. The country's neutrality has enabled it to act as a mediator in Palestinian–Israeli affairs and regional humanitarian crises.

In practice, Jordan's neutrality is functional rather than absolute, blending alignment with Western security frameworks and Arab solidarity. The monarchy's foreign policy emphasizes regional stability and sovereignty preservation rather than ideological alignment. This pragmatic neutrality helps ensure domestic stability, sustain aid flows, and maintain international credibility. Thus, Jordan's version of neutrality exemplifies adaptive balance—anchored in survival, diplomacy, and restrained regional engagement.

This regional engagement attains salience in the current context held up against Loebell's conceptualisation of nifty small states balanced by greater emphasis of institutional strategies for the promotion of stabilisation of the middle eastern state system, i.e essentially a meeting of minds between european and small state diplomacy in the overall interest of system stability.

Thus, holding Jordan's neutral stance up against Loebell's conceptualisation of "nifty small states" highlights a deliberate alignment between theory and practice. Loebell emphasizes that small states achieve influence not through coercive power but via strategic agility, institutional engagement, and the cultivation of niche roles in the international system. Jordan's neutrality exemplifies this model: by abstaining from entanglement in regional conflicts, it preserves maneuverability, maximizes diplomatic options, and leverages international institutions to project influence.

In Loebell's framework, neutrality is not passive; it is an active strategy that allows small states to "punch above their weight" through mediation, alliance balancing, and the careful orchestration of international partnerships. Here, institutional strategies play a crucial role in modifying the inherent instability of the regional state system. By

embedding itself in multilateral organizations, cooperative security frameworks, and regional development initiatives, Jordan can mitigate systemic shocks, buffer against external pressures, and institutionalize mechanisms for conflict resolution. These strategies reduce the volatility that small states face in a fragmented or turbulent regional order.

Jordan operationalizes these principles by participating in multilateral initiatives, facilitating dialogue in conflict-prone arenas, and maintaining cooperative security arrangements without formal alignment that would compromise independence. Neutrality, framed through Lobell's lens, becomes an instrument of institutionalized resilience: it transforms structural vulnerabilities into opportunities for influence, stability, and legitimacy. In Jordan's case, neutrality combined with institutional engagement—through UN, Arab League, and other frameworks—demonstrates that abstention from overt alignment, coupled with strategic participation in institutions, can itself constitute a sophisticated mechanism to manage instability in the state system.”

The balance of power suggests, Jordan subsumes itself, but there are different ways of doing so. If the Nabataens used to trade with their bigger neighbours to keep them at bay, something that has been perpetuated in today's turn-key diplomacy between Iraq-Egypt, PNA-Israel, KSA-Syria, Lobell's conceptualization of small state diplomacy and diplomatic practice suggests a more active and institutionalized foreign policy is warranted, something that has become a necessity and possibility in the contemporary regional system in the Middle East.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – A Presentation of a Representation

The Euro Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) aims to integrate the EU with Southern Mediterranean countries and encourage South–South trade. Its main goals are liberalisation of industrial goods, enhanced services trade, regulatory alignment, and regional economic integration. North–South cooperation involves the EU and Southern Mediterranean partners, while South–South involves trade among the Southern Mediterranean countries themselves. The EU has concluded bilateral Association Agreements (AAs) with most Southern Mediterranean countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. These AAs include a free trade component for industrial goods. For example, the EU–Morocco agreement entered into force in 2000, fully liberalising industrial products. Agricultural liberalisation is more gradual and includes some sensitive product carve outs. Trade volumes show that the Southern Neighbourhood represents a notable share of EU external trade in goods. The South–South dimension includes agreements such as

the Agadir Agreement among Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, later joined by Lebanon and Palestine. These agreements liberalise industrial trade among Southern Mediterranean countries. However, South–South trade remains low compared to trade with the EU. Services trade is weakly addressed in most agreements. Investment provisions are limited in scope across existing AAs.

Non tariff measures, including technical regulations, customs procedures, and sanitary standards, remain major barriers. Agriculture and fisheries remain politically sensitive in both the EU and Southern partners. The EU seeks deeper integration through “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas” (DCFTAs). Tunisia launched DCFTA negotiations in 2015, but progress is on hold. Morocco began DCFTA negotiations in 2013 but requested a pause in 2014. Implementation has been asymmetric: Southern partners often liberalised more than the EU. Many non tariff barriers persist despite tariff reductions. Domestic political economy factors in Southern countries hinder further liberalisation. Governments fear industrial displacement and loss of agricultural competitiveness. Administrative and regulatory capacity is weaker in Southern partners.

Modern EU trade priorities include industrial policy, green transition, energy partnerships, and digital economy regulations. Existing AAs are increasingly considered outdated in light of these new priorities. Non tariff barriers include technical standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and customs inefficiencies. Alignment with EU regulations remains incomplete. Services liberalisation is minimal, including in finance, transport, logistics, and digital sectors. Public procurement, competition policy, and state-owned enterprises are not fully integrated in existing agreements. Labour and environmental standards are limited or absent from current AAs. Intra-regional trade among Southern partners is structurally weak. Infrastructure, regulatory divergence, and fragmentation limit South–South trade. Political will is inconsistent, with domestic concerns slowing reforms. Geopolitical factors, including migration, security, and climate concerns, add complexity to negotiations. The EU must balance offering attractive liberalisation while protecting sensitive sectors.

Modernisation of agreements is needed to reflect digital economy and green transition challenges. Existing AAs primarily focus on industrial goods, leaving gaps in services and investment. Agriculture remains a key sticking point due to political sensitivities. Fisheries liberalisation is often excluded or gradual. DCFTA-style deep integration would include regulatory convergence, competition policy, and investment protections. Weak South–South trade limits regional value-chain development. Harmonisation of technical and sanitary standards could boost Southern

firms' integration into EU supply chains. Southern Mediterranean countries face high costs of compliance with EU standards.

Delayed or paused negotiations, such as with Tunisia and Morocco, reflect both domestic and political constraints. EMFTA's North–South dimension is largely implemented for industrial goods but remains shallow for services and investment. South–South liberalisation remains limited in both scope and depth. For EMFTA to succeed, deeper integration in services, investment, and regulatory alignment is essential. Modernisation could upgrade existing AAs rather than replacing them entirely. Regional cooperation initiatives and infrastructure development could enhance South–South trade. Overall, EMFTA has achieved foundational industrial liberalisation but requires significant reforms for deep, comprehensive, and modern economic integration. The hoped for weight of the Euro-MED Partnership based on mutually reinforcing baskets in security, trade and finance, human and culture and policy interoperable has come to a naught.

The Pact for the Mediterranean seeks to make a valiant effort at resuscitation, a bold heartbeat of ambition, with the unspoken aim to triple trade volume—matching the might of the US in LATAM and the momentum of China in Southeast Asia. Where once interlocking initiatives were abandoned, now dozens of carefully crafted projects accumulate, laying the foundation for a considerable strengthening of governance at the UFM towards the formation of a regional organization by 2030. The aid for development it incarnates does rhyme with the pride of the Arab Group that has nearly wrecked the EU's objectives in the southern near abroad and the series of weakened authoritarian regimes that has resulted from the Arab Spring, but to reduce once proud peoples and appealing to the youth cannot hide the failure of policy and the quasi absence of well structured and disciplined, coherent and integrated approaches and the utter administrative disarray that policy area covering the cradle of Europe's civilisation, has been characterized by for decades. Che Casino Sanino!

Provided Israel delivers on the PNA, a step even the extreme right cannot ignore, the region can seize opportunity and security in tandem—a paradox of peace and pragmatism. For decades, for years, for months, this vision has awaited activation; for decades, for years, for months, the Mediterranean has whispered its potential. And in this symphony of strategy and diplomacy, the Pact becomes more than a plan—it becomes a promise, poised to turn latent possibilities into lasting progress, even as its realization threads delicately through the KSA–Israel peace equation.

Jordan's bold push, alongside Morocco, in shaping the Agadir Agreement demonstrates how smaller states can act strategically within regional frameworks, precisely the kind of dynamic that Hoekstra identifies as a catalyst for trade reform through aid and liberalisation. The move to reactivate Syria's long dormant association agreement with the European Union reaches back to a Mediterranean vision from thirty years ago, seeking to turn latent potential into tangible integration—a narrative of transformation rather than mere transition. The idea of fusing that vision with the Pact for the Mediterranean and relaunching the region reflects Hoekstra's insight that trade-facilitation and liberalisation matter less unless they are embedded in wider governance, institutional and infrastructural change. Yet there is a tension: while Hoekstra emphasises incremental, behind the border reforms and modest liberalisation as realistic levers of change, the ambition here—to triple trade volumes and ignite a region wide transformation—is much more audacious and politically charged than her empirical framework would typically assume. In essence, the strategy aligns with Hoekstra's diagnosis of what makes trade liberalisation work, but it departs from her caution about pace, risk and the need for domestic institutional grounding, pointing instead to a more ambitious, high stakes leap.

In this, Jordan aligns closely with Lobell's expectations: small states acting strategically, using multilateral frameworks and regional agreements to punch above their weight, shaping outcomes far beyond their size. Yet it also diverges from Lobell's model: whereas he emphasizes cautious, low-risk maneuvers and incremental influence, Jordan's moves—nudging Israel, reviving dormant agreements—carry higher stakes and visibly assertive ambitions that risk entanglement in broader geopolitical dynamics, highlighting both the promise and the peril of small-state activism in a volatile region.

The conditions for transcending the default, US led balance of power—a structure often maintained *en faute de mieux*—in the Middle East are complex, interwoven, and historically contingent. They require not only the recalibration of regional alliances, the strengthening of local institutions, and the management of external interventions, but also the cultivation of trust among states long habituated to rivalry. They demand vision, patience, and the willingness to engage in multilateral frameworks that go beyond short-term tactical gains. They necessitate the alignment of economic, security, and diplomatic levers to create durable, rather than episodic, stability. In short, moving beyond a system dictated by external default requires both structural innovation and the political courage to imagine, negotiate, and implement alternatives capable of reshaping the regional order.

His Majesty's co-presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in this regard is helpful so long as it is leveraged to foster inclusive regional dialogue, ensure alignment between member states' strategic interests, and advance tangible cooperation projects rather than symbolic initiatives alone. Effectiveness requires that the co-presidency functions as a platform for mediation and consensus-building, particularly in addressing persistent political, economic, and social asymmetries across the region. Moreover, the role must be anchored in proactive engagement with both institutional actors and civil society, facilitating policy coordination that translates high-level commitments into concrete outcomes. The credibility of this leadership is further reinforced when it is exercised transparently, with measurable benchmarks for progress, and when it signals a commitment to long-term regional stability, sustainable development, and integration of shared priorities such as renewable energy, maritime security, and educational exchange. Ultimately, the strategic value of the co-presidency is realized when it combines symbolic authority with operational impact, enabling the UfM to act as a catalyst for pragmatic multilateral cooperation across the Mediterranean basin.

Critique

Steven Lobell's framework on small-state strategies provides valuable insights into how smaller nations navigate international relations, emphasizing agency and strategic behavior. However, several scholars have critiqued aspects of his approach, offering alternative perspectives that challenge and complement his findings.

One notable critique comes from the field of neoclassical realism, which Lobell himself contributes to. While neoclassical realism incorporates domestic factors into the analysis of foreign policy, it has been argued that it still places significant emphasis on systemic structures and state behavior. Critics suggest that this approach may not fully account for the complexities of small-state behavior, particularly in regions with unique geopolitical dynamics.

Additionally, scholars have pointed out that Lobell's framework may overlook the agency of non-state actors in shaping small-state strategies. In some cases, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and private sector entities play crucial roles in influencing foreign policy decisions, especially in areas like development aid, environmental policy, and human rights advocacy. By focusing primarily on state-centric analyses, Lobell's framework may miss these influential dynamics.

Furthermore, while Lobell emphasizes the importance of identity and role theory in understanding small-state

behavior, some researchers argue that this perspective may lead to an overemphasis on ideational factors at the expense of material capabilities and structural constraints. They contend that small states often face significant limitations due to their size and resources, which can constrain their foreign policy options regardless of their perceived identity or role.

In conclusion, while Steven Lobell's framework offers a valuable lens through which to examine small-state strategies, it is important to consider these critiques and alternative perspectives.

Incorporating insights from neoclassical realism, acknowledging the role of non-state actors, and balancing ideational factors with material constraints can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how small states navigate the complexities of international relations.

Policy and Research Implications: Toward a Red Sea Small-State Research Network

Building on Lobell's insights and the comparative lessons drawn from Nordic and Icelandic small-state scholarship, one clear implication is the value of institutionalizing systematic research and strategic analysis. The University of Iceland's Centre for Small State Studies provides a compelling model: it combines sustained empirical research, comparative theory-building, and policy-oriented engagement, producing both academic insight and actionable guidance for small states navigating complex international environments.

For the Red Sea region, and for Jordan as a pivotal small state within it, establishing a dedicated Center for Red Sea Small-State and Maritime Studies could serve multiple purposes. First, it would function as a hub for rigorous, cross-disciplinary research on security, trade, maritime governance, and regional conflict dynamics. Second, when coupled with a network of peace and conflict research institutes anchored in Addis Ababa, it could facilitate knowledge-sharing, early-warning analysis, and collaborative policy development across the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and adjacent littoral states. Third, such a center would provide Jordan and its neighbors with an institutional platform to enhance legitimacy and influence: by producing credible research, convening regional dialogues, and framing policy debates, small states could exercise intellectual and normative leadership even where hard power is constrained.

In Lobell's terms, this recommendation aligns with the strategy of institutional embedding and normative signalling: the center would not only generate practical knowledge but also serve as a visible marker of regional

commitment to stability, multilateralism, and cooperative governance. By drawing on the Icelandic precedent, states in the Red Sea region can combine scholarly rigor with strategic foresight, ensuring that small-state agency is both structured and adaptive in an environment of volatility and geopolitical flux.

Theoretical Implications of Lobell's Work in Small-State Studies

Lobell challenges traditional assumptions that small states are predominantly passive actors in international politics. His analysis emphasizes that small states can exert agency by strategically navigating asymmetries in power, using diplomacy, alliances, and institutional leverage to influence outcomes disproportionate to their material size. This reframing contributes to a more nuanced understanding of state behavior, moving beyond size-based determinism toward capability- and strategy-based analyses.

In international relations, small states have often been conceptualized as structurally constrained within realist frameworks, facing severe limitations against great powers. Lobell's work bridges this gap by showing how small states can turn structural weaknesses into strategic tools, such as forming coalitions, leveraging international norms, or exploiting institutional venues to enhance bargaining power. This positions small states as active participants in systemic politics rather than merely reactive actors.

A core insight from Lobell is the interaction between domestic governance and external behavior. Strong institutions and adaptive governance are not only crucial internally but also shape a state's external credibility and effectiveness. This integrates domestic-level analysis into international relations theory, connecting the study of small states to debates on institutional capacity, policy implementation, and resilience in the face of external shocks.

Lobell foregrounds the importance of flexibility, adaptation, and learning in small-state survival and success. This resonates with broader IR debates on resilience and the role of soft power in systemic turbulence, suggesting that theoretical models should account for the dynamic, context-dependent strategies small states employ to maintain sovereignty, security, and influence amid environmental, economic, or geopolitical volatility.

By emphasizing historical legacies, regional contexts, and issue-specific strategies, Lobell contributes to the refinement of small-state typologies. His approach encourages theorists to move beyond static size-based classifications toward multidimensional frameworks that account for governance capacity, institutional sophistication, and strategic acumen.

Lobell's work acts as a conceptual bridge between mainstream IR (realism, liberal institutionalism) and the specialized study of small states. While realism highlights structural constraints and liberal institutionalism emphasizes international cooperation, Lobell demonstrates how small states can exploit both structural pressures and institutional mechanisms, providing a hybrid perspective that enriches both theoretical debates and policy-oriented research.

In an era of globalization, climate change, and geopolitical volatility, Lobell's emphasis on adaptive, governance-informed strategy underscores the relevance of small-state studies to pressing global challenges. His framework suggests that theory should account not only for material capabilities but also for strategic foresight, institutional innovation, and interdependence management.

Lobell's contribution lies in reframing small states as strategically competent, institutionally capable, and adaptively resilient actors within the international system. Theoretically, his work bridges structuralist and agency-focused perspectives, links domestic governance to external behavior, and challenges simplistic size-based assumptions, enriching both small-state studies and broader debates in international relations.

Europe, Middle East and Small States

To enhance institutional strategies in the Middle East and mitigate enmities and volatility in the state system, several approaches could be considered.

Strengthening regional cooperation through existing institutions such as the Arab League, or more targeted bilateral or trilateral initiatives (e.g., Jordan-Turkey-Iraq), could promote common interests in stability, security, and economic development. These frameworks should focus on building shared infrastructure projects, such as cross-border transportation, energy, and digital networks, which bind states together in mutually beneficial ways.

Given the volatility of the region, an institutionalized early warning system for potential conflicts, underpinned by regional diplomatic bodies, could proactively address rising tensions. This system could provide neutral platforms for dialogue, de-escalation, and crisis management, where competing interests can be reconciled through diplomatic means rather than military ones.

Jordan, with its relatively stable political environment and strong ties to both Arab states and the West, could play a more central role as a regional mediator. By expanding its diplomatic efforts, particularly in areas of water security, trade, and refugees, Jordan could foster greater cooperation between neighboring states, such as Israel, Syria, and Palestine. Jordan's position could serve

as a bridge between divergent regional blocs, focusing on areas of common ground like economic development and counter-terrorism.

Loebell's ideas on deliberative democracy emphasize the importance of engaging communities and stakeholders in decision-making processes, creating a more inclusive and transparent political environment. Adapting this concept regionally, Middle Eastern states could experiment with local and national forums that bring together civil society, businesses, and political actors to build consensus on critical issues like resource allocation, governance reforms, and security. These platforms would reduce the sense of alienation or disenfranchisement that fuels extremism and sectarian conflict.

Adopting models of soft institutionalization, which Loebell suggests, can build a foundation for stability by focusing on creating flexible, adaptive governance structures that remain responsive to the ever-shifting dynamics of the region. This could involve creating hybrid models that incorporate both state institutions and traditional mechanisms of authority, particularly in tribal or local communities, where such traditional structures often hold sway. The goal is to integrate these into national frameworks without undermining the state's authority, offering a more organic and inclusive model for governance.

The creation of cross-border economic zones could serve as a powerful tool for reducing tensions. By encouraging economic interdependence, where states have a vested interest in the stability of their neighbors, the region could gradually move toward a more cooperative environment. This would require institutional mechanisms for joint ventures, trade agreements, and infrastructure projects that transcend national borders, fostering a sense of shared destiny.

By adopting Loebell's insights into state stability, especially through institutional frameworks designed to minimize fragmentation and polarization, Middle Eastern states could manage their internal divisions more effectively. These frameworks would prioritize inclusivity, allowing for diverse groups—whether ethnic, religious, or political—to have a stake in the governance process. This approach would make political systems more resilient to both internal and external shocks, reducing the likelihood of breakdowns that lead to violent conflict.

Towards Strategic Equilibrium

Lobell's work both consolidates and redirects, gathering the scattered insights of prior scholarship while bending them toward a sharper horizon. By placing systemic turbulence at the very heart of analysis, and by interrogating the fraught trade-offs among security, legitimacy, and influence, he reimagines small-state strategy not as a linear quest for maximisation but as a restless balancing act—a

dynamic equilibrium forged in motion. His comparative typology offers clarity, sketching recurring repertoires of adaptation, even if at times it brackets the weight of domestic contingencies or the stubborn drag of history.

What emerges is less a rupture than a strengthening spiral in the evolution of small-state studies. Earlier research affirmed that small states could act with agency; Lobell presses further, showing that agency is meaningful only when attuned to volatility, when recalibration is embraced as condition rather than exception. The implication is sobering yet liberating: the true measure of small-state power lies not in the pursuit of fixed outcomes but in the endurance of adjustment itself. To persist, to remain consequential, is to sustain equilibrium amidst the shifting tides of order and disorder alike.

A nifty small state diplomacy can do quite a few things to nudge the other regional powers to reconciliation and institutionalisation, perhaps less so to reduce dependence on external military guarantees, something to prod economic diversification and regional integration by specialised subregional entrepreneurship and creative and effective leadership, by deriving political legitimacy through governance reform and inclusive development within a legitimate Islamic discourse of strengthened governance and increased pluralism in the policy making system, and by addressing with energy and determination containment of identity based conflicts. A self-sustained regional order in the Middle East under the US-led regional balance of power has maintained a precarious peace but at the end at the cost of sovereignty and genuine regional agency. A more stable and prosperous Middle East must emerge from within - through shared institutions, diversified economies, legitimate governance and pragmatic conflict management. Whose fault is it if the EU-Turkey not in three years, not in eight years but in 12-15 years will come back and demonstrate political will in earnest to organise the Mediterranean and the wider Middle East?

Only the synergy between reconciliation, autonomy, integration, reform and conflict containment could gradually replace external management with indigenous stability, something that the middle eastern populations overwhelmingly support and The European Union has a clean and obvious interest in, so long as its underpins its objectives of increased trade and FDI flows, comparable to that of China and the USA in South East Asia and in Latin America.

Small states, in this reframing, are not the passive debris of global currents but the nimble helmsmen of their own precarious vessels. Their influence is neither permanent nor illusory—it is provisional, contingent, and all the more remarkable for its durability in a world that refuses stability.

References

1. Abu-Rumman, M. (2020) *Jordan's Religious Diplomacy and the Amman Message*. Amman: Al- Quds Center for Political Studies.
2. Achilli, L. & Fargues, P. (2021) 'Jordan's Refugee Policy: Balancing Domestic Stability and International Legitimacy', *Middle East Journal*, 75(4), pp. 593–615.
3. Barari, H. (2015) 'Jordan and the Politics of Multilateralism', *International Politics*, 52(1), pp. 65–83.
4. Centre for Small State Studies, University of Iceland (2010–2023) *Annual Reports and Research Publications*. Reykjavik: University of Iceland.
5. Ingebritsen, C., Neumann, I., Gstöhl, S. & Beyer, J. (eds) (2006) *Small States in International Relations*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
6. Lobell, C. (2026) *Small States in a Shifting International Order*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
7. Robins, P. (2004) *A History of Jordan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Ryan, C. (2018) 'Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Resilience', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 8(2), pp. 173–191.
9. Ryan, C. (2021) *Jordan and the Politics of Security*. London: Routledge.
10. Tell, T. (2014) 'Jordanian Foreign Policy: The Limits of the Possible', *Mediterranean Politics*, 19(3), pp. 411–427.
11. Yom, S. (2022) *Jordan's Fragile Stability: Regime Survival and Regional Realignments*. New York: Columbia University Press.
12. Yom, S. & Al-Khatib, L. (2019) 'Jordan's Pragmatic Balancing Act', *Carnegie Middle East Center Paper*.
13. Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat. (2025). Regional integration in the Union for the Mediterranean 2025: Progress report. Retrieved from <https://ufmsecretariat.org/regional-integration-2025/>
14. European Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). Mapping European leverage in the MENA region. Retrieved from https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_eu_leverage_mena/
15. European Commission – Directorate General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA). (n.d.). Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/middle-east-north-africa-and-gulf_en (European Commission)
16. EU News. (2024, October 1). European Union main trading partner of MENA countries. Retrieved from <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/10/01/european-union-main-trading-partner-of-mena-countries/> (Eunews)
17. Middle East Institute. (2024, August 19). The EU needs to expand its support for the MENA region's digital transformation. Retrieved from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/eu-needs-expand-its-support-mena-regions-digital-transformation> (Middle East Institute)
18. Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development. (n.d.). Investment and trade – MENA OECD Competitiveness Programme. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/mena-oecd-competitiveness-programme/investment-and-trade.html>
19. European Central Bank. (2018, April). Economic and monetary developments – ECB Economic Bulletin, Issue 4/2018. Retrieved from https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/economic-bulletin/articles/2018/html/ecb.ebart201804_01.en.html
20. European External Action Service. (n.d.). Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Retrieved from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-and-north-africa-mena_en
21. European Commission. (n.d.). North Africa, Middle East & Gulf. Retrieved from https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/index_en (north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu)
22. Oumazzane, T. (2021). *Regional integration in the Middle East and North Africa: The Agadir Agreement and the political economy of trade and peace*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-33-6452-3>
23. Ilcus, C. *A comprehensive roadmap to Libya's stability & governance*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/comprehensive-roadmap-libyas-stability-governance-christian-ilcus-p2zmf/?trackingId=oxYgFGJnQ%2BW2kHzc44%2F3Ww%3D%3D>
24. Gomez, R. (2003). *Negotiating the Euro Mediterranean partnership: Strategic action in EU foreign policy?* Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Negotiating-the-Euro-Mediterranean-Partnership-Strategic-Action-in-EU-Foreign-Policy/Gomez/p/book/9781138711495?>
25. Joffe, G., & Vasconcelos, A. (Eds.). (2001). *The Barcelona Process: Building a Euro Mediterranean regional community*. Routledge
26. Sidlo, K. (2025). *New Pact for the Mediterranean: The future of Euro Mediterranean relations on the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process*. In *IEMed*

- Mediterranean Yearbook 2025 IEMed.* <https://www.iemed.org/publication/new-pact-for-the-mediterranean-the-futureof-euro-mediterranean-relations-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-barcelona-process/qRr>
 27. Youngs, R. (Ed.). (2016). *Twenty years of Euro Mediterranean relations*. Routledge
 28. Barnett, M. N. (1998). "The game of Arab politics" in *Dialogues in Arab politics: Negotiations in regional order* (pp. 25–48). Columbia University Press.
 29. Rengger, N. J. (2013). *International relations, political theory and the problem of order: Beyond international relations theory*. Routledge.
 30. Hinnebusch, R. (2014). *The international politics of the Middle East (2nd ed.)*. Manchester University Press.
 31. Gause, F. G., III. (2019). *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*. Cambridge University Press.
 32. Valbjørn, M. (2020). *Dialogues in new Middle East cold wars: The politics of rivalry and the structuring of regional order*. *International Affairs*, 96(5), 1317–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaa088>
 33. Magid, A. (2025). *The Most American King: Abdullah of Jordan*. Universal Publishers.
- Internet Sources**
34. The impact of governance on political stability in Jordan ... <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2025.1595297/full>
 35. The Impact of Foreign Involvement on Political Reform ... https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3991&context=isp_collection.
 36. Jordan Country Report 2024 <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/JOR>
 37. OECD Public Governance Reviews: Jordan (EN) https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/12/oecd-public-governance-reviews-jordan_7f5f986f/be41202d-en.pdf
 38. security implications of EU-Jordan relations and the ... https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/files/254800393/MD_IH_Peter_Seeberg_From_Mobility_Partnerships_to_Migration_Compacts.pdf
 39. OECD Public Governance Reviews: Jordan https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-public-governance-reviews-jordan_be41202d-en.html
 40. THE INFLUENCE OF PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS... <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-2427.13203>
 41. political science department <https://www.clarku.edu/academic-advising-center/www-content/blogs.dir/3/files/sites/43/2019/02/HandbookOnline.pdf>
 42. Regions and Powers-The Structure of International Security <https://ir101.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Buzan-Waever-2003-Regions-and-Powers-The-Structure-of-International-Security.pdf>
 43. How do Small States conduct foreign policy? <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/how-do-small-states-conduct-foreign-policy>
 44. DIPLOMACY OF SMALL STATES: trends in 2024 <https://www.diplomacy.edu/topics/diplomacy-of-small-states/>
 45. Small State Foreign Policy <https://anderswivel.com/research-anders-wivel/small-state-foreign-policy/>
 46. Small States and the Multilateral System: Transforming ... <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Small-States-and-the-Multilateral-System-web.pdf>
 47. Small States in International Relations - Diplo Resource <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/small-states-in-international-relations/>
 48. A small state addressing big problems. perspectives on recent .. https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/3297157/Perspectives_recent_Danish_foreign_and_security_strategy_D_IIS_Report_2_2020.pdf
 49. Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Strategies of Small States <https://actualitica.com/en/politics-en/foreign-policy-and-diplomatic-strategies-of-small-states/>
 50. Main Challenges for Small States in Contemporary ... - CEP <https://www.cep.si/main-challenges-small-states-contemporary-international-relations/>
- Statement on AI**
- I used ChatGPT and Sharly AI as digital tools to assist in researching and drafting this piece. By “digital method,” I refer to the use of AI-powered platforms to gather, organize, and synthesize information, identify patterns, and generate coherent text based on prompts and queries. These tools function as analytical aids, enabling the processing of large volumes of information more efficiently than manual research alone.
- After completing the draft with the assistance of these platforms, I carefully reviewed and verified the manuscript for accuracy, coherence, and analytical integrity. I take full responsibility for the content of the final work, including any errors or misinterpretations, and for all decisions regarding its arguments, structure, and conclusions.

Appendix 1-Towards a Treaty of Good Neighbourliness in the Levant

The Principle of Good Neighbourliness in International Law

The principle of good neighbourliness serves as a foundational concept for fostering peaceful cooperation, dialogue, and mutual tolerance among states. It is rooted in core tenets of international law and seeks to establish and maintain harmonious relations based on mutual respect, sovereignty, and shared interests. Central to this principle are several key international law doctrines that govern state interactions and ensure that disputes are resolved amicably while promoting cooperative solutions to common challenges. These core principles include:

- 1. Sovereign Equality and Territorial Integrity of States:** The principle underscores the notion that all states, irrespective of their size, power, or wealth, are equal in their sovereignty and entitled to maintain their territorial integrity. This idea is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and reflects the idea that each state possesses the right to govern its own territory without external interference.
- 2. Non-Interference in the Internal Affairs of Other States:** A fundamental tenet of good neighbourliness is the obligation of states to refrain from interfering in the internal political, social, or economic affairs of other states. This principle ensures that each state has the freedom to determine its own governance without external pressure or coercion, contributing to stability and sovereignty.
- 3. Peaceful Settlement of Disputes:** Good neighbourliness emphasizes the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes between states. This includes utilizing diplomatic dialogue, negotiation, mediation, or arbitration rather than resorting to force. The peaceful settlement of disputes is a cornerstone of the UN Charter and a guiding principle of international law.
- 4. Prevention of Harmful Acts within One's Territory:** States are obligated not to engage in activities within their own borders that might cause harm to other states. This principle, often linked to international environmental law, obliges states to avoid actions that lead to transboundary harm, such as pollution or resource depletion. It underscores the responsibility of states to ensure that their actions do not negatively affect neighbouring states, reinforcing the notion of shared responsibility in preserving common resources.
- 5. Cooperation in Matters of Mutual Interest:** The principle of good neighbourliness encourages states to cooperate in areas of shared interest, such as the

management of common resources (e.g., rivers, air quality, fisheries), regional security, and economic development. Cooperation fosters stability and ensures that states benefit from mutually advantageous relationships, particularly in situations where resources or security concerns transcend national borders.

The Principle in International Instruments

The concept of good neighbourliness is embedded in a variety of international legal instruments and frameworks, each contributing to its development and application across different contexts. Key sources where this principle is articulated include:

- 1. The UN Charter:** The principle of good neighbourliness is integral to the spirit of the UN Charter. The Preamble of the Charter reflects a collective determination "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours." Furthermore, Article 74 underscores the importance of friendly relations and the peaceful resolution of disputes as essential to the pursuit of international peace and security. Thus, the UN Charter serves as a foundational document promoting this principle among its member states.
- 2. UN General Assembly Resolutions:** Over the years, the UN General Assembly has adopted various resolutions that emphasize the need to develop and strengthen good neighbourliness among states. These resolutions encourage states to commit to the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperation, and they call for the adoption of measures that contribute to the strengthening of regional stability and international peace.
- 3. Declaration on Principles of International Law (1970):** This declaration, formally known as the *Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States*, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1970. It outlines key principles for establishing friendly and cooperative relations between states, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference. This declaration links the principle of good neighbourliness to the broader framework of international law governing state relations.
- 4. Bilateral and Regional Treaties:** One of the most concrete manifestations of the principle of good neighbourliness can be found in bilateral and regional treaties, where states specifically commit to cooperative relationships based on shared interests. For example, the *Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia* is a prime example of a bilateral treaty that operationalizes

the principle by establishing legal obligations for both states to respect each other's sovereignty, promote economic cooperation, and peacefully resolve disputes. Similarly, regional cooperation frameworks such as the European Union (EU) enlargement process or the South-East European Cooperation Process translate the principle of good neighbourliness into actionable commitments among member states, promoting cooperation in political, economic, and social matters.

Good Neighbourliness: A Framework, Not a Single Convention

While the principle of good neighbourliness is widely recognized and incorporated into international law, it does not exist as a single, standalone convention. Rather, it functions as a framework or guideline for interstate relations that can be tailored to suit specific regional or bilateral contexts. This flexibility allows states to apply the principle in ways that are most relevant to their particular geographical, political, and historical circumstances. As such, good neighbourliness is an evolving concept, and its application can be seen in both formal treaties and informal diplomatic practices.

The diverse array of legal instruments—from global treaties like the UN Charter to regional agreements such as the EU's cooperation mechanisms—demonstrates that the principle of good neighbourliness is embedded in the fabric of international law and is essential for promoting peace, stability, and cooperation in the global community. It is this adaptability that makes the principle so valuable in addressing a wide range of issues facing states today, from border disputes to environmental protection, and from trade relations to regional security.

In conclusion, the principle of good neighbourliness is a core element of international law that encourages peaceful, respectful, and cooperative relationships between states. While it lacks a single, universal convention, it is enshrined in numerous international legal instruments and implemented through a variety of treaties and diplomatic practices. As such, it serves as a vital tool for states seeking to ensure peaceful coexistence and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world.

A trilateral treaty between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan focused on good neighborliness would be a significant diplomatic effort. Given the complex and delicate nature of relations in this region, the treaty would need to focus on fostering peace, promoting cooperation, and ensuring the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Here's a tailored application of the key elements of a trilateral treaty specifically for these three parties:

1. Preamble

- **Objective:** The treaty would aim to foster peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperation between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. It would address regional security concerns, economic development, and the protection of cultural and environmental heritage, while striving to resolve outstanding political issues, including the status of Jerusalem and borders.
- **Principles:** Commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each party, with a focus on peaceful negotiation and conflict resolution.
- **Historical Context:** Acknowledging the shared and often turbulent history, the treaty would stress the importance of overcoming past conflicts, building trust, and seeking reconciliation for the sake of regional stability and prosperity.

2. General Provisions

- **Mutual Respect and Sovereignty:** All parties agree to respect each other's territorial integrity, political sovereignty, and the right to self-determination.
- **Non-Interference:** Each party agrees not to interfere in the internal affairs of the other, recognizing the importance of self-governance and sovereignty.
- **Peaceful Resolution of Disputes:** A commitment to resolving disagreements through diplomatic means, such as dialogue, negotiation, mediation, or arbitration. The treaty would include a clear mechanism for peaceful dispute resolution, with involvement from neutral third parties if necessary.

3. Economic Cooperation

- **Trade and Investment:** Israel, Palestine, and Jordan would work together to facilitate trade agreements, ease cross-border commerce, and create a free trade zone where applicable, especially in sectors like technology, agriculture, and tourism.
- **Development Projects:** Joint ventures to promote infrastructure development, including transportation (e.g., rail links between Jordan and Israel), water management, energy cooperation, and regional connectivity.
- **Tourism and Cultural Exchange:** Promoting the region as a unified tourism destination, including shared sites of historical, religious, and cultural significance, such as Jerusalem, Petra, and the Dead Sea.

4. Security and Defense

- **Security Cooperation:** Israel, Palestine, and Jordan would establish a joint security framework, focused

on counterterrorism, border security, and preventing violent extremism. This might involve sharing intelligence on terrorist groups, coordinated military operations against common threats, and joint efforts to combat smuggling and arms trafficking.

- **Non-Aggression:** All parties would commit to non-aggression and the peaceful settlement of disputes, refraining from military escalation or unilateral action that could harm the other.
- **Conflict Prevention and Early Warning:** A system for early warnings and regular consultations on regional security developments, including the potential for peacekeeping forces in sensitive areas if needed.

5. Cultural and Social Exchange

- **Educational Cooperation:** The treaty could promote academic exchanges, joint research, and programs that encourage dialogue and mutual understanding between people from Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Collaborative university partnerships and scholarship programs could help foster a new generation of leaders committed to peace.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Establishing cultural exchange programs that celebrate the shared history and diversity of the three parties, with an emphasis on art, music, and cultural heritage. Events such as joint festivals, art exhibits, and historical tours could strengthen social ties.
- **Social Development:** Joint initiatives in healthcare, refugee assistance, and poverty alleviation. For example, collaborative programs to provide healthcare to Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza or mutual support for displaced populations.

6. Environmental Protection

- **Water Resource Management:** Given the shared water resources, the treaty would include provisions for equitable and sustainable management of transboundary water resources like the Jordan River, while a joint trilateral Dead Sea Commission is under study. Joint initiatives to address water scarcity and pollution could help secure future water supplies for all three parties, included a joint venture on water pipelines.
- **Climate Change and Sustainability:** Collaboration on renewable energy projects, such as solar power in Jordan, desalination plants, and green building initiatives. Environmental protections for shared natural areas would also be crucial.
- **Disaster Preparedness:** Coordinating responses

to natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, with joint plans for emergency management and humanitarian aid.

7. Legal Framework

- **Mutual Legal Assistance:** Agreement on the enforcement of laws related to cross-border crime, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and terrorism. Establishing legal frameworks for extradition between the three countries could strengthen cooperation in law enforcement.
- **Human Rights:** Ensuring the protection of human rights for all citizens, including Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians, with emphasis on the rights of minority groups and refugees.
- **Dispute Resolution Mechanism:** Establishing a joint body for resolving legal conflicts that may arise between the three parties, including border issues, trade disputes, or violations of the treaty's terms. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) or a similar impartial body might be involved in resolving serious disputes.

8. Regular Consultations and Meetings

- **Annual Summits:** A regular high-level summit between leaders of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan to discuss progress on the treaty, address emerging challenges, and strengthen bilateral and trilateral relations.
- **Joint Working Groups:** Technical committees to oversee specific areas of cooperation, such as water management, trade, or security, ensuring continuous collaboration.
- **Ongoing Diplomatic Channels:** A permanent diplomatic framework to ensure constant communication and rapid resolution of potential issues.

9. Monitoring and Implementation

- **Joint Oversight Committee:** A body composed of representatives from Israel, Palestine, and Jordan (potentially with neutral international observers) to monitor compliance with the treaty's provisions and assess progress in key areas.
- **Transparency and Reporting:** Regular, publicly accessible reports on the implementation of the treaty to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Support for Civil Society:** Encouraging the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community leaders in monitoring and evaluating the treaty's impact, particularly in terms of human rights and social progress.

10. Duration and Termination

- **Duration:** The treaty would be of indefinite duration but could be reviewed and renewed periodically to ensure it remains relevant to changing geopolitical conditions.
- **Termination:** There would be clear procedures for withdrawal from the treaty, subject to mutual agreement or major violations of the terms. Any termination would require careful diplomatic handling to prevent a return to conflict.

11. Ratification and Entry into Force

- **Ratification:** The treaty would need to be ratified by the governing bodies of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, such as their respective parliaments or leadership councils.
- **Entry into Force:** The treaty would enter into force once all parties have ratified it and established the necessary legal frameworks to implement its provisions.

12. Signatories and Witnesses

- **Signatories:** The heads of state or designated representatives from Israel, Palestine, and Jordan would sign the treaty.
- **Witnesses:** Neutral third-party organizations, such as the United Nations or other international bodies, may act as witnesses or guarantors, ensuring that the treaty is upheld and respected by all parties.

This framework, though complex and ambitious, would serve as a significant step toward building long-term peace and stability in the region, addressing not only political issues but also economic, environmental, and cultural concerns that impact the daily lives of people in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. The treaty would need to be flexible and adaptable to the realities on the ground while keeping the overarching goal of peace, security, and prosperity for all parties.

Draft Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Cooperation, and Peaceful Coexistence Between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan

Preamble

Recognizing the shared historical, cultural, and religious significance of the Middle East region, the peoples of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan,

-Desiring to establish a framework for lasting peace, mutual respect, and cooperation,

-Committed to resolving disputes through peaceful dialogue,

-Acknowledging the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of each state to self-determination,

-Affirming the importance of a just, comprehensive, and sustainable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

-With the understanding that peace and prosperity can only be achieved through partnership, collaboration, and respect for human rights,

-And in recognition of the importance of protecting the shared environment and natural resources,

Hereby agree as follows:

Article 1: Objectives of the Treaty

1. **Promotion of Peace and Security** The primary objective of this treaty is to promote lasting peace and security through cooperation in political, economic, social, environmental, and security matters.
2. **Cooperation in Governance and Development** The parties shall work together to facilitate economic growth, technological innovation, and mutual development, with an emphasis on poverty reduction, infrastructure development, and human welfare.
3. **Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability:** The parties commit to jointly protect their shared natural resources, including water, land, and air, and to pursue sustainable development and environmental conservation.
4. **Cultural and Educational Exchange:** The treaty shall promote greater cultural understanding, educational cooperation, and people-to-people dialogue, reinforcing the social ties between the three peoples.

Article 2: Recognition of Sovereignty and Non-Interference

1. The parties recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other, and shall refrain from any action that undermines the political independence or territorial boundaries of any party.
2. Each party shall respect the internal affairs of the others and refrain from interfering in the domestic political, social, or cultural systems of the other parties.
3. The parties shall refrain from engaging in actions that may harm or provoke the other parties, either directly or indirectly, including through third-party actors.

Article 3: Economic Cooperation

1. **Free Trade Area** The parties agree to create a regional free trade area (FTA) aimed at reducing tariffs, trade barriers, and facilitating the flow of goods and services across their borders within the Barcelona process.

Specific efforts will be made to ease cross-border trade, particularly in high-demand sectors such as agriculture, energy, technology, and tourism.

2. **Joint Investment Projects** The parties agree to establish a joint investment fund to support infrastructure projects that benefit the entire region, including but not limited to transportation corridors, renewable energy, water management, and technology hubs.
3. **Economic Dispute Resolution** In the event of economic disputes, the parties shall first attempt to resolve them through direct negotiation. If unresolved, disputes may be submitted to a mutually agreed-upon international arbitration body for resolution.

Article 4: Security and Defense Cooperation

1. **Mutual Non-Aggression** The parties agree not to engage in acts of aggression or violence against one another and to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity at all times.
2. **Joint Security Framework** The parties shall establish a joint security framework aimed at addressing common threats to peace and stability, including terrorism, organized crime, and smuggling. This framework will include:
 - **Shared Intelligence:** Collaborative intelligence-sharing mechanisms to combat terrorism, extremist groups, and other security threats.
 - **Border Security Cooperation:** Joint patrols and coordinated security measures to ensure secure borders and prevent illegal activities.
 - **Emergency Security Response:** The establishment of a rapid response team to coordinate responses to security emergencies or natural disasters that affect multiple parties.
3. **Peacekeeping and Conflict Prevention** The parties commit to seeking peaceful solutions to any conflicts or tensions that arise between them and, if necessary, agree to the deployment of neutral peacekeepers or a regional peacekeeping force to manage sensitive areas or conflicts. The Jordan Valley is patrolled jointly by the parties within their respective overlapping national areas of control. The Waqf Haram al-Sharif coordinates with the local Israeli security authorities within each's area of responsibility, without prejudice to the permanent status of the Temple Mount, even as the status quo is consolidated and solidified in cooperation with the UNESCO office in the Old Town.

Article 5: Environmental Cooperation and Resource

Management

1. **Shared Water Resources:** Recognizing the importance of shared water resources, the parties agree to cooperate in the joint management of transboundary water bodies, including the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, to ensure equitable, sustainable, and environmentally responsible use.
2. **Environmental Protection:** The parties commit to working together to protect the natural environment, mitigate climate change, and promote biodiversity. Specific measures shall include:
 - Joint renewable energy projects (e.g., solar, wind).
 - **Environmental Standards:** Agreement on a shared set of environmental standards, particularly in regard to pollution, waste management, and sustainable development.
 - A **regional climate change action plan**, with coordinated efforts to address climate-related challenges such as drought, desertification, and rising sea levels.

Article 6: Cultural, Educational, and Social Cooperation

1. **Cultural Exchange Programs:** The parties will develop programs to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding, including:
 - Joint cultural festivals.
 - Collaborative arts and heritage projects celebrating the shared cultural history and religious significance of the region.
 - **People-to-People Dialogues:** Programs to foster communication and understanding between the people of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.
2. **Educational and Scientific Cooperation** The parties will support educational exchanges and joint research initiatives, focusing on:
 - **Scholarships** for students from each party to study in the others' universities.
 - **Research Collaborations:** Joint research projects in fields such as medicine, technology, agriculture, and environmental science.
 - A **Jordanian-Palestinean-Israeli Bayt al- Saydaga** will be established in cooperation with the French government.
3. **Human Rights and Social Welfare** The parties will work together on joint initiatives to improve human rights, social welfare, and public health in their

respective territories, with particular emphasis on refugee assistance, healthcare access, and the welfare of displaced populations.

Article 7: Dispute Resolution and Conflict Prevention

- 1. Diplomatic Mechanism:** The parties agree to establish a permanent diplomatic channel for the early identification of emerging issues and the resolution of disputes before they escalate.
- 2. International Mediation:** In the case that a dispute cannot be resolved through direct negotiations, the parties may seek the assistance of a neutral third party or international mediator to facilitate dialogue and resolution.
- 3. Monitoring and Compliance:** A joint oversight committee shall be established to monitor compliance with the terms of this treaty, assess its impact, and ensure that all provisions are being implemented fairly and equitably. The committee shall submit an annual report to the parties.

Article 8: Ratification and Entry into Force

1. This Treaty shall be ratified by the legislative bodies of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

2. The Treaty shall enter into force on the date that all parties have completed their ratification processes.
3. This Treaty shall remain in effect indefinitely, subject to periodic review by the parties.

Article 9: Final Provisions

- 1. Amendments:** Any party may propose amendments to this Treaty, which shall be subject to mutual agreement by all three parties.
- 2. Termination:** The Treaty may be terminated by mutual consent, or if one party commits a material breach of its obligations under the Treaty. The termination process shall involve a formal diplomatic process.

Signed by the Representatives of the Parties On behalf of the State of Israel, On behalf of the State of Palestine, On behalf of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,

[Date and Place of Signing]

This draft establishes a comprehensive legal framework for cooperation in all key areas of concern and promotes peace, stability, and mutual respect. It lays out specific, actionable steps for the three parties to follow, ensuring they have a clear, structured path toward cooperation and peacebuilding.