

# The philosophy of neutrality

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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEUTRALITY

By courtesy of the editor of the "Amerikanische Schweizer Zeitung" we have much pleasure in publishing excerpts from a lecture which Dr. August R. Lindt, Swiss Ambassador to the United States recently delivered at the University of Denver.

The underlying philosophy of any foreign policy is, it seems to me, very simply this: to maintain national independence and national freedom. A foreign policy is realistic only when it takes into account the geographical, economical and internal political factors, and the relativity of the size and of the military power of a given country. Therefore, the means to maintain freedom and independence naturally vary from nation to nation. The means Switzerland has chosen is Permanent Neutrality.

Let me clarify, already at this stage, an important point. While Neutrality directs the foreign policy of a nation, there is not — and of course cannot exist in a free country — a neutrality of opinion. The people in Switzerland have therefore the greatest contempt for moral neutrality which would bar a citizen from making up his mind on the happenings in the world. Press and public opinion have the full right, energetically defended, to form their own judgment on what is right or wrong. Neutrality obliges the State, not public opinion.

I said Neutrality, not Neutralism.

Neutrality and Neutralism have surely in common that states who practice either principle are firmly convinced that they follow a foreign policy best suited to their possibilities. Nobody who is inspired by democratic conceptions, can contest a country's right to choose freely its own foreign policy. Neutrality and Neutralism both keep out of alliances with the great power blocs. But the differences are more numerous than the similarities.

(1) Fundamental is the difference; The three *neutral* states are economically highly developed. This enables them to be independent of foreign aid which, even in the case where no strings are attached, is bound to exercise some political influence. All of them can look back to a long historical tradition of national independence. The *neutralist* states whose memory of colonial domination is still fresh, are without exception involved in the difficult process of industrial revolution. They need and accept foreign assistance.

(2) Neutrality is an institution of international law, while Neutralism, at least up to now, knows no legal framework. Neutrality considers itself limited by legal obligations, Neutralism is, legally, as free as a bird.

(3) *Neutral* policy is absolute, *Neutralist* policy is relative. *Neutralist* policy is neutral only in the East-West conflict; not in what I might call the North-South problem, the colonial question. Here neutrality is passionately partisan. The neutral state is neutral towards *all* problems and *all* countries big or small, the *neutralist* only towards *some* nations and *some* problems. The *neutral* state carefully avoids to appear to support in special questions one power against another. The *neutralists*, more bold, do this frequently and use fully their moral weight, sometimes organizing themselves into pressure groups.

The Second World War fundamentally changed the political situation of the world. For the first time, the centre of gravity of power moved away from Europe. Wars between the continental European states became an impossibility. The choice between war and peace was no more in their weakened hands, but rested with the two great extra-European giant powers. Switzerland no longer bordered on rival nations but now, on three sides on countries which had joined the same alliance, NATO. Under these conditions, could Swiss Neutrality still have a meaning?

Neither the Swiss Government nor the Swiss people had the slightest hesitation in answering this question in the affirmative. This was certainly motivated by the fact that a country is unwilling to abandon a policy which has served it well for a long time. But two other factors were decisive:

(1) The philosophy of Swiss neutrality was, during the preceding period, not limited to Europe. Slowly, Switzerland's neutrality had stepped beyond its European limits and taken on a global character. Switzerland clearly was neutral, not only to its European states but to any state.

(2) The fact that neutrality to a certain extent is a passive attitude, kept Switzerland out of wars and permitted it to maintain free relations with all countries, creating the possibility of pursuing an active foreign policy in certain non-political sectors. Our last foreign minister, Mr. Petitpierre, has expressed that concisely by the formula: Neutrality and Solidarity. You may ask

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solidarity with what? I answer: solidarity with other people in all humanitarian and economic problems of our time.

In modern war, relations, even diplomatic ones, were severed, leaving hopelessly stranded and in a legal no-man's-land, the nationals and the economic interests of a given state. International law, in order to eliminate this danger, has developed a conception of the representation of foreign interest by a state not party to the conflict. It is not necessarily countries having a permanent neutrality which are entrusted with this representation, but very often the permanently neutral state, Switzerland, is almost the only country not involved in a conflagration.

During the last war, Switzerland was glad to represent 35 states and even now, in our funny sort of peace, we are proud to represent American interests in Cuba, French, Belgian and Turkish interests in Cairo, and French interests in Bagdad. Clearly the Swiss international services have moved further than Europe.

In international relations there is sometimes an urgent need for an intermediary, generally considered as objective and not suspected of partisan feelings.

In 1953 the Korean Truce Convention stipulated the creation of a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (still existing today) and of a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (dissolved when it had completed its work). Switzerland was asked to serve on both, and the United States in submitting the request stated "The Government of the United States fully understands the desire of the Swiss Government to maintain its policy of neutrality and impartiality. . . . The Government and the people of the United States as well as many other governments and peoples in the world have long felt that Switzerland is the country to which one can appeal for impartial services in the settling of wars or other international difficulties."

"But", you will say, "how can the affirmation of solidarity be comptable with non-membership in the United Nations?" and I am sure you are shocked by this fact. We are serious people and take commitments very seriously. The Charter of the United Nations foresees the imposition of sanctions whose execution would be in contradiction with our neutrality. This has not prevented us from joining most of the specialized agencies of the UN and to co-operate fully in the non-political-humanitarian, economic and social tasks of the Organization. We participate in the technical assistance programmes and the United Nations Children Fund, the Anti-Narcotic Commission, and the High Commissioner's Office for Refugees.

When passions run high, it is very understandable that a neutral foreign policy is hardly popular. But it is not international popularity which can influence Swiss foreign policy. Today, I have the feeling that neutrality is beginning to be better understood. We have no intention of propagating neutrality as a panacea for world ills. But it cannot be denied that it is sometimes helpful to interpose a neutral buffer between conflicting states.

When Austria in its delicate situation on the border between East and West, looked for a guide line to guarantee its independence, the Swiss type of neutrality seemed to offer the best solution. This Austrian proposal was accepted by the four Powers, a proof that neutrality of the Swiss type is regarded as a factor of political stability by statesmen on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Though each of them is individually responsible for its foreign policy and its defence Switzerland and Austria together now form, in the centre of Europe, a neutral zone between the two blocks and, thus, they contribute to the stability of international relations, which are at present so often disturbed.

At this very time an attempt is being made at the Conference on Laos in Geneva to untangle that country from power struggles by giving it a neutral status. Again East and West are in agreement on this point. However, the neutrality of Laos cannot be like that of Austria, similar to the Swiss one. Laos being underdeveloped is dependent on foreign aid. The most difficult aspect of the discussion in Geneva therefore centres on the tasks to be entrusted to an international control commission, one of whose duties will be to see to it that foreign aid, from whatever quarter it comes, is "depoliticized" so as not to infringe on the independence of Laos.

We also believe that, to quote our last foreign minister, "In our disrupted times neutrality can fulfil a useful function as long as there is no world organization capable of really securing peace and political stability."

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