

THE BEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

Towards a Neutral, Peaceful and Prosperous Lebanon

I. A History of Conflict in Lebanon

- In 1943, the 43rd Charter between the two independence leaders, Bechara El Khoury and Riad El Solh, established two main pillars of national life: disengagement from Syria for some, and disengagement with France for others. The independence march was launched on the premise that Lebanon would be a link between the East and the West, and not a corridor or headquarters for any conspiracy, i.e. neutral.
- In an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the balance of power, and in line with world events, internal ties grew stronger with some Arab and Western positions of influence. This ultimately brought the conflict of the regional axes onto Lebanese soil, sparking the events of 1958. For the two opposing sides, the decision of confrontation in Lebanon was a decision directly related to the struggle for power in Lebanon: clinging to it for some and looking for more of it for others. Lebanese leaders sought alliances abroad to strengthen their positions at home. The Lebanese clash in the 1958 revolution did not end without an American-Nazarene consensus, after the entry of the Marines into Lebanon and culminated in a consensus between them on the person of the President of the Lebanese Republic, General Fouad Chehab.
- This would not mark the end of the power struggle in Lebanon. The events that followed the 1967 war intensified the crisis of the Lebanese political system, where conflict arose regarding the treatment of Palestinian weapons in Lebanon. Once again, alliances were formed with various external powers in search of support for positions of influence and power on the one hand, and support for those seeking more power on the other. Lebanon faced a severe institutional crisis that lasted for about eight months, until the conditions set by the Palestine Liberation Organization, which aim to facilitate the movement of Palestinian arms in Lebanon, were accepted. Lebanon linked itself to the fate of the Palestinian cause and inserted itself into the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, even though it had been accustomed to classifying itself as a supporting country and not a confrontational state in this conflict.
- The Lebanese collective memory also recalls the major events known as the Lebanese war of 1975, which had many chapters and varied between a war with the Palestinians in the early stages, albeit within Lebanese-Palestinian alliances, to a Lebanese-Lebanese war starting in 1983 over the identity of the regime and political participation. In that war, the Lebanese appealed to the Syrians and the Israelis and called for international initiatives to break the conflict between them and to arbitrate the differences between them. This cycle did not end except with external intervention by a Saudi initiative approved at the Arab and international scale, **and Syrian** engineering. Then came forth the framework of the National Accord Agreement in Taif (1989), which imposed on the Lebanese to stop the war and launch the process of rebuilding the state.
- Today, however, the Lebanese political situation remains drenched in external alliances and maneuvers to guarantee a greater power grab, with Lebanon's situation sinking to levels worse than the time of war. International and regional conflicts have found in Lebanon a nesting spot on Lebanese soil, dragging the country further down into the abyss, while its leaders cling to the last bit of power they have, as they have lost all legitimacy. The need to link with external powers is a structural need in the sectarian power-sharing system adopted by Lebanon.
- Meanwhile, Lebanon's youth emigrate, and the largest number amongst them tries not to look back when leaving. In their heart there is a lump for their homeland that has yet to know peace and stability.

II. The Concept Of Neutrality

Neutrality and National Identity

- o Former “neutrals” i.e. Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, and Switzerland, are commonly regarded as success stories—well-regarded by the international community as prosperous, democratic, and stable countries.
- o These nations have been able to successfully capitalize on the largely favorable perceptions of European neutrality that have existed since the 1960s.
- o This can be seen in their continuous leveraging of these perceptions/images in crisis management and response, in spite of the dwindling importance of neutrality as a tool in their respective national foreign policies.
- o For decades, popular opinion regarding national defense has assumed pivotal influence in orienting policy making in all of these countries.
- o Neutrality is often intertwined with a country's own national history and identity, and is especially debated in Austria, Sweden, and Finland.

A. Austrian Neutrality

- o Unlike Sweden and Finland, neutrality in Austria remains an openly acknowledged aspect of the Austrian's state and nation's identity today; this is demonstrated by the preservation of the constitutional paragraph regarding Austria's neutrality—initially instituted in 1955—irrespective of Austria's membership to the European Union (EU). Neutrality is often considered to be “embedded” within Austrian nationality and is a source of pride to them (Österreichbewusstsein, “Austria-consciousness”). Hence public support regarding potential revisions to neutrality is low.¹
- o Neutrality was not a popular option during the early years of the Cold War (1947–1953); the assumption of neutrality was regarded by many contemporaries as tantamount to exposing Austria to Soviet influence. This critique pervaded subsequent disputes over Austria's neutrality until the 1960s.
- o The numerous international crises that occurred between the years 1956 and 1962 prompted national and international discourses regarding the nature of “practical” neutrality—indeed, no ready-made blueprint detailing how to implement neutrality existed, and thus necessitated conceptualization.
- o This issue of a “practicable” neutrality, in Austria, was inextricably tied to the necessity of compromising between Austria's interest in partaking in European cooperation initiatives and its own neutrality. The subject of balance had significant implications regarding Austrian identity and politics, as neutrality was perceived as having been imposed on itself as a consequence of the Cold War, which limited Austria's “true, natural” affiliation to Europe.
- o The Soviet view at the time was that there existed two kinds of neutrality; permanent neutrality and positive (or active) neutrality. The former entailed a series of legally mandated steps to be taken by permanent neutrals in peacetime to guarantee neutrality in the event of a conflict. Hence, these measures discouraged neutrals from investing too much into arming national security, instead maintaining that they should keep armies of modest size.²

1 Rainio-Niemi, J. (2014). *The Ideological Cold War: The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland* (1st ed.). Routledge
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203379769/ideological-cold-war-johanna-rainio-niemi>

2 Mueller, Wolfgang. (2016). The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War. *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 18. 148-179. 10.1162/JCWS_a_00683.
<https://direct.mit.edu/jcws/article-abstract/18/4/148/13901/The-USSR-and-Permanent-Neutrality-in-the-Cold-War>

- On April 15, 1955, the Austrian delegation asserted its intention to “practice a perpetual neutrality of the kind practiced in Switzerland” within the Moscow Memorandum. This document paved the way towards the withdrawal of the Allied Forces—who had been occupying Austria since 1945—from the country.³
- Accordingly, the Austrian parliament integrated its neutrality law into the Austrian constitution, and further specified its commitment against joining any military alliances, as well as prohibited the creation of foreign military bases on Austrian soil. This declaration was also officially made to other countries which Austria maintained diplomatic relationships to. As a result, international law, as well as Austrian constitutional law, dictate the nature and scope of Austria’s permanent neutrality—which Austria assumed as a sovereign state. Hence, it is Austria’s responsibility to construe its neutrality law in compliance with international law.⁴
- The 1990-91 Iraq/Kuwait conflict, as well as Austria’s membership to the European Union in December 1995, were the two major events which prompted a rethinking and narrowing of Austria’s permanent neutrality following the end of the Cold War. In the case of the latter, as full membership to the EU entailed active participation in its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Austria had to ratify an article authorizing this involvement in the Austrian Federal Constitution.⁵
- In the decades following its membership to the EU, Austria has shifted its focus towards practicing active (or positive) neutrality, mediating in certain conflicts and Vienna becoming one of the most prominent headquarters for International Organizations (IO) promoting diplomacy, stability, and the countering of corruption, substance abuse, and criminal organizations.⁶

B. Swiss Neutrality

- The decisive factors governing Swiss policy of neutrality are the national interest, the body of law on neutrality, the international situation as well as tradition and history.
- The law of neutrality forms part of international law. The essential rights and duties of a neutral state are laid down in the Hague Conventions of 1907. At national level, neutrality is cited in the Federal Constitution as an instrument for safeguarding independence. Switzerland follows a policy of permanent, self-determined and armed neutrality. Armed is to say the Swiss Armed Forces guarantee the country’s neutrality, self-determined means the country can choose to give up the neutrality if it so chooses, and permanent signifies that as long as Switzerland is neutral, it shall not participate in armed conflicts.⁷
- Swiss neutrality was formally recognized in 1648 under the Peace of Westphalia and renewed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Seven centuries of cooperation between Romansh, French, Alemannic, and Italian cultures, with four principal languages and three religions, makes Switzerland unique in European history.⁸

³ Harrod, A. (2010). Austrian Neutrality: The Early Years, 1955–1958. *Austrian History Yearbook*, 41, 216-246.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/austrian-history-yearbook/article/abs/austrian-neutrality-the-early-years-19551958/0A0B43BA02022C1D5E9EE8E1BBA5CA1D>

⁴ Ibid.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_374826.pdf

⁵ Austria’s Permanent Neutrality — New Austrian Information

<https://www.austrianinformation.org/winter-2015-16/wc55d7qi5qrmymzmxh1qkofcmluxvj>

⁶ International Organisations in Austria – BMEIA, Außenministerium Österreich

<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/international-organisations-in-austria/>

⁷ A Comparative Overview of European Neutral States’ Armed Forces: Part I – Comparing neutrality and ground-based assets - Human Security Centre

<http://www.hscentre.org/uncategorized/a-comparative-overview-of-european-neutral-states-armed-forces-part-i-comparing-neutrality-and-ground-based-assets/>

⁸ The Neutrality of Switzerland: Deception, Gold, and the Holocaust

<https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1144&context=historical-perspectives>

- o Switzerland fits the definition of neutrality given by Camille Piccioni at the end of the nineteenth century, according to which it was 'the situation of a state which during a war between other states, takes no direct or indirect part in hostilities.' Such a state would be 'perpetually neutral' if it declared its intention of remaining neutral in advance and embodied it in treaties of other states.⁹
- o The reason for the policy of neutrality in Switzerland has its roots in Swiss history, dating back to the fifteenth century. Economic factors, such as poverty of the soil, dependence on other countries for food supplies, hard living conditions and low wages led people to take up arms. Mercenary service gradually became one of the principal economic resources of the country. Swiss soldiers were much in demand and oftentimes, the Swiss confronted each other.
- o Furthermore, in the second half of the fifteenth century, the Swiss cantons themselves had entered on the path of conquest, though they soon realized the risks they ran, notably because they depended on those very people they were fighting. This explains why, the policy of what later on would become neutrality, began to develop.
- o From the dawn of the fifteenth century, the spirit of conquest spread wild amongst the different Swiss cantons, and Switzerland nearly broke up. In the end, the Confederates gave priority to their desire to live together. They adopted the advice of Nicolas de Flue at the Diet of Stanš in 1481: 'don't get involved in foreign quarrels! The main objective was above all to ensure the cohesion of a group the members of which held fast to the decentralization of power. Neutrality seemed then to be the instrument most adapted to secure such cohesion, able to hold centrifugal forces in check.¹⁰
- o In 1783, Switzerland was acknowledged as a neutral state in the Treaty of Paris.
 - The Treaty of Paris was signed in Paris by Great Britain and the United States of America and Canada on the 3rd of September, 1783, and it officially ended the American Revolutionary War.¹¹
- o In 1848, Swiss neutrality was inscribed in the Federal Constitution, which entrusted the Federal Council with the task of maintaining it, under the supervision of the Swiss Parliament.
- o Switzerland being neutral allows the country to act as a mediator. Its diplomats often represent the interests of countries that have no relations with each other, and offer neutral ground for sensitive topics.¹²

⁹ Neutrality and Security Policy as Components of the Swiss Model

https://www.jstor.org/stable/44482373?casa_token=I2sMQUd85nYAAAAA:PtVcs0bmjRm3CdGzLSR3wHqujsZN5pjp8rR-JA2yrp0ZXAzmkDBrpxesy8kC08j-ro8u1psowZrnm3BeaLmaNHCGOV6EmrRc6Nppvpv21gxd-OpO_BI

¹⁰ Neutrality and Security Policy as Components of the Swiss Model

https://www.jstor.org/stable/44482373?casa_token=I2sMQUd85nYAAAAA:PtVcs0bmjRm3CdGzLSR3wHqujsZN5pjp8rR-JA2yrp0ZXAzmkDBrpxesy8kC08j-ro8u1psowZrnm3BeaLmaNHCGOV6EmrRc6Nppvpv21gxd-OpO_BI

¹¹ Switzerland's Policy of Neutrality

<https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/switzerland-s-policy-of-neutrality>

¹² Why Switzerland is a neutral country and what it means | Expatica

<https://www.expatica.com/ch/moving/society-history/neutral-switzerland-107842/>

Neutrality as a Natural Conclusion for Lebanon

- o Lebanon cannot be neutral in a negative sense, that is, to wash its hands of what is going on around it after the Lebanese embraced the issues of the Arab world, and Lebanon has seen its fair share of conflict. The openness of the Lebanese, and their embracing of all issues made their small country an open arena for all people and an easy playground for all regional and international players.
- o The Lebanese need to take the courageous decision of declaring Lebanon's positive neutrality in the world, for the greater good of Lebanon. This can be done by holding an international conference to declare the neutrality of Lebanon, whereby the international community recognizes Lebanon as a neutral state, thereby neutralizing Lebanon from regional conflicts and activating active diplomacy that would restore it to its pioneering role and work to break its isolation as a necessity for stability within the country.
- o Positive neutrality, according to the Austrian model, is different from Swiss neutrality, as all options remain open to the Lebanese to interact with all issues and currents and to take positions that support them. Lebanon can remain that platform that embraces all issues and all opinions. The positive neutrality option presumes that Lebanon reconsiders its foreign policy, so that it is peaceful with everyone and open to everyone without prejudice, as well as in its defense policy, so that it will be peaceful and not combative, neither with anyone nor against anyone in the Arab world. The security missions are in the hands of the national security institutions alone - and that Lebanon does not enter into any hostile or supportive position for any party in the ongoing armed conflicts.
- o Positive neutrality is not merely a possibility for Lebanon, but rather a natural conclusion if the Lebanese want the country to ever become stable and prosperous. The sectarian political system survives and is renewed through the conflicts of the axes. On the one hand, the sectarian system serves regional conflicts by making the Lebanese pledge to open political and military battles in their name. At the same time, the system exploits these conflicts, allowing the elites to consolidate their positions or protect their gains through alliances with the outside. The solution is a gradual transition to a competitive democratic system and the establishment of strict laws that impose transparency - especially financial - on all those working in politics. Lebanon must also continue to build its constitutional and political institutions and find, within the framework of its constitutional institutions, a site that will undertake the task of arbitrating disputes if they occur and giving guarantees to protect sectarian groups in their basic rights without compromising the human rights of the individual or at his expense. The attempt to abolish sectarianism and consolidate Lebanon's positive neutrality constitutes the real entrance to Lebanon's stability and to the separation of the internal Lebanese political track from the outside to a large extent.
- o As the country dives deeper into hyperinflation and economic downturn, unless it were to adopt a neutral stance it does not hope to see any foreign aid come its way from either Western Aid agencies such as the IMF or the World Bank, western governments, or even Eastern governments such as China, which has little interest in investing in a crumbling isolated country shunned by other investors, particularly Arab investors. By adopting active neutrality, Lebanon will proclaim its refusal to join coalition, axes, and regional and international political conflicts, as well as its refusal of any state from interfering in its internal affairs, occupying its land or using its territory for military purposes, in accordance with the second Hague Convention. Neutrality will also allow Lebanon to regain its esteemed status in the League of Arab States and the United Nations, and can provide it with the role of mediator in the region. As mentioned previously, by adopting active neutrality, Lebanon by no means gives up its position on the Palestinian cause, and reserves its right to defend the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland. Active neutrality will also help restore confidence in the Lebanese state's institutions, which have lost almost all trust in the local and international arena. Furthermore, it is essential at this crucial moment in Lebanese history, when the issue of maritime and land borders with Israel and Syria are in question.
- o Adopting and active neutrality status would strengthen sovereignty and stability in the country, reinforcing the National Pact Agreement made in 1943. Considering that it is a long-term process and not simply a concept to be adopted, it will continue building on the foundation laid by the National Pact to build mutual trust between the different factions in Lebanese society. Furthermore, the economic prospects of neutrality are not to be disregarded. Lebanon's economy has long been

services based, and the last two years are a perfect example of how fragile and dependent the Lebanese economy truly was (and still is). Lebanon's isolation and political instability not only meant financial breakdown, but an additional hit to its exports. Though the current crisis does present itself as an opportunity for Lebanon to become more self-dependent, according to the McKinsey report, Lebanon's strong suit will always be its services sector, and removing it from isolation will help not only attract tourists and Arab investors, but many Lebanese expatriates to return to invest in various projects in their country of origin. Its strategic positioning on the Mediterranean lends it the ability to become a maritime force to be reckoned with; however, its continuous internal strife is to the benefit of its competitors, namely Israel, which also hopes to achieve maritime force status. A strong Lebanon empowered by strong institutions would be a thorn in Israel's side.



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