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# The Swiss Observer

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## FOUNDATIONS OF SWISS FOREIGN POLICY

By Professor RUDOLF L. BINDSCHEDLER

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### Conditions, General Political Situation and their Repercussions on a Small State

1) A study of Swiss foreign policy best starts from the basic character of the society of States. This society is composed of sovereign States. From the juridical point of view this means the decentralisation of the law of nations, which is generally devoid of special organs functioning by division of work. Legislative, jurisdictional and executive powers are to a great extent not separate; they are exercised by the respective partners, i.e. by the individual States, alone or jointly. Self-help is the guiding principle. Thus, in the last analysis, *power* is the decisive factor in international relations, whereby the fact that the State in its sovereign authority holds the monopoly of power is of particular importance. Every kind of foreign policy, therefore, is power policy. This does not mean that force is necessarily always resorted to. Potential power, however, operates throughout. It is based on political, military, economic and spiritual foundations which are all closely interrelated. But the specific phenomenon lies in power itself which, in the background, is ever present. "*L'ambassadeur et le soldat vivent et symbolisent les relations internationales qui, en tant qu'interétatique, se ramènent à la diplomatie et à la guerre. Les relations interétatiques présentent un trait original qui les distingue de toutes les autres relations sociales: elles se déroulent à l'ombre de la guerre ou, pour employer une expression plus rigoureuse, les relations entre Etats comportent, par essence, l'alternative de la guerre et de la paix.*"<sup>1)</sup> The society of States is an anarchic society.

Notwithstanding their proclaimed aims and ambitions, no fundamental change has been brought about either by the numerous international organisations or by the United Nations.

Thus, even Swiss foreign policy rests in the last resort on power, a fact which is often overlooked. Swiss military policy is part of Swiss foreign policy.

The aim of foreign policy is to increase, to maintain and — under certain circumstances — to surrender power (union with another State), whereby power is either an end in itself, or an expedient, or both. In most cases it represents a means for territorial expansion or for preservation of territory.

Without doubt the aim of Swiss foreign policy consists in the preservation of freedom, of the independence of the country and of its territory. A certain loss of liberty

of action may have to be accepted, but only in so far as it leads to greater freedom on a different level. Thus, increased security of the country from outside is to be aimed at by consolidating and expanding international law and the organisation of the society of States.

2) The foreign policy of each State is based on factors which are more or less unchangeable. They have to be taken into account if foreign policy is to be realistic and successful.

In the first place, the general political trend of the day has to be considered. At present it is characterised by the conflict between Western civilisation and communist pseudo-religion, as embodied in two Great Super Powers with their allies and satellites; a conflict which is also of the nature of a civil war as its front-line goes through all nations. In addition, there is the tension — resulting from the liberation of the former colonies — between the underdeveloped revolutionary peoples and the old ruling powers. Finally, a number of local conflicts sow dissension between certain nations. These three categories of hostile camps are globally connected with mutual effect and reaction. There is a general tendency to concentrate power within a small number of Great Powers. The technical development of weapons, the progress of modern large-scale industry, and scientific research with its tremendous expenditure call for concentration and for large States. The threat of total war is always close, not only because of the development of war technique (nuclear arms, missiles), but also because conflicts of power have become ideological issues and the extinction or complete surrender of the enemy implies at the same time the triumph over Evil. As the British General Fuller justly said: "*The holier the cause the more devilish the end.*"<sup>2)</sup> In comparison to the nineteenth century irrational factors have come to the forefront in politics, whereas the concept of law has lost ground and is being pushed back.

A small State can draw the following conclusions from these facts:

The tendency of concentrating military power within a small number of large States is a dangerous one because it reduces the small State's capacity for defence. The same applies to the trend for large spheres of interest and the impossibility of following up technical, scientific and industrial developments on one's own.

The deep-rooted political tensions with their possible repercussions are a direct danger to the small State. In the political interplay of forces, the world has become a

unit and one can rightly speak of the indivisibility of war and peace. The global connexion does not exclude local conflicts, but there is a direct interest in a general appeasement.

As opposed to this, there is the old experience that too great a unity among the Powers will have unpleasant results for the small countries. The Holy Alliance, after 1815, with its attempts at internal intervention, and the unity of victors after 1945 who had manoeuvred us into a certain isolation and imposed upon us the agreement of Washington, belong to the most unpleasant periods of our history. Thus, the small State has a certain interest in conflicting trends in world politics. The somewhat amplified role played by the weak neutralist States thrives on existing tensions.

The small State has no influence on these realities. It has to put up with them.

One's own concrete position also has to be taken into consideration. The fact of its being a small State is decisive for Switzerland. The given factors are well known: a small territory and therefore limited space with all the ensuing military consequences, no raw materials and an insufficient food supply which means dependence on export trade, no direct access to the sea, a population which is rather too big in relation to the territory and too small in comparison with other countries. With some reservations, the character of the population may be described as hard-working, soberminded and persevering, but not free from illusions and occasional over-estimation. All in all this is a very minor power potential which cannot bring about an effective influence on world politics. There exists, however, strong inner cohesion; moreover, military efforts on a more than average scale are being made — two factors which are at the root of a remarkable power of resistance against outside pressure.

But Switzerland also belongs to Western civilisation and adheres to the Western concept of life, and, above all, Switzerland is situated in the centre of Europe.

3) These data are in accordance with the politico-juridical expedient of Switzerland's foreign policy: its permanent neutrality, grown out of long historical experience. We may presume that the character, the contents and the consequences of Swiss neutrality are known.<sup>3)</sup>

Ever since Federal Councillor Petitpierre made his speech before the Council of States (Ständerat) on 7th October 1947, and principle of solidarity has been set beside the concept of neutrality. Both these principles aim at entertaining well-ordered relations with all nations, at maintaining a sufficient military preparedness, at co-operating for the maintenance of peace and for the establishment and strengthening of the authority of law.

However, there might be other conceivable alternatives. One of them would consist in isolation, i.e. in an extensive reduction of the international obligations of our country, which would then content itself with a minimum of relations with other States. Yet, such a radical change would be impossible in the world of today, where a small country is much more directly involved in world politics than only a hundred and fifty years ago.

Another solution would be to enter permanent alliances or to adhere to a union of States. An adaptable policy of alliances would also come into consideration as it would permit — depending on political developments and on existing threats — to change allies. The small

Italian States of the Renaissance period followed such a policy. These alternatives, however, ought to be considered under the aspect of neutrality as they would entail abandoning neutrality. *(To be continued.)*

- 1) Raymond AKRON: Paix et guerre entre les nations, Paris 1962, p. 18.
- 2) The Second World War, London 1948, S. VII.
- 3) See BINDSCHIEDLER: Die Neutralität im modernen Völkerrecht, Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht, Volume 17, No. 1 (1956), p. 1-37, as well as the official definition of neutrality as decreed by the Federal Authorities, "Verwaltungsentscheide der Bundesbehörden," 24 (1954), p. 9-13. With regard to aspects of military policy, see: Botschaft des Bundesrates betreffend die Organisation des Heeres (Truppenordnung), of 30th June, 1960, p. 2-10.

*("Schweizer Monatshefte" April 1963.  
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## SWISS NEUTRALITY IS NO OBSTACLE TO INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

When the debate preceding the drawing up of the San Francisco Charter seemed to suggest that neutrality and membership of the United Nations were incompatible, Switzerland opted for neutrality.

This does not debar her, however, from joining in the activities of several of its specialised organisations: the International Labour Organisation with its headquarters in Geneva, the World Health Organisation, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). The European headquarters of the United Nations is established in Geneva, where a number of international conferences are held. The Universal Postal Union, the International Telegraph Union, the Central Office for International Transport by Railway, and the International Union for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works also have their head offices in Switzerland. In the scientific field, this country collaborates in the work of the European Centre of Nuclear Research (CERN), whose laboratories are on Genevan soil; the International Atomic Agency and the European Organisation for Space Research. The Swiss universities, particularly the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, attract a large number of foreign students, who account for almost 8,000 out of a total of 24,000. A growing number of foreign firms are opening research laboratories in Switzerland. Switzerland became a member of the European Payments Union and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation at their inception and is a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which has succeeded the latter. It plays an active part in the meetings of GATT (General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade) whose object is to liberalise trade. Although it is not a member, the Swiss Confederation co-operates with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The International Bank of Settlements has its headquarters in Basle. Finally, although Switzerland is not a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), it is a member of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA). And then there are innumerable economic, scientific, and cultural undertakings, both public and private, which are members of hundreds of international organisations. It will also be recalled that the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is made up entirely of Swiss, is permanently engaged in various activities and carries on its good works in every part of the world through representatives who are all Swiss by nationality. In short, the network of Switzerland's international relations is one of the most extensive there is, and its interchange of ideas with the rest of the world — in spite of, or perhaps because of, its neutrality — is at least as brisk and lively as that of any other country.

[S.N.T.O.]