THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEUTRALITY

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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.

Before going any further, let me clarify 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.

The language of our times has the sorry tendency to lose its precision and to confuse the meaning of words. It uses indiscriminately neutrality and neutralism, thus throwing two different concepts into the same pot. At

the start it therefore appears useful to draw a distinction between these two political phenomena which, in any case, are difficult to understand. Neutrality knows no twins. Austrian and Swedish neutrality have a different historical origin and though they have much in common, are in many respects different from the Swiss kind, which, as being the oldest of the neutral breed, I shall mainly use in this comparison.

Neutrality and Neutralism have surely in common that states which practice either principle are firmly convinced that they follow a foreign policy best suited to their possiblilities. Nobody who is inspired by democratic concepts 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 simularities.

1. -- Fundamental is this 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. -- Swiss Neutrality is perpetual neutrality, embodied in the Constitution. It is a firm, unchangeable international promise. Every foreign state can clearly foresee what the Neutral State will do in the future: Independent of power-changes, the Neutral State will remain neutral. Neutralism on the contrary can change its position, being in a state of flux. Flexibility is its outstanding characteristic.

4. -- 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 neutralism is passionately partisan. The neutral state is neutral towards all conflicts of foreign nations and all countries, big or small, the neutralist only towards some nations and some problems. The neutral state carefully avoids appearing 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.

5. -- The neutral state considers its frontiers as permanent and has renounced all expansion (Switzerland bluntly rejected after World War I the wish of the small Austrian province of Vorarlberg to be allowed to join the

Confederation). Neutralism per se does not exclude an expansionist policy. Some neutralist countries, having only recently acquired independence, claim territory at present belonging to other nations.

Now let us examine the development of the Swiss philosophy of neutrality. It was a slow and sometimes painful growth. I am sorry to say that Swiss history knows a period of the most boisterous imperialism. The Swiss cantons or states had successfully defended their medieval rights against the feudalism of the period. In so doing they had developed a rather original infantry tactic, which proved superior to the feudal cavalry of the times. Passing to the offensive they invaded the plains of Italy and enlarged their territories in the West. After an unbroken chain of victories they met their first resounding defeat in Italy in the 16th century. History proves that a nation rarely learns from a lost battle. The Swiss did. They realized that the very loose Confederation of town and country states offered no suitable basis for an aggressive policy. Then and there they renounced any idea of conquest, which was the beginning of Swiss neutrality. Economically that created a difficulty. Switzerland with its barren and mountainous soil needed exports to pay for its imports. Not yet industrialized, the only available export was soldiers. The Swiss federate states lent Swiss regiments to the European princes. There is hardly a battlefield in Europe

where Swiss mercenaries haven't shed their blood. Although the Swiss regiments in foreign service considerably influenced the balance of power in Europe, and therefore exercised anything but a neutral influence, the Swiss Confederation, as such, remained outside the power struggle. Military foreign service prevented the Swiss from becoming effeminate in a country which no longer participated in wars. The military prestige of the Swiss was such that none of their powerful neighbors dared to attack them. Only the French Revolution did not respect this tradition and invaded Switzerland, which became a battlefield during the Napoleonic Wars. Even a Russian army under Suvaroff crossed the Gotthard into Switzerland and joined in the melée. At the Congress of Vienna the powers recognized Swiss neutrality as being in the interest of Europe. Switzerland again became the protector of the Alpine crossroads of Europe, maintaining an army strong enough not to lead any potential aggressor into temptation.

But neutrality for Switzerland also constituted an internal political necessity. Composed of different religions, different languages and ethnic groups, any participation in a European war would have led to disintegration of the different elements which learned through tolerance and mutual respect to grow into a national unity.

Switzerland, mobilizing its citizen army, survived two world wars even though in the Second World War it was a defiant island, for years completely surrounded by the Axis powers.

The Second World War fundamentally changed the political situation of the world. For the first time, the center 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. Switzerland was careful to avoid becoming involved in any conflicts, even though they took place on other continents, in order not to jeopardize its good relations with all countries. Already the Council of the League of Nations had in 1920 recognized: "Switzerland is in a unique situation motivated by a tradition of several centuries which has been explicitly incorporated in international low . . . and the permanent neutrality of Switzerland and the guarantee of its inviolability are

justified by the interests of world peace." Slowly, Switzerland's neutrality had stepped beyond its European limits and taken on a global character. Switzerland clearly was neutral, not only to European states but to any state.

2. Every foreign policy is first of all egotistical but certain countries -- and here I think very much of the United States -- also try to combine this aspect with a realistic idealism. 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 solidarity with what? I answer: Solidarity with other people in all humanitarian and economic problems of our time.

The political aspects of neutrality are not just pious generalities but can be stated very concretely. A Swiss, badly shaken emotionally by the misery of the wounded on an Italian battlefield of the last century, conceived the idea of the International Red Cross. A war should have its limitations. Even in war humanitarian duties towards the prisoners of war and the wounded, independent of on whose side they fought, should be carried out. Totalitarian war, which is an inglorious invention

of our century, made the accomplishment of these duties still more essential. All the functions of the International Red Cross, effected by its International Committee, can only be carried out from a country still at peace. Without the assistance of a neutral Switzerland, it is difficult to conceive of the accomplishment of International Red Cross tasks of whose benefits so many hundred thousands of prisoners of the last war were witness.

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 the 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, French interests in Bagdad, Damaskus and Tunis and Togolese interests in Nigeria. Clearly the Swiss international services have moved beyond Europe.

In international relations there is sometimes an urgent need for an intermediary, generally considered as objective and not suspected of partisan feelings. Before the Second World War, Switzerland was entrusted with such tasks in Europe. In the postwar period, in recognition of the global character of its neutrality, she was asked to perform the duties of an intermediary in extra-European countries. I shall mention only two:

In 1953 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." Thus it came about that Switzerland had to play its role of neutral intermediary in the Far East. The U.S. Note recognized explicitly the international character of Swiss neutrality, and the global usefulness of a neutral intermediary.

Later, in the Algerian conflict, Switzerland lent its good offices to help arrange the first conference between France and the provisional government of Algeria.

But, you will say, how can the affirmation of solidarity be compatible 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 cooperating fully in the non-political, humanitarian, economic and social tasks of the Organization. We participate in the technical assistance programs and the United Nations Children's Fund, the Anti-Narcotic Commission, and the High Commissioner's Office for Refugees. The General Assembly of the UN, at the height of the Hungarian crisis, thought it useful to elect a Swiss as High Commissioner for Refugees. It is sometimes helpful to have as a member of the international community a country which was not obliged to take sides in the sometimes heated deliberations of the assembly of nations. To illustrate this, allow me to relate a personal memory. It was at the end of 1956, when in order to bring the hostilities which had erupted around the Suez question to an end, the General Assembly decided to send a UN Emergency Force -- the first in history -- to the

Egyptian-Israeli front. The force was already assembled in southern Italy, but Egypt had turned down the landing permits for the aircraft of several nations. At two o'clock in the morning, Dag Hammarskjöld rang me up -- I was then Swiss Observer to the United Nations -- to ask whether SWISSAIR would not be ready to undertake the task, as Egypt would raise no objections against its use. I immediately telephoned my foreign minister and two hours later the Swiss Government agreed to the use of SWISSAIR. The costs of the operation were paid in full by the Swiss Government itself. The first elements of the UNEF were landed by planes of a non-member nation.

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 defense, Switzerland and Austria together now form, in the center of Europe, a neutral zone between the two blocs. 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 that of the Swiss. Laos, being underdeveloped, is dependent on foreign aid. The most difficult aspect of the discussions in Geneva therefore centers 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 fulfill a useful function as long as there is no world organization capable of really securing peace and political stability."

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