



“Friends with Enemies: Neutrality and Nonalignment Then and Now” Conference Conclusions

The following conclusions are the outcome of the “Friends with Enemies: Neutrality and Nonalignment Then and Now” conference held on March 2-3, 2020 in Vienna. Over 30 experts and artists from Austria, Switzerland, Japan, Finland, India, Egypt, Iran, Belarus, Ireland, the United States, Russia, and Germany discussed the past, present, and future of neutrality and nonalignment. The conference was sponsored by the International Institute for Peace (IIP) in Austria and the Waseda Institute for Advanced Study (WIAS) in Japan. It was supported by PEN Austria and the University of Vienna. The conference was organized by Heinz Gärtner (IIP, University of Vienna, Austria) and Pascal Lottaz (Waseda University, Japan), and the art panel was organized by Mitra Shahmoradi.

Celebrating 65 Years of Austrian Neutrality

This conference aimed to commemorate sixty-five years of Austria’s neutrality by highlighting and analyzing the meaning and usage of neutrality around the world today. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the international security environment faces numerous challenges and is subject to shifting global dynamics and alliances. With the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and new ideas for security cooperation in Europe, the US-led unipolar security system of recent decades seem to be in its final days. Alliances in Europe and Asia are not as clear-cut as they used to be, and even core institutions such as NATO and the US-Japan alliance are under pressure. What does this mean for neutrals and nonaligned countries?

Following its occupation after World War II, Austria’s independence and declaration of neutrality in 1955 marked the start of a new chapter for the country. In order to prevent Austria from joining NATO, neutrality was found to be the most suitable option for both the West and the USSR, as Austria would serve as a buffer zone between the East and West as well as between Germany and Italy. Nevertheless, Austria’s neutrality was popular among its citizens at the time of its declaration as well as today. In part this popularity is due to the changing conceptualization of the country’s neutrality: from disengagement toward engagement under Prime Minister Bruno Kreisky. Austria’s neutrality was also contested in the lead up to its accession to the European Union (EU) and other international organizations. Austria has shifted toward preserving the core of its neutrality while positioning itself as an involved state in an increasingly multipolar world. Although the country’s neutrality grew out of the post-war security situation in Europe and was in effect a price for the return of its sovereignty, neutrality in Austria has been an unmitigated success story.

Drawing from the unique experience of states such as Austria, this conference aimed to provoke discussion and debate about the meaning of neutrality, the responsibility of neutrality, the potential of neutrality, the difference between neutrality and nonalignment, and the future of neutrality. The conference and the participating panelists put forward several key conclusions throughout the course of the two days, with panels focusing on the history of neutrality, the neutrals and geopolitics, the role of neutrals and nonaligned states in multilateral institutions, the values of neutrality, and art and neutrality. The general conclusions and primary themes discussed are presented below.

General Conclusions

- The meaning of neutrality has evolved both after World War II and after the Cold War, particularly in its normative purpose focused on mediation, good offices, and multilateralism as well as by the blurring of the borders between neutral and aligned states
- Neutral states have historically served three primary purposes: as barriers between competing blocs, as bridges for dialogue, and as generators of new ideas
- The “classic” European neutral states (Switzerland, Austria, Finland, and Sweden) have been particularly successful in building their reputations and capacities in areas such as mediation, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, international organizations, disarmament, arms control, human rights, and democracy
- A key prerequisite for the success of neutral states has been their small size, strength, and inner cohesion
- Neutral states adopted neutrality as a result of unique geopolitical and historical circumstances, but neutrality has since been internalized in their national identities
- Neutrality has taken on a new prominence in multilateral institutions, particularly through advocacy by neutral states themselves, and neutral states now take part in peacekeeping missions
- Many aspects of neutrality that existed across history (such as occasional neutrality or neutralization) have been forgotten and should be reconsidered as tools of foreign policy
- Neutral states and nonaligned states had very different experiences and degrees of success during the Cold War
- As Austria increased its engagement on the international level, its neutrality has been reduced to the most basic criteria: avoiding military alliances, banning foreign troops from domestic soil, and not engaging in war
- Neutrality is likely to grow in attractiveness in a more multipolar world
- Neutrality differs in its origin, content, shape, history, and geopolitical context; each neutrality is unique

Neutrality and Nonalignment in a Historical Perspective

The practice of neutrality stretches back significantly into history, but the modern conceptualization of neutrality was primarily developed in Italy and France during the 16th century in debates over balance of power systems and state interests. The first strain of thinking, represented by French political theorist Jean Bodin, viewed neutrality as a useful instrument to avoid conflict: neutral states can serve as mediators for other states at war as well as balancers to avoid the dominance of a hegemon, thereby providing a restraining force. The second strain of thinking, represented by Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli, took a more pragmatic approach to neutrality: neutrality is a tool that can safeguard the power of a state and avoid conflict when necessary to ensure the state’s existence. Thus, neutral mediating states have played a key role in the international balance of power system to shape the outcome of conflicts.



The Cold War witnessed a transformation in the meaning and usage of neutrality, exemplified by the states of Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, and Finland. These states took on significant roles as mediators and advisors to conflicts, providing platforms for dialogue and confidence-building. However, neutrality is not enough to successfully undertake this role; the states that were able to use their neutrality successfully were also small, strong, and domestically cohesive. Conversely, countries that won their independence from colonial powers also sought neutrality but were often limited in their success due to their fragility and lack of domestic cohesion. The classic European neutrals secured a niche in the international security system, built up their reputations as impartial, restrained, and pragmatic negotiators, and utilized their neutrality during the Cold War to increase their international influence.

The unique path toward neutrality followed by each of the classic European neutrals was distinct and took place amid specific geopolitical and historical circumstances. For example, Austria's neutrality developed in large part following Soviet directives. The USSR was hesitant to grant neutrality to Austria until the death of Stalin; after Moscow's original intention to neutralize a reunited Germany as well as Austria failed, Austria lost its importance in the Soviet perspective. After intensive negotiations between Vienna and Moscow, Austria was able to secure its independence with the price of declaring its neutrality. Moscow continued to suspect Austria of Western attachments, particularly during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968. While Austrian neutrality officially emerged during the Cold War, the country has a history of neutral behavior that dates back well before, and its neutrality has endured after the end of the Cold War. Austrian neutrality is thus not simply a Cold War phenomenon. Today, Austrian neutrality can serve as model for states in Eastern Europe that are caught between two competing sides. Following Austria's model, these states should promise to avoid military alliances or joining with neighbors, commit to permanent neutrality on a constitutional basis, and ground their neutrality in international law.

The Neutrals and Geopolitics

Over the course of history, neutral states have served three key roles: providing a barrier between competing blocs, serving as a bridge for dialogue, and fostering new ideas. During the Cold War, neutral and nonaligned states (Sweden, Finland, Austria, Yugoslavia) provided the main border between NATO and Warsaw Pact members, with the exception of Germany and smaller borders in Norway, the Caucasus, and Greece. This barrier helped preserve peace and balance during the Cold War, including by serving as a tripwire, as an invasion of one of the neutral states would have triggered a war. After the Cold War, early discussions about promoting neutrality in the states between Russia and the EU were unsuccessful, with many former Warsaw Pact and Soviet states joining NATO. Today, many states in Europe present complicated positions toward neutrality: Sweden and Finland have seen debates about joining NATO, Belarus has behaved as a de facto neutral (including by hosting negotiations for the war in Ukraine) while officially being aligned with Russia, Czechia and Slovakia seem minimally committed to NATO, and Ukraine seeks to join NATO, with increased support after Russia annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine in 2014. There should be further consideration of the value of neutral states as a barrier between the EU and Russia, with Moldova serving as one possible example, and neutral states such as Austria should continue to promote Track II diplomacy and NGOs in order to offer new ideas and dialogue.

The cases of Switzerland and Austria demonstrate how the concept of neutrality, arising under specific geopolitical circumstances, can be internalized by a domestic public. Swiss neutrality emerged from the

concept of sovereignty and is linked to the right to partake or abstain from waging war, but its neutrality had to be respected and acknowledged by all states to take effect. The meaning of Swiss neutrality has evolved over the country's history, as evident in the debates over Switzerland's accession to the United Nations (UN) in 2002. Switzerland's neutrality has endured, despite the starkly different geopolitical circumstances of its origin, due to nearly universal support by its population; rather than a rational political advantage, neutrality is now a part of the country's national identity. Similarly, Austria's neutrality is also a major part of its national identity, and most citizens believe all positive post-WWII developments are linked to the country's neutral status. Austria's neutrality has also shifted, as the country sought to pursue an active neutrality on the international stage to promote peace, security, disarmament, decolonization, international organizations, and peacekeeping during the Cold War. Debates about the meaning of Austria's neutrality emerged during its accession to the Council of Europe, the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 1973-74, and the EU. As a result of these entanglements, Austria's neutrality has been reduced to the hardest core meaning: avoiding alliances, not engaging in wars, and banning foreign troops from domestic soil.

After the Cold War, much less attention has been directed to neutral states and their contribution to the international system. As a result, many foreign policy tools based on neutrality have been lost, including maritime neutrality and the neutrality of waterways; territorial (or partial) neutrality; occasional neutrality; great power neutrality; and neutralization. It would be worthwhile to consider how these tools could be utilized today in the interest of promoting peace and security. However, certain aspects, such as permanent neutrality, nonalignment, non-belligerency, and the law of neutrality, have endured. Going forward, it seems that the politics of neutrality will continue to outpace the law of neutrality, and neutrality as a national security policy is likely to increase in attractiveness as the post-Cold War unipolar world comes to an end.

The Role of Neutral and Nonaligned States in Multilateral Institutions

The changing attitude toward neutrality by organizations on the international level is epitomized by the case of the UN, which at its origin sought to exclude neutral states from participation. Over time, neutrality was gradually recognized as a means of promoting peace and began to win prominence and visibility in the UN, including through the accession of neutral states to the UN and the UNSC. The UN itself also began to adopt aspects of neutrality, engaging in peacekeeping operations in member countries and providing services in conflict resolution, mediation, and advising. The UN's adoption of an International Day of Neutrality thus completed a full circle for the UN – from ostracizing neutral states toward actively promoting the concept of neutrality. Neutral states themselves have also played a key role in promoting multilateralism and multilateral institutions, as evidenced by countries such as Switzerland. In an increasingly globalized world with globalized threats, even neutral states must act through multilateral institutions to boost transnational security. Neutral countries such as Switzerland thus support organizations such as the UN, the UNSC, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, the changing global security environment will require new thinking from neutral states, including in how to better promote humanitarian activities and advance multilateral security strategies and policies.

The exact meaning of neutrality throughout this period, however, has changed significantly. The concept of neutrality has its origins in international law and dictated how neutral states had to formally behave and



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engage with other states. In recent times, however, states that are officially aligned but demonstrate neutral behaviors, such as Belarus, as well as states that are formally neutral but demonstrate aligned behaviors, such as Sweden, are being increasingly commonplace. This has given rise to the concept of “post-neutrality,” whereby the traditional borders between neutral and aligned states have been blurred. States now pursue policy of “situational neutrality,” which is reactive, political, and security-based, and “project-based neutrality,” which is long-term, targeted, and ideologically-driven.

In contrast to the debate around neutrality taking place across Europe, much less attention has been directed to nonaligned states and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). During the Cold War, nonaligned states sought to promote world peace and cooperation and bring an end to colonialism. The success of the NAM was somewhat limited, as Western powers did not recognize the influence of these states, but the NAM championed many causes, including the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa, global disarmament programs, and the independence of Namibia. The NAM also promoted the establishment of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to foster a new global economic system to aid the development of newly independent states. Since the end of the Cold War, globalization has increased the differences between NAM members, leading many to distance themselves from the movement. The NAM has struggled without the guidance of states such as China or India but still seeks to promote multilateralism as its core objective.

Neutrality, Nonalignment, and Values: From Good Offices to Engagement

The changing meaning of neutrality has not only manifested itself in the international security system but also in a more normative context. Historically, neutrality simply meant non-belligerency in war and non-alliance in peace. After the Cold War, however, the normative definition of neutrality advanced by European neutrals included support for international organizations, conflict resolution, mediation, good offices, arms control, disarmament, human rights, democracy, and peacekeeping. These priorities have not been the sole property of neutral states, with aligned countries such as Germany and Norway taking on many of these roles and thus blurring the borders between neutrality and alignment. Neutrality has been largely successful as a political and strategic policy since WWII, although its success beforehand was more limited. Critics of neutral states argue that they are free-riders in the international security system and are agnostic about great powers and dictators. In the final analysis, European neutrals are neither uniquely virtuous nor uniquely free-riding; they have made constructive contributions to global security by promoting international norms, multilateralism, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping, which provide compelling reasons for these states to maintain their neutrality and leverage their strengths as part of ad-hoc coalitions.

It is not clear, however, whether neutral states are living up to their full potential. Neutral states must provide political space to engage in conflict resolution; neutrality should serve as an instrument of peace, not an end in itself. Neutrality provides many opportunities in the area of disarmament and arms control, conflict resolution and dialogue, and support for international organizations. In all of these areas, Austria should carefully consider further entanglements in EU foreign policy and do more to utilize its neutrality: by sending more civilian or military experts to verify treaties, providing venues for dialogue, and pushing for more diplomacy in the EU. In the United States, there is a need to further consider the potential benefits of permanent neutrality in boosting peace and diplomacy. Permanent neutrality could provide a new

international security system based on trust, justice, and Kantian ideals that focuses first and foremost on human security. This policy would need to be guided by values, strength, and a willingness to take on responsibilities and solidarity through offering good offices.

Without grounding a policy of neutrality on these foundations, the very meaning of neutrality risks being abused or manipulated for other purposes; the case of Serbia is instructive. Serbia has formally adopted a policy of ‘military neutrality,’ aiming to balance between the East and the West all while continuing to engage in military exercises with its allies (more with NATO than with Russia). To understand why Serbia declared itself to be neutral, it is necessary to understand the country’s domestic political situation. Serbia’s domestic public opinion demonstrates significant ambivalence, with high levels of support for joining the EU but opposition to joining NATO. Neutrality thus provided a compromise solution while also allowing for fluctuations between pro-Russian and pro-Western rhetoric by the Serbian government, depending on the parties in power. Although the initial declaration of neutrality in 2007 was done for domestic considerations without serious commitments to win international recognition, it was later leveraged during the Ukrainian crisis. In order to avoid angering its Russian or US/EU allies, Serbia used its neutrality to avoid taking a position on the annexation of Crimea: recognizing Crimea would undermine its claims to Kosovo, while refusing to recognize it would undermine Russia’s support for Serbia. Thus, neutrality without ethical or legal foundations risks being manipulated simply for domestic gains.

Neutrality and Art —The Art of Independence

Alongside the changing geopolitical situation over the last century, the field of arts and culture has also evolved to reflect the shift from a bipolar world to a multipolar one. During the Cold War, artists and critics tended to position themselves along bipolar lines, siding with either the Western bloc or the Eastern bloc, with neutral states forming a space in between. Neutral countries such as Austria played a unique role during this period – oftentimes engaging with artists from the Eastern bloc – either to sponsor their art or to provide a refuge for political or cultural dissidents from countries such as Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Since the end of the Cold War, societies are increasingly prone to different cleavages along numerous lines. As a result, arts and culture have moved from divisions along political lines toward divisions along cultural lines, whereby citizens are forced to determine their position on a wide variety of issues rather than the single East/West divide. Art has also turned more toward global issues, such as increasing inequality and the division between dominant and oppressed groups. Concurrently, it has become harder to create purely neutral art in a multipolar world. Nevertheless, artists still maintain an important position in framing debates and raising attention for certain issues. Most importantly, democratic values, which are increasingly challenged by populist and nationalist leaders around the world, must be preserved to allow for the continued freedom of art.

My Name

By Mitra Shahmoradi

What is your name?

My name is Foreigner!

What kind of name is that?



It is an easy name!
In which language?
In German

But, I don't recognize that as a name
Oh yes, it is a modern name, like
Alien, Migrant, Immigrant, Stranger, Muslim, the Other One

My name is Foreigner
Do you like it?

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