

Neutrality and its Relevance for the European Security in XXI Century

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Abstract – This work ponders upon relevance of the neutrality for the European security in XXI century. It covers basic rights and duties provided by this status, and it examines some instances of its application in history. Political, economic and strategic transformations are studied as main factors that impact on neutrality.

Key words – neutrality, European security, security transformation, NATO, international system, threats.

I. Introduction

Neutrality is a long lasting concept for the European political life that has been tested over the last two centuries and now is bluntly questioned as XXI century unfolds. The actuality of this research is stipulated by the fact that neutral states face the dilemma of relevance of such policy in terms of providing and ensuring security in a current political reality. In addition, some states that arose from the ashes of the Soviet Union, adopted neutrality as a principle of their foreign policy, thus it is timely to research this topic and establish the prospects of neutrality to be an effective tool for the provision of the security in XXI century.

II. Fundamentals of the concept

Switzerland was the first neutral state and represents classic model of neutrality. A successful application of such policy by Switzerland during wars earned wide respect as it saved the country from catastrophic damage other non-neutral European states have faced. Indeed, in the course of history the policy of neutrality was a useful tool in the provision of the security for some European states as it allowed them to opt out from involvement into conflicts. However, the evolution of international system and global transformations have altered the political, economic and strategic environments, thus it is of particular importance to engage in analytical exercise and establish if neutrality remains relevant after such changes. The objective of this work is to establish if there is a future for the neutrality in the European security in XXI century. It is expected that neutrality is in decline due to the deeply rooted changes that basically have changed the context of international relations.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines the term neutrality as follows “the legal status arising from the abstention of a state from all participation in a war between other states, the maintenance of an attitude of impartiality toward the belligerents, and the recognition by the belligerents of this abstention and impartiality” [1]. The cornerstone documents that define rights and duties of neutral states are Declaration of Paris of 1856, V (neutrality in land

war) [2] and XIII (neutrality in maritime war) [3] Hague Conventions of 1907.

According to the international law neutral states were obliged to refrain from participation in war, nor facilitation activities by both direct and indirect actions were allowed. In return these states were promised the immunity right for their territory from becoming part of conflict. However, article 5 of V and 25 of XIII Hague Conventions defined as a direct duty of neutral states to protect their status from violation on their own territory. Eventually, the neutrality status obliged states with such status to maintain strong and sound capability to ensure respect of their status on their own territory. In fact, neutrality was largely a great manifestation of peaceful intentions in conduct of international relations.

III. Application and future of neutrality

Neutrality has faced both respect and violation from conflicting parties. During the World War II Germany has occupied Belgium, Luxemburg, Holland, Norway and Denmark regardless of their neutral status. However, Switzerland was treated with due respect to its status. Among the factors that contributed to this was the general mobilization of army, consisting of 450 thousands men, to withstand possible threat from Germany, that made the price of invasion too high of a cost vis-a-vis potential gain. In addition, it is believed that strong banking sector of Switzerland played a role in such turn of events as stability in Switzerland ensured security of savings of conflicting parties. As a result, we can constitute that the effectiveness of neutrality rests on the respect of such status by conflicting parties, especially if they happen to be superior in power.

During the World War II other instances of violation of the neutral status took place. States that could not ensure a protection and due respect of their status resorted to certain concessions that preserved its sovereignty and prevented occupation. Sweden has violated its status by providing support to Finland during Winter War 1939-40 as well as allowed Germany to use its territory and infrastructure to transport military goods and personnel. Trade relations between Germany and Sweden are also a subject for critic in respect to neutral status, since iron ore and bearings are goods that were used for military purposes. Such desperate deviations from neutrality were made in attempt to protect sovereignty of the state that was under direct threat otherwise. Prospect of becoming subject of occupation due to limitations in forces that were supposed to ensure neutrality has caused a failure to respect this status by the state that has initially embraced it. Eventually, we have to conclude that the status of neutrality is credible only in case of it being backed up by respective force that would be able to enforce it or other means that would make the cost of invasion higher than potential gain.

After the end of the Cold War and bi-polar confrontation a massive geopolitical shift that has changed the strategic environment in Europe has taken place. International system has transformed to the mono-

polar model with sole pole being western democratic state that shares liberal-democratic values and respect for human rights. These developments invited the neutral European states to question their status. Later new wave of NATO expansion has also contributed to the dilemma of relevance of neutrality in XXI century. NATO has expanded Eastwards becoming a club of democratic states and eventually becoming alliance of democratic values. Standards of NATO basically became the standards for the entire European security space. Certainly states are free to choose their own standard if they wish but, in order to ensure interoperability and cooperation, they massively opt to embrace NATO standards. Sweden is one of the prominent examples of states that favor cooperation and makes full use of opportunities for further cooperation with the Alliance.

Another critical factor that has changed the international environment is a globalization. Technological development, as well as progress in the transportation and communication sectors, has ensured interdependence of states in the economic field. Unprecedented economic gain from international trade has also some negative implications for the security of the states. The borders that are washed away by globalization make societies more vulnerable to international threats, thus pose a new challenges for the states.

Initially neutrality was designed with the aim to reinforce security of the state from threats that at the time were largely emanating from other states, whether it is an aggression or prospect of being involved in the conflict. However, nowadays the threats are much more complicated: terrorism, illegal migration flows, organized crime, food and resource shortage, climate degradation, cybercrime and others. Even the most advanced and developed states with the most vast resources allocated for their security needs, including the sole superpower, admit that they are unable to cope with these challenges by themselves and need to reinforce the efforts by means of cooperation. In deed, the challenges posed by new reality need comprehensive approach for their solution, thus the neutrality is not deemed to be adequate in response to new threats. It is just not reasonable to remain neutral toward terrorism and nearly impossible to allocate adequate resources to address these problems independently.

Another important role for the neutrality was to establish peaceful principle in the conduct of international relations and to reinforce the security of the state that embraces such principle. In fact, it was a monumental development during the time neutrality was introduced, as war was largely regarded as a norm in settling the disputes. However, later peaceful principle of conduct in international relations was introduced by League of Nations in 1919, and consequently by the United Nations in 1945. The core principle of peaceful conduct in international relations is enshrined in our current international system and backed by the UN that basically comprises nearly all states in the World.

Eventually it is deemed that the status of neutrality as effective norm of international relations is in decline due to the global transformations that took place. Thus, broader cooperation is deemed to be an efficient way to ensure security. In addition, cooperation is a more resource conscientious comparing to self-dependent provision of security. For example, all formerly "failed" neutral states of Europe now are members of NATO. On the other hand, Switzerland allocates 6 percent of its heavy GDP for security and maintains its 150 thousand army equal to the forces of Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Finland and Norway combined [4]. In XXI century, when geopolitics is being replaced by geoeconomics, it is believed that efficiency will gain the upper hand.

Conclusion

Neutrality being a great tradition and symbolic attribute of international relations is believed to be in its decline. Recognition of such decline could be demonstrated by the facts of flexibility that neutral states display. Switzerland, the most conservative in its neutrality has joined the UN in 2002 despite the fact that its Charter indirectly limits its neutrality. Sweden has dropped its neutrality claim and replaced it with the solidarity clause commitment with the EU State Members that resembles Article 5 of NATO. Austria has stated that it would repudiate its neutrality given that within the EU security structure is created. Finland is also seeing the EU as an instrument to provide its security. All of the neutral European states have extensive and expanding cooperation with NATO. The security in Europe is defined by being indivisible and could be more effectively and efficiently achieved by broader cooperation. Nevertheless, the neutrality has not exhausted itself completely. It does play an important role in conflict resolution. Conflicting parties perceive neutral states unbiased, thus providing space for such states to play a mediating role.

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