

Chapter 9

Neutrality: Engaged, Credible, and Useful

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ABSTRACT

The concept of neutrality has evolved over time, with various definitions emerging since the 19th century. Initially, neutrality was associated with non-participation in foreign wars and military conflicts. However, after the onset of the Cold War, the focus shifted towards non-participation in military alliances. In the context of “engaged neutrality,” neutral states should also take principled positions. Neutrality does not imply value-neutrality, and in times of conflict, neutral states must condemn serious human rights violations, genocide, and warfare. However, neutral states are not compelled to adopt the stances of great powers or alliances. Unlike alliances, they do not pose a threat to major powers. Engaged neutrality, therefore, stands in contrast to mere detachment. It signifies active involvement whenever feasible and abstention when necessary. This approach can constitute a valuable contribution to mediation and de-escalation during periods of escalating international tensions.

INTRODUCTION: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF NEUTRALITY

What does neutrality actually mean? There are many definitions for them that have evolved since the 19th century. This article provides eighteen different definitions of neutrality that have developed over history. The demise of neutrality has been much exaggerated. Although some neutral states disappear in some historical periods, this paper demonstrates that new types emerge. Neutrality was always a response to both conflict and polarization. This paper also discusses the historical cases when neutral states emerged and have been created.

This article shows that the demise of neutrality has been much exaggerated. Principled stances of neutrality, always and everywhere, are reactions to conflict and polarization. As long as those conditions exist, so, too, will neutrals. One point has been lost in the debate. Historical examples are bipolarity during East-West Conflict and Cold War, unipolarity after the end of the Cold War

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Neutrality

Great Power competition or multipolarity between US, China, Russia, multipolarity before World War I. The new double polarizations between US and China on the one hand and West-Europe and Russia on the other show the ongoing relevance of neutrality.

The concept of neutrality has evolved over time, with various definitions emerging since the 19th century. Initially, neutrality was associated with non-participation in foreign wars and military conflicts. However, after the onset of the Cold War, the focus shifted towards non-participation in military alliances. (see Gärtner, 2023a) Neutrality, while not a prerequisite for peace, has historically served as a means to avoid involvement in wars triggered by military alliances. This includes refraining from making promises to aid other states in times of external threats or attacks. Consequently, neutral states cannot join alliances like NATO, which require explicit obligations to provide assistance. Neutrality encompasses three key aspects: non-participation in military alliances, absence of foreign troops on neutralized territory, and refraining from involvement in foreign wars.

Switzerland (1815) and Belgium (1839) are well-known examples of neutral states, with several Great Powers recognizing their neutrality and territorial integrity. The legal definition of neutrality was further established through the Hague Peace Conferences in the early 20th century (1899,1907), which codified customary neutrality practices. It's important to note that neutrality does not exclude defensive security arrangements and guarantees. While Switzerland relied solely on its own defense, Belgium had "hard" security guarantees. Striking a double-agreement in 1870, the British government signed two treaties, one with France, promising military support to Paris (and Brussels) should Belgium be invaded by Prussia, and in turn, with Prussia, promising aide to Berlin (and Brussels), in the case of a French breach of Belgian neutrality. This two-way security agreement played a crucial role in maintaining Belgium's territorial integrity during the Franco-Prussian war and influenced Britain's entry into the First World War. (Gärtner and Lottaz, 2023)

Neutrality also could have had a significant impact on international relations, as demonstrated by King Edward VII's advice to Austria-Hungary 1907 to adopt neutrality and prevent the outbreak of World War I. (Abbenhuis, 2014, p.172) If Austria had accepted this offer, World War I most likely would not have happened. It is highly improbable that Germany had gone to war against Russia without Austria's backing.

Although classic neutrality declined during the Second World War and the establishment of global collective security under the UN, new forms of neutral behavior emerged during the Cold War. Decolonized states in Asia and Africa distanced themselves from the bloc mentality through the Nonaligned Movement, while countries like Finland and Austria declared their neutrality under the consent of the military blocks. While neutrality was proposed but ultimately abandoned by Japan and Germany, they opted for tight military integrations instead.

Despite Berlin's initial negative reaction to the Stalin note of 1952, which proposed an alliance-free Germany, suggestions for a neutral Central Europe, including Germany, persisted for many years (see Gärtner, 2018). George F. Kennan, in 1956–57, advocated for a neutral Central Europe as the only viable way to reunify Germany and referred to Central Europe as the "in-between zone." Additional proposals came from US Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and William F. Knowland, who initiated a bipartisan effort during the same years to establish a European buffer zone, coinciding with the withdrawal of US and Soviet troops from Germany and the Warsaw Pact countries. Over time, this buffer zone could have integrated with the existing neutral states of Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Similar ideas were put forth by Hugh Gaitskell, the chairman of the British Labour Party. Unfortunately, the plans were thwarted by the Cold War's conclusion. In a classified meeting in 1958, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles asserted that the US and the Soviet Union concurred that a unified, neutral Germany

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