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FOUNDATIONS OF SWISS FOREIGN POLICY

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(Continuation)

Neutrality

4) Today, an observer of Swiss foreign policy will have to answer above all the following questions:

- a. Is the maintenance of independence by our own means and without an association with other groups of States still possible?
- b. What are our relations to European unification? The prevailing question is: universalism or regionalism?
- c. Relations with the United Nations. Shall accession be taken into consideration?
- d. Closer collaboration with other neutral or neutralist States?
- e. Aid to underdeveloped countries.

In the following considerations, the daily problems of a more routine character will not be taken into account. Frontier settlements, regulation of neighbouring relations, protection of Swiss citizens and of their property abroad, regulation of trade and traffic admittedly also pertain to foreign policy. Important as they are, they do not constitute the decisive problems.

The answer to these fundamental questions is closely connected with the problem of neutrality. The abandoning of neutrality would give Swiss foreign policy more freedom of action. Alien circles have their doubts about the value and justification of neutrality and understanding for this policy is not always forthcoming. Thus, there are times when one can no longer shirk taking position in the face of these various arguments. Neutrality is no dogma and no taboo, but an expedient of foreign policy. A question of State policy is at stake, not a question of sentiment.

5) Whether or not the principle of *neutrality* should be maintained is determined by its practicability and depends on what could be got in return for it in the case of a change in foreign policy.

As the conditions which have led to the concept of neutrality and constitute its very basis to some extent no longer prevail nowadays or have been weakened, we have a case against neutrality. In this connexion we have to consider the unyielding position of the opposing camps in the East-West conflict, the situation in the military field, the crisis of international law — and especially of the law of neutrality —, total war with the uncontrollable effects of modern weapons and the inclusion of economy in warfare, the bringing into discredit of neutrality by neutralism and the turning of front-lines into ideological battlefields which no longer mark rival camps of power policy but have become front-lines of "international civil war". Under these circumstances the vital question is whether a policy of neutrality will be practicable in the long run. Moreover, ethical considerations request a clear-cut attitude. Self-preservation might suggest an association with States whose interests run parallel and who are founded on the same values. Such an alliance would also make a rationalisation of military defence possible.

But these considerations are not conclusive. A number of reasons speak for the retention of the principle of, neutrality for Switzerland:

a. To anticipate the ethical argument, it must be stressed that resistance to an ideology which threatens the very basis of our concept of life is in the first place a matter for each individual State and the battle has to be fought

on the domestic front above all. Under the present political circumstances, conquest from inside and subversion in its widest sense open up more favourable perspectives than war. In this context the problem of neutrality remains in the background. As there is no spiritual or moral neutrality, the neutral State can accomplish its tasks just as well, under the condition that it does not become a political and military vacuum. The armed neutrality of Switzerland which must not be judged isolated, but seen against the background of the general balance of power, fulfils this condition. Besides, associated with another camp would hardly strengthen the latter.

When conflicts of a national character or an issue of power policy are at stake, right and wrong are usually to be found on both sides. The clear-cut situation of 1939 was an exception. Where and what was "right" during the Middle East crisis of 1956?

b. Switzerland would hardly be the only victim of armed aggression, which could only occur in connexion with a general conflict also involving other States. The political set-up of the moment would then be of decisive importance, more so than previously arranged pacts.

c. The same reflection speaks against a policy of alliances. Alliances between small nations and great powers are in general rather dangerous for the former. The small State becomes dependent on the big one and often gives more to an alliance than it receives. Experience shows that the interests of small States are frequently sacrificed by the great powers whenever their own interests are at stake. What Machiavelli said about offensive alliances holds good also for defence: "It is to be noted that a prince must never combine with a mightier one in order to attack a third, except in a case of emergency. For if he is victorious, you are in his power: this, however, is to be avoided above all."⁴⁾ Similarly, this can also be said of international organizations, especially regional ones, which are dominated by certain powers. Even unions of an economic nature entail this risk.

d. Blocs do not last forever, constellations and alliances can change, even suddenly and unexpectedly. Recent history abounds in examples. To quote Machiavelli once more: "No State should ever firmly count on anything but keep in mind the uncertainty of all things. For the world is made in such a way that by escaping one complication, one invariably gets involved with another. Wisdom consists in choosing the smallest of them."⁵⁾ Rival ideologies do not exclude such sudden changes either, quite apart from the fact that they can lose their virulence in the course of time. These slow or sudden changes in the political constellation are beyond the influence of a small country. It can only place the permanence of its own foreign policy in opposition to it and thus create at least one factor of stability and security.

e. The principle of collective security has proved unfeasible to this day because it does not correspond to the realities of the political system.⁶⁾

f. It may rather be assumed that an atomic world war becomes less probable. Therefore, the importance of classical warfare is on the increase. The consequences for Switzerland lie in a reappraisal of her army and in a greater prospect of coping successfully with

a prospective war. From the point of view of military policy we are therefore once more in a position to maintain a policy of neutrality. Moreover, the military potential of a State never operates in isolation but in conjunction with the political constellation. Relative, not absolute strength, the "force de dissuasion" is decisive. In consequence, should it come to fighting, gain of time would win half the battle.⁷⁾

g. Neutrality, and above all the Swiss version, enjoys a much greater esteem today than in 1945. Since the foundation of the United Nations, many events have contributed to a greater consciousness of the utility of neutral States. The institution of neutrality has gained strength within the community of Nations.

If neutralism discredits genuine neutrality on the one hand, it contributes on the other to the spread of the idea of neutrality and increases in other respects the political freedom of movement. The rigid system of States is thus loosened.

h. The geographical position of Switzerland and her characteristics of a small State — which are at the root of her neutrality — have not changed.

i. In spite of everything, Switzerland has a chance of not becoming involved in a future war. It is also conceivable that hostilities may take place outside Europe.

k. Finally, permanent neutrality — above all the Swiss version — also affects favourably other States. This thought will be developed further on.

These reflections make the drawbacks of neutrality recede. The question of the practicability of a

policy of neutrality has to be answered in the affirmative also in the present situation. If neutrality were abandoned, nothing equivalent could replace it. Only a fundamental change of the present society of nations could bring about an altogether different situation. However, a supranational world organization, a World State, or even a European Confederation of States are still far away. Thus, the interest of the State would recommend the continued application of the principle of neutrality.

(To be continued.)

4) The Prince, chapter 21.

5) Op. cit., chapter 21.

6) See BINDSCHEDLER, Grundfragen der kollektiven Sicherheit, Festgabe Wehberg, 1956, p. 67-88.

7) Arthur KOESTLER, in The Trail of the Dinosaur, expresses this fundamental fact most tersely, 1955, p. 240, 242.

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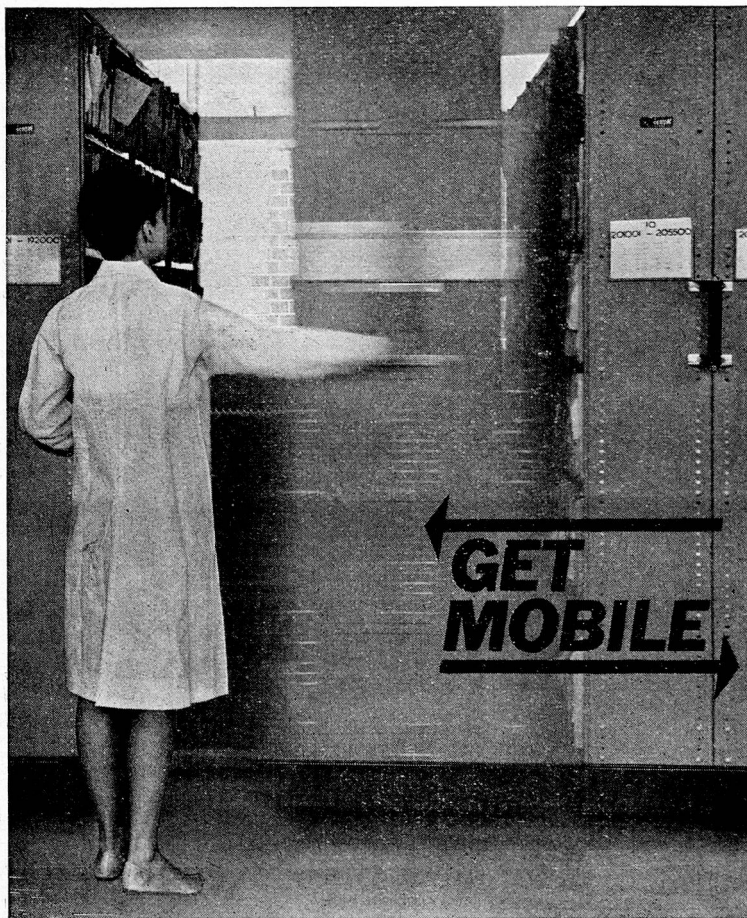
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