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QI Panel:

Book Talk: Neutrality After 1989

October 29th, 2024

12:00-1:00 PM ET

Anatol Lieven 0:46

Welcome everybody. I'm Anatol Lieven,, director of the Eurasia program here at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. It's great pleasure today to introduce Naman Habton to talk about his edited book on neutrality, before doing so, just a couple of notes. Please put questions in the Q and A at the bottom of your screen, and I will pass them on to the author. And I'd also like to flag two upcoming webinars this week. The first is tomorrow at 1pm not 12pm as usual, on the future of the so called Axis of Resistance to the US and Israel in the Middle East. And on Thursday, at this time, 12pm we have a webinar, which I will be moderating on the parliamentary elections and crisis in Georgia and Western policy, and in the chat, you will find a paper that we published at the Quincy before the elections on this subject, and an article that I published back in July, and we but both of these pieces warned, I think, very accurately, alas, of the crisis that was going to occur, and also warned against certain Western responses to this crisis. So I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend these two webinars, and once again, I urge you to read what we've written. So today, it's my great pleasure to introduce naman habton, who is a Swedish writer on international affairs and security. He was previously a visiting researcher at the Swedish Defense University. And today we will be discussing just published book that he has edited neutrality since 1989 new paths in the post Cold War world. And this is available for free as an e book, which I'm sure will be a relief to many of you who do not work for university libraries. So welcome Nanam. First of all, can you describe your book and its, its contents and its, its main arguments.

Naman Habtom 3:21

Thank you so much for the invitation. So the book, at its core is a collection of case studies in seven chapters, eight case studies looking at the way neutrality developed since the end of the Cold War. I think for most people, neutrality was seen as a relic over the past 30 years, something that's a small a handful of small European countries were still engaging in but it was no longer relevant. In fact, when we looked at the case studies globally, what you see actually is two phenomena, one sort of decline of neutrality in Europe, on the other hand, so the rise of new neutrals around the world. The goal of the book is to highlight the fact that neutrality comes a in many forms. It can be permanent constitutional. It can be simply non interventionist. And there's also neutrality beyond Europe, it's not just Switzerland, Sweden. It's a truly global phenomenon, one with a deep history, and one, I think, with continued relevance going forward. And in fact, neutrality is really about neutrality is most useful when there's competition or BI polarity, multi polarity. Neutrality doesn't exist in a unipolar world, which, I think, described the

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1990s but no longer is the case. So just highlighting the fact that this is not something that's dead, but in fact, is part of being brought back, but also becoming more important in various forms.

Anatol Lieven 4:40

In Europe and particularly, of course, in Scandinavia and in your own Sweden, it looks as if neutrality has taken a huge step backwards recently with the decision to join NATO and. BREAKING very old tradition of neutrality, and in Sweden's case, to some degree, non alignment. Two questions, I suppose, is this, in fact, only a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as it's portrayed, or where the deeper factors and movements at work in both cases. And the second question is, I mean, is this, in your view, just a local and temporary phenomenon, or does it have long term implications beyond Europe?

Naman Habtom 5:39

So I think, first of all, it's not a new development. All those headlines in 2022 when Sweden finally applied to join NATO, you had all these headlines say, you know, Sweden breaks 200 years, or ends 200 years of neutrality. What really was happening was It's been 20 years without war, which has sort of been conflated. And of course, during parts of that 200 years you had neutrality, especially during Second, first, second world wars and the Cold War. And in fact, neutrality officially ended 1995 when Sweden joined the European Union. And I think it's the same for Finland. What you instead have was non alignment in the past. The following 29 years in the Swedish case, for 28 years in the Finnish case, this is, I think, a core aspect of neutrality that consists of two actions, two parts. One is neutrality as a policy that's been conducted. Another one enters perception. And I think what maintained from the Swedish case was this reputation that was established by faith, like Prime Minister of Parliament during the Cold War, where Sweden established this reputation as the orange broker in international affairs, which managed to outlive neutrality itself, that while Sweden was continuing to participate in various new emissions, beginning in Bosnia, then Kosovo, then Afghanistan and Libya, and then even on the EU domain, for example, you're seeing a similar development in previous Mali anti party missions. This I think, clear break though in the 1990s already, right?

The first time Sweden was involved in a international military mission that was not a UN mission was Bosnia, first time since 1804 during the Barbary wars, whereas now NATO e missions were sort of the default, even during this period when Sweden was still perceived as neutral in terms of global ramifications. I think it does just harm Sweden, reputationally, or in Finland, as well as these honest brokers. You know, it's hard to imagine Finland being able to host another summit between an American president or Russian president, for example. I think that role has basically been exported from Europe to the Middle East, or maybe just other parts of Asia, maybe Latin America, the Scandinavian capacity contribute, I think, has diminished. The counter argument is, of course, that countries like Norway, which have been part of NATO, have been able to play this role. You know, obviously also, of course, but also in Colombia and elsewhere. However, that's been very much, very distinct profile, not really neutrality, necessarily, just a small state far

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away that's engaged and has created a diplomatic profile when it comes to negotiations. But having neutrality is a baseline as a reputation as a legitimate, legitimizing factor is, I think, something that's ended. But just one last thing on the aspect of whether or not this new, I think the Russian response tells us something. In fact, it's been relatively muted. And I think this signals the fact that for the Russians, Sweden, especially, but also Finland, has had ceased to be neutral for decades. If this was truly a break, then you'd probably expect a larger reaction from the Russians.

Anatol Lieven 8:42

And of course, also that, you know, the Russians have no territorial ambitions vis a vis Finland or Sweden. And you know, even when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia, you know, during the 19th century, the Russians never regarded it as Russian in the way that they regarded large parts of Ukraine. So obviously, I mean local factors matter hugely from that point of view. I mean in terms of the transition from neutrality, I suppose I mean also a key part has been played precisely by the fact that in the 90s, several countries, or even earlier, in the case of Ireland, for example, could join the European Union while still believing that this did not qualify their commitment to neutrality. But of course, even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and certainly since, there's been a virtual merging of the European Union and NATO in geopolitical and military terms, and I was struck by the fact that. Was it Austria, I think, in one of the essays, as part of its constitutional commitment to neutrality, it's not just that it mustn't take part in war, but that there is a semi formal barrier against adopting foreign policies that could lead to taking part in war, so not just formal alliances, but adopting positions that could lead to war. Well, yeah, I mean, in the case of so many countries you know that joined the EU, they have been really pulled in that direction without, I think, the populations fully realizing what was happening.

Naman Habtom 10:49

In many cases, I would agree with that. And I think something the EU signaled a sort of a gateway towards NATO for a lot of these countries. And I think key for the Swedish development, Austrian development, and Finnish development, but in different ways, of course, is that it had to be gradual in order for this to be an accept more normalized aspect of foreign policy. If you look, for example, in the 90s, support for NATO actions becomes quite high in a lot of these neutral countries, but not native membership. And of course, the concept of neutrality has shifted dramatically from the Second World War, where neutrality just meant you're not a part of war, to the Cold War definition of you're not part of an alliance block, which, at the time, was interpreted to meet include the European Economic Community, which is why war, Sweden, Austria, Finland, only joined in 1995 and then you sort of see a gradual breakdown of that, and it sort of mirrors the way military deployments have occurred as well, and that what most of these countries, when they do deploy with NATO, it tends to be in these smaller deployments, sort of balancing both NATO deployments and UN deployments, and then gradually becomes essentially just NATO deployments, perhaps with the demand for U.N. authorization. But fundamentally, the policy itself is quite a NATO based one.

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Anatol Lieven 12:05

And of course, the humanitarian interventions, whether genuinely humanitarian or more geopolitical, I think, played a critical part also in bridging that gap, in gradually bringing certain countries, you know, into NATO's fold without formally being so, right in the in the Balkans in the 90s, no?

Naman Habtom 12:31

Very much so. And I think there was the failure of the UN to the UN peacekeeping missions to resolve the issue, which, of course, was caused by the role in various powers in Germany, the US to various role various degrees, sort of made it easier to say, well, we're gonna allow NATO to fill this gap. Some of the things, even in the case of Libya, where, if you have the tacit Russian and Chinese acceptance, not necessarily for the end intervention, but for, at least for the beginning, sort of made it more normalized for even those anti NATO activists or anti NATO politicians to say, well, this is an exception. This is sure is under the framework of NATO, but it's not fundamentally a NATO mission, even though argues the reverse.

Anatol Lieven 13:15

You mentioned Norway and its role in in the Oslo process in the 90s. Of course, it's very striking that today, that would be quite impossible. You know, the US would veto any such attempt by Norway. But I have noticed, in the case of Ireland, that the Irish stance on Gaza coming, you know, I think very much also from deeply rooted anti colonial feelings in Ireland because of Irish history, as as in so much of the rest of the world. As actually, to some extent, you know, checked that that process. Do you think that Gaza will have a big effect in encouraging countries to take a more neutral stance vis a vis the US?

Naman Habtom 14:14

So, I think this would we can break this down into a European answer, a non european answer, and I think the case of Europe, I think the Gaza question really reflects pre existing political situations. In the case of Ireland, there's a long history of support for the Palestinian movement because of its the way it's been viewed internally, as a sort of parallel with the Irish struggle. And in Spain, for example, their history of involvement in Israel, Palestine, obviously going back to Madrid Conference. I mean, moncari. Conference. I mean, one can even go further from Francoist period, where the Arab countries were, in a sense, key gateway to normalization. So in that sense, I think that talks about what has happened, or an existing situation, became more in the forefront. I think beyond Europe. I think God. Gaza. It's not that Gaza itself causes the shift, but rather it makes it easier to point out the Western hypocrisy on the issue. And I think the fact that it's time to accept concurrently between Ukraine and Gaza makes it a lot easier for countries that are already leading towards some sort of neutrality, or at least non alignment, to then seize upon the issue as a further evidence, which in the case, I think was would have been

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hard in the 90s or even early, early 2000s that perhaps people would have to point back to Iraq, but not necessarily talking about a contemporaneous issue.

Anatol Lieven 15:19

It seems pretty clear. You know, if you look at votes in the UN if you look at opinion polls in many countries, that the great majority of countries outside the West and populations outside the West are very anxious to stay neutral in both the you know, the you know, the confrontation between the western Russia and the confrontation between the US and and China, which, of course, risks dragging in Europe as well. What do you think? I mean? Do you think they will be able to sustain this or as of course, as we saw in so many parts of the world during the Cold War, will one see countries just dragged, willy nilly, forced to take sides in this confrontation? And also, what? What are the implications for internal politics? Because it's quite striking in Europe that you know, on the one hand, you have Finland and Sweden joining NATO on the other hand, of course, in Germany especially. But you know, in and Hungary and to some extent in France, you also see a backlash, a backlash against dictation by the European Union, but also, you know, with implications for, you know, any kind of outside dictation, including that of NATO and the and the US on a country's, you know, foreign and especially military policy. How do you see this going, both in Europe and and in the in the wider world?

Naman Habton 17:20

I expect there to be sort of spectrum of responses, that there will be some countries, both of internal political elite leadership reasons, will be very close to the US. I think the UK, for example, Australia is another, where they'll essentially try to magnify their own position, at least from the leadership point of view, by being as close to the US, whereas the others, I think, will try to carve out their own space. I think the Gulf countries being a good example of this. I think also depends on the country's own leverage, country like the UAE, for example, or Qatar, when they have American military bases or a close relationship, so they're able in Turkey, I think, in other ways as well, know that they're in some ways indispensable to the US, so they're able to leverage that in order to go beyond that. I think there's also a question of where the neutrality is being applied, if it's a core interest or non core interest. For example, I think the Iran nuclear deal is good example, where there's briefly talked about Europeans creating alternative payment mechanisms and resisting us efforts. But in the end, Iran just was not important enough for European leaders to sacrifice, or at least risk damaging points with the US, whereas one can imagine that for countries in Asia, for example, China is such an important country for them that they're willing to make that trade off if they're forced to that position. So then it will come down to the question whether or not an American or Chinese or whatever other leader pushes those countries.

And I think even we've seen some range in this area. So for example, American response, for example, towards China and India buying Russian oil and gas, that even though they're both doing it, the criticism is much more vocal towards China than it is towards India and sort of the tastic acknowledgement. But of course, it's not a universal one. I mean, the current US

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Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, notoriously said that there's no such thing as strategic autonomy during war. Of course, that's when you need strategic autonomy.

Anatol Lieven 19:17

That did not go down at all well in India, and it's, I think India is perhaps the biggest example of what you were saying. You know, it depends on leverage, and also, to a degree, on self perception, because the Indian elites of both main political strains, by the way, have always been extremely clear that they will, you know, seek international alignments that are in India's, that they see as in India's interest, but that they are nobody's subordinate ally, and they will not allow India to be dictated to, you know, by anybody. And. And and so I wonder, I mean, if India is also an example of what you could call selective neutrality, which is to say that India is, you know, obviously aligned with the US against China. But when the US tried to tell India to impose sanctions on Iran, which of course, is seen as as a vital Indian interest because of energy supplies or on Russia, the Indians fairly politely, but told America to go to hell. So interesting question, is India a neutral country, a non neutral country, or just perhaps India is just a country which which, which goes its own, its own way.

Naman Habton 20:45

And I think if we could take it to historic perspective, I think the Indian position is a very normal historical trajectory. It's hard to imagine the 19th century that one would have assumed that the Prussians or the French would have automatically taken a position on various issues by virtue of a Napoleon relationship? No, they sort of took a case by case approach. I think the problem with the neutrality understanding is that it's been so heavily defined by a bipolar world of the Cold War that when a country is seen as not leaning towards one side, it's renovate either supporting the other side or neutrality becoming a dirty ward where, in fact, they're just carrying out a series of independent policies that run concurrently with one another. And I think multi polarity sort of encourages that sort of behavior. And I think it's true even for countries are very close to US allies. I mean, in the book, for example, chapter in Israel and Israel, I think one could even though it's not a treaty ally, in most politically understood as an American ally, around Russia, Ukraine, they've taken a very different position. They've refused to impose sanctions, resisted sending weapons to Ukraine and so forth. And that's because the Israeli Russian relationship is very important for the Israelis, because of Syria, Iran, other the Russian population within Israel. And same thing could be said about the UAE or Thailand, for example, wanting to join BRICs. That's another treaty ally. So I think what become selective neutrality, I think will become the norm in many ways and but it won't necessarily be understood as neutrality. It's just a separate policy that's specific, for example, India, Iran, or Israel, Russia.

Anatol Lieven 22:24

Which was, after all, very much the policy of the United States for the first 150 years of its existence. The US did not feel any need, indeed, with strong prejudices against entering foreign alliances, this, this, of course, broke down partly with the two World Wars and the Second World

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War, but also because, well, once again, the US never, and I mean the vast majority of the American people will never accept being part of a subordinate Alliance, you know, subordinate to anybody else. So in the 19th century, when Britain was more powerful, or, you know, France was more powerful, of course, a very different matter. If alliance is, in some ways, a euphemism for a client state system in which you're the boss. So very much, India has never been averse to having a large system in which it was the boss.

Naman Habton 23:29

And I think a lot of this has to do with the leadership of these, of the Allied the smaller country that, for example, I think Denmark is an interim case where you have someone like Anderson Rasmussen, who later on, who was prime minister, later became Secretary General NATO, who had a very personal drive towards culture Danish American relations within the context of NATO, which are not reflected as broader Danish politics. And one can imagine a situation where, had there been a different Prime Minister with slightly different interests, that would have gone on a very different path.

Anatol Lieven 23:59

Well, I think that's something that the Irish chapter in your book also brings out to a degree, because, I mean, I have been so struck in, you know, the discourse of the European security elites. How the I mean democracy, the elections, the idea of, you know, the desire of of democratic majorities, is either completely ignored or treated with actually, overt disdain. I had a conversation recently with a with a French official who was advocating, advocating macrons, line of sending French troops to to Ukraine, potentially. And I, you know, pointed out that three quarters, according to opinion polls of the French people, are strongly opposed to this. And she replied, My dear sir, in France, it is the President who makes foreign policy. And when I suggested that, you know, an issue that could conceivably, you know, involve a risk of the nuclear annihilation of France, you know, the population might perhaps have a legitimate right to say, no, we decide.

Naman Habton 25:25

I think similarly, I think it was a German foreign minister who said that you should pursue a lot of your policies on Ukraine, even if German voters should oppose it.

Anatol Lieven 25:36

Well, yes, I mean this combination of hyper moralism with militarism. I can't help thinking that the greens are rather more like, never say, Nazis, but perhaps a little more like their Wilhelmine ancestors than they themselves may fully realize. You know, one day Germany may heal the world, as the old slogan goes, and bricks. Where do you see bricks going in this regard? Because clearly the Russians and the Chinese, you know, very much, want to turn it into a, I mean, fairly soft, but still definitely anti Western block, talk of the global majority. You know,

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ideas of replacing the dollar South Africa is, at present, on their side, perhaps. But whether this will outlast Gaza, I'm not sure India sees it in very different terms, you know, certainly as a way of pushing back against Western hegemony, but without actually taking sides geopolitically. And Brazil seems to be seeing saying as little as possible, from what I could make out, um, but certainly, I mean also the more BRICS grows, you know you now have. I mean, of course, outside Europe, so so many countries which are either against the US, but others are, well, yes, I mean, like Egypt. I mean, on the one hand, one would have called Egypt a client state. But clearly, Egypt did not ask America's position before applying to join BRICS. So where do you think BRICS will go, in terms of alignment, neutrality, replacement of the United Nations eventually? What do you think?

Naman Habton 27:39

So the most realistic path forward would be that it serves as an alternative that can enable countries to sort of leverage their positions more effectively and therefore pursue this sort of selective neutrality that you mentioned earlier. The just use a minor example. You know, Serbia, for example, the president there mentioned maybe we'll abandon the EU because they're not going to let us in. So maybe we'll have to turn towards bricks. I don't think it's fundamental. I think ultimately, service still wants to join the EU, but it can at least raise the spectrum of bricks as in order to negotiate, improve their own negotiating position. And I think that would be sort of the norm going forward. And of course, the more bricks expands, the more internal contradictions it will be. So you already see this, for example, Egypt and Ethiopia, the newest interest. And the issues around, obviously the Nile, but also in terms of Ethiopia, wanting to have a access to the to the sea by small land. So the various issues where there's a risk, of course, importing these tensions into bricks. On the other hand, I think it will also help diffuse in other areas. I think a core component breaks has been not imposing sanctions on one another, and I think sanctions, for example, is one that's increasingly been seen as in odds with neutrality. You can't really be neutral if you have sanctions. Switzerland, for example, imposed sanctions on Russia, but it kept insisting that they're neutral. Turkey, on the other hand, sold drones to Ukraine, but didn't impose sanctions, and using the Russian Turkish relation not necessarily being fundamentally harmed there. So I think in those ways, BRICS will be able to at least redirect the way neutrality is understood.

Anatol Lieven 29:17

You see that, and this will be one of the subjects of our webinar on Thursday, playing out very much in Georgia at the moment, because the Georgian government, it's accused of being, you know, under Russian domination. I mean, rather more. I think it was trying to pursue neutrality with, actually, an officially, formally anti Russian position, but rather like turkey at the same time benefiting, but even more than Turkey benefiting enormously from trade with Russia, and Georgia formally accepted Western sanctions, but was fairly relaxed in. Implementation, shall we say. But what we are now seeing is that this is unacceptable to the west, this attempt to balance or pursue, you know, a multi vector policy, as they say in some of the former Soviet states. No, the West is insisting on absolute conformity too.

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Naman Habton 30:19

And I think this is one of the successful aspects. For example, for example, Russian foreign policy is being understanding of other countries' dilemmas that, for example, there been countries like Brazil which have criticized or condemned Russia's role in Ukraine. But then the Russian response is, we appreciate the Brazilian balanced and nuanced position on the issue, whereas I think the reverse is not necessarily true from the US position or the EU position. The Russians have not been or the Chinese have not, with exception, perhaps, on the issue of Taiwan, have not tried to impose unrelated issues in terms of their bilateral relationships, whereas I think it was EU Mercosur summit earlier this year or last year, when they were trying to prepare a statement, the EU kept insisting on something about the about Ukraine and Mercosur, the Latin Americans just didn't want to address it. So I think perhaps if the Europeans are in some select neutrality, at least not forcing others to adopt without necessarily abandoning their own position.

Anatol Lieven 31:21

Yeah, I think one way of looking at this is that, you know, Russia does try, as far as it's able, to impose a kind of Monroe Doctrine on the territory of the former Soviet Union, but not in the wider world. I mean, it's learned from the Soviet experience that that's just not possible. Whereas America, of course, always imposed a kind of Monroe Doctrine in Central America, there's never any question of these countries, you know, being allowed to align themselves against the United States. And since the end of the Cold War, has really tried to extend this, with the help of the European Union, to the entire world, and it's not working, really. I mean, it can't. The world's just too, too big.

Naman Habton 32:07

And I think there's an understanding in other quarters that very issues that it might be central to either west or Russia, for example, are actually very peripheral to the rest of the world, that in some ways in the issues that Ukraine might be as peripheral to Botswana as South Ossetia is to Bangladesh like the Russians wouldn't say, we have to have a statement on South Ossetia in order to proceed with other issues. And I think this applies to the rest of bricks, and I think that's the understanding within BRICS that makes select neutrality very desirable.

Anatol Lieven 32:45

So we have some questions from the floor. First question in your view, which countries have been most successful in maintaining their neutrality or in, perhaps more widely, one could also say in in using their neutral position to serve their interests and benefit themselves.

Naman Habton 33:05

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So if you take neutrality to have a sort of broader conception, not just the sort of constitutional understanding along like Switzerland, for example, then I think a country like Singapore, which has obviously a closed military relationship. And I think it's key to emphasize neutrality does not require you to be fully self sufficient militarily. For some countries, this was the desired path of others. It's just non alignment. So I think Singapore would be a good example. I think more recently, some of the Gulf countries, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, of course, this helped them in so far as they already had some pre existing relationship with the major powers. But yeah, so see, probably Yeah, Singapore, the Gulf states. I mean, I would say even until very recently, Finland, even though it had abandoned neutrality in a fundamental sense, decades ago, was still able to have a very good relationship regionally until early 2020, so. So I think it's a range of part like good successes, I think in that sense.

Anatol Lieven 34:14

We have a very interesting question. In the 19th century, there were two countries in Europe that had their neutrality guaranteed by international treaty. One of them was a very happy example, Switzerland. The other was a very unhappy example. So it turned not not in the 19th century, but in 1914 and 1940 and that was Belgium and Britain actually formally involved itself in the first world war against Germany, because Britain had signed the Treaty on Belgium's neutrality, and Germany violated it by invading in 1914 and the question relates to the. Ukrainian neutrality, you know, Switzerland, of course, is, I mean, I said, Well, I mean, in the past, of course, it was on people's invasion route or supply route. You know, in the in the Habsburg wars, in the 30 Years War, in the French Revolutionary Wars. But since then, it's been happily sitting on its mountains, and nobody has really needed or wanted to invade it. Whereas, of course, Belgium found itself direct, well, first, of course, on the route of French invasions of Germany, and then twice, the other way round. Um, so I mean, on the one hand is, is neutrality a viable path for a country in Ukraine's position? But on the other hand, given that, you know, the British treaty with to guarantee Belgian neutrality, actually, in the end, required Britain to go to war to defend that neutrality, and, you know, defend Belgium against invasion, given that the West says that it will, every country has said we will not go to war for the sake of Ukraine. I mean, NATO, membership would seem meaningless, but, but also, how? How worthwhile in the end, can any guarantees of neutrality be?

Naman Habton 36:46

As much as I support neutrality, I think it's worth noting that neutrality is not a guaranteed path to security always, and that these have to be adjusted local conditions. Using the Second World War as an example, all three Scandinavian countries we in Denmark, Norway declared neutrality in the case of Denmark, Norway, that was just simply violated. So did Swedish neutrality work because of Sweden's own conduct, or is it just simply the Germans respecting Sweden's neutrality? So of course, there's always the external aspect. I think when it comes to security agreements, one has to recall that it has to be realistic as well. So in the case of Belgium, was it? Perhaps it was realistic at the time that the Brits committed themselves to Belgian neutrality, but obviously that's not a you can predict the future with such certainty.

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Anatol Lieven 37:35

Yes, though actually, I mean, I think that that is an interesting contrast with with Ukraine today, because the British didn't only Well, they didn't guarantee Belgians neutrality in the first place on, you know, grounds of international law, morality and the and they didn't go to war with Germany in 1914 only in order to defend that treaty. I mean, the thing is that ever since the 16th century, so for more than 300 years, keeping the low countries out of the hands of an actually or potentially hostile great power had been absolutely just central to English and then British International Strategy. Again and again, England fought the Spanish. Britain fought the French. I can't remember how many times precisely, in order to prevent that happening. So there was a, I mean, that amounted to something like a British security doctrine, you know, until, of course, NATO made it irrelevant. Whereas you know, defending Ukraine was never part of a 16th century English strategic doctrine. So there is also a question of, of, you know, perceived vital national interests at work. I mean, Britain would still go to war. But obviously NATO would happen. Would have to go to war if Russia were to invade Belgium. Of course, Russia would have to invade rather a lot of places before it got to Belgium, but we would go to war for that, because it would be seen as a mortal threat to us, quite rightly.

Naman Hapton 39:17

And I think, say with the Second World War as an example, I think this, this is how we should understand, for example, Britain's entry signal World Wars. I mean, there was no realistic possibility for the British to liberate Poland in september 1939, but it was what German invasion of Poland signaled to Britain's own security, exactly. And I think that should be applied to Ukraine. So if Ukraine is not in a position, if Ukraine is not seen as vital, then it's not necessarily realistic to expect for another foreign country to fight an existential war. It's worth noting that United States itself has only fought one country explicitly for the defense of another country. It's probably Kuwait right all other conflicts, there's some sort of American motive, you know, I. Korean or Vietnam War was about drawing back Chinese expansion as understood. It was not about South Vietnamese territorial integrity at its core.

Anatol Lieven 40:11

Yeah the question here, which actually also does relate to Ukraine, what role do multilateral institutions play in promoting neutrality, and has this shifted since 1989 it's an interesting question, because one thought that has come up and has been raised by, shall we say, sort of moderate thinking Russians, is that, you know, if military guarantees of Ukrainian neutrality and, you know, non aggression against Ukraine are, you know, weirdly at one the same time, both meaningless and unacceptable to Russia, um, guarantees by the United Nations, by, say, by bricks, by all These, you know, institutions and countries that Russia has done, you know, has invested so much effort in reaching out to diplomatically and also depends on economically. Would would they be a more sensible and in a way, more realistic path to guaranteeing Ukrainian neutrality as as a as a disincentive to future Russian aggression. I mean, that's, sorry,

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that's my answer, specifically in regard to Ukraine. But what do you think more generally? I mean, how, how important are un guarantees? For example, does, does the UN I mean after, of course, its terms have been violated so often by now, but does it still have a degree of moral force in the world? From that point of view, could bricks have a moral force as well in guaranteeing countries.

Naman Habton 42:01

So I think the answer is yes, and that to the extent that view and has not functioned to its fullest capacity potential, is, of course, the result of some of the major powers, but essentially described note that in the BRICS documents, they repeatedly refer to UN charters and UN positions sort of secure Security Council reforms, you know. So it's 70 BRICS, countries, especially Brazil, India and South app, South Africa. The UN does give a legitimizing force to their positions as sort of representing the global south or their own regions. I think these countries can play a greater role. One thing that has not been explored is, for example, peacekeepers in Donbas. Would the Russians actually risk restarting fighting if there are Chinese and Indian peacekeepers in Ukraine? I think I find that very hard to imagine. On the other hand, do countries in the West one have Chinese and Indian peacekeepers? Doesn't seem like it. I mean, I think that's one thing that's very struggling in the case of the Balkans, is that even though initiatives that un effort was was immediately sort of hijacked by the European Union as a well, there's a problem for Europe. Europe's hour has arrived. We have to handle it. It's our back door.

Anatol Lieven 43:28

Haha, yeah. I mean, I think China definitely not and the US would, would certainly veto that. But I, I do feel very strongly that, you know, given that the West and the US, frankly, have made such a mess of a number of issues, you know, when it comes to countries that are to, you know, at least on these issues genuinely non aligned, like India and Brazil, frankly, I mean, I think that they have A moral right to be consulted and should be encouraged to play an active role, including, you know, if they're willing to provide them peacekeepers on the ground. You know, it's not as if our record has been so bloody stellar. You know, when it comes to resolving conflicts or preventing conflicts or promoting morality in the world.

Naman Habton 42:01

And one I would add to that is, I think there's a unresolved internal contradiction in the Washington position, and that, on the one hand, we want these countries to play people often trying to be a responsible global actor. On the other hand, if it does do things that associated with that, then it's seen as being too expansive. You know, well, can you be an active Peacekeeper with a full range of deployment capabilities if you don't have a larger military, and you can't have have it both ways, and you can't just have a small police force acting as a peacekeeper in major issue, in major conflict?

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Anatol Lieven 45:02

We have a question for you about Sweden. Sweden's position compared to Austria's, for example, although, well, Austria is a very special case, you know, as the remnant of a former great empire. Although, I suppose you could say that if Sweden, it just took place over a longer, you know, a longer period, but it, you know, has Swedish policy also been really influenced by this Swedish history, you know, going back to the 17th century of war with Russia. And, you know, several wars with Russia. And indeed, it was the wars with Russia that actually destroyed Sweden as a European great imperial power. So I suppose I mean the question being, is national history also of critical importance, or can it be in, you know, in dictating, not, not necessarily always formal alliances, but basic attitudes.

Naman Habton 46:10

I think, absolutely, I think the case more obviously, the case of Finland, in this regard, in terms of specific relationship with Russia, in the case of Sweden, what you had, at best was sort of a functional relationship during the Cold War, but not necessarily a friendly one. I think also the Swedish case was sort of moderated by the fact that there was an understanding in Sweden that if a war did break out during the Cold War, it was not because Sweden itself was going to be targeted. This would be part of a larger European conflict in which Sweden would presumably lean westward. We have always thought internal documents talk about in case of an external aggressor, and it's always clear who that was referring to. I think so, of course, in that sense, I think history does play a role. On the other hand, I do think also there's been very little contact between no average Swedes and average Swedes and average Russian. So I think it sort of intensified this threat perception on the parts of Sweden that if you ask most Sweden, like, what is Russia's basis Putin, people just don't know very much about the country, or if they do is maybe about Russia and Syria, Russia and Ukraine. So in that sense, this, even the contemporary aspect has been very much skewed towards a very militarized understanding. There's also aspects of the hyper moralism, which applies, I think, even because of Swedish relation with China, essentially that Sweden has the most anti China opinions of Western European country. Now that can't be explained by any historical relationship that we had up with them. That we have with them. And I think that can be explained by a sort of stuff. We're the we're democracy, we care about human rights. They're not, therefore they must be the exact opposite of ours

Anatol Lieven 47:55

Is Gaza going to have an effect from that point of view? Do you think? Because you know? I mean, as you know very well, most of the world by now regards, you know, Western professions of adherence to human rights in international affairs as I mean worse than hypocrisy. I mean just a bad joke. But is this? Will this affect Swedish opinion? Do you think so?

Naman Habton 48:18

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In a sense, like Sweden has stood up in terms of Palestine for a few decades. I mean, we're the first country to have a PLO, first western country to have diploma to establish diplomatic relations with power to recognize Palestine as an independent states. On the other hand, I think it's unfortunate case that the issue of Russia just dwarfs everything else that when people are raised the issue of double standard, standards, the automatic response, essentially, that's what about ism. And it's hard for, I think, for most Swedish policymakers, to see anything beyond Russia, that if anything goes wrong, it's Russian. You see the same in terms of the media coverage, for example, the description of the AfD in recent elections, or even FPO in Austria, the feeder party it was describes a Russia friendly party has electoral gains. So if everything is covered by Russia, then sure, Gaza creates issues, and even the right thing, government has been critical in some ways, of the Israeli conduct and most notably the recent unruly decision. But if everything is defined by Russia policy, then it's hard for anything else to really break through at the moment, unfortunately.

Anatol Lieven 49:28

Yeah, a question about Ireland, I think, from the Irishman by his name, has Ireland been able to maintain neutrality, and you know, an element of distance from the US, in part because of the Irish the Irish American community and diaspora and its political power in America, and also the economic ties that it has helped but. Create. In other words, you know, in order to pursue this policy, do you need to have some kind of internal, domestic grip on American or West European politics?

Naman Habton 50:13

It's an interesting question. It's my initial reaction is probably no in that. I think the Irish diaspora issue obviously did play along the case of the troubles, or sort of a latent acceptance of the IRA fundraising and that sort of thing. But I think the case of Ireland internationally is that I think this is just a tacit acceptance on America from the American part, that Ireland is just not very relevant. And I think if you're an irrelevant country, and in some ways you have more things to say, there's a diaspora, there are areas in the case of us, foreign policy does play well. I think Cuba policy, Venezuela policy, I think he supports the clearest examples. One can even go back to the Polish issue in the 1990s but I think the problem the US is just too insular in some sense. One thing I would say is I think the US diplomatic core is just so heavily exposed to Europeans more than any others, that it creates a sympathy towards an overemphasis in the transatlantic relationship, to the expense of everything else that we do have very few Chinese language specialists or Russian, Latin language specialists. And if there are, then you often times demean does well, you're just sort of falling prey to your host, in a sense, whereas, I think other countries, yeah, whereas other countries, like Russia, for example, has much more developed diplomatic core that's able to play a more effective role. I mean, you've seen in the case of the UK, where arabists were, you know, derided during the statue government as well. If you speak Arabic, you know, of course you can be anti Israel, and we can't trust your opinion, even though you're a regional expert.

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Anatol Lieven 51:55

Yeah, yes. And I mean, in China, the number of American students in China has gone down by, I think not. You know, 95% in recent years, and in Moscow, of course, most of the Western journalists have left, and the Western diplomats don't seem to go out anymore. So and I mean, if they what they are reporting doesn't make its way to the general public. Says, Actually people just don't know what is happening in Russia or what ordinary Russians are thinking.

Naman Habton 52:30

One thing I would just add to that is, I think in the case of the US in particular, a lot of these issues have been sort of delegated to people with particularly niche interests in various areas. I mean, I was watching the previous event with Chas Freeman, where he talks about how there are no people who are already predisposed to being supportive Israel end up focusing on Israel policy, or those who are already interested in cube policy or right wing and Pan American context, and working on those issues in a sense, being a self fulfilling prophecy in that sense. And you know, what do you do if you have a population that is not as reflective of the country you're examining, then that creates its own knock on effect. And I imagine this will perhaps be the case in the future with India. Now, I mean, in us, still has a relatively small Indian, us, born Indian population. But you know, once the once they reach the sort of mid diplomatic careers. One can imagine the same thing happening in that dimension, but it comes to go other way. It could be a more liberal Indian American population being overly critical towards India, or it could be one that's very sympathetic to India and therefore being very anti Pakistan. You know, you could go in either direction. But yeah, it's not necessarily the population as a whole impacting foreign policies.

Anatol Lieven 53:41

True this question about Finland. When it comes to neutrality in Finland, why does the term finlandization have such negative connotations? What do its critics get right as well as wrong? Well, you know, I've often felt this because I visited Finland, you know, during the last years of the of the Cold War. And, I mean, and I went through Finland to the Soviet Union. And I mean, nobody could possibly think that Finland was a communist country or part of the Soviet bloc. I mean, it was clearly a Western democracy and a very successful free market democracy, happiest, you know, throughout the Cold War, it often, you know, got top marks as happiest country in the world. Of course, it's, it's foreign policy was limited, but in your book, I was amused by one thing I read, how, you know, Finland was tremendously blamed in the West for abstaining during un votes condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. And a thought came to me, and I looked up how Finland voted in un votes on Gaza. Fire, and on condemning Israel and calling for a cease fire, and guess what, they abstained. So you know, your geo political, or what you see as your geopolitical reality, has some consequences indeed?

Naman Habton 55:17

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I think that the negative condition, the case of colonization, is sort of reverse causation, that if you begin with the premise that having close foreign policy relations with the Soviet Union is bad, then a country that does so is itself, therefore bad, but it doesn't necessarily speak about the marriage of the policy itself. You know, one could look at, for example, Yugoslavia, which was still a socialist state with an authoritarian government, but had made the break with the Soviet Union. But, you know, don't no one talks about you will civilization as a positive policy. You know, you should be associates at home, but perhaps more an online internationally. So I think it's just a value judgment that comes in the first place. And I think it also assumes that countries are have more autonomy than they really do that. And we see this in the case of Ukraine, that, you know, Ukraine, Islamic State. What should anyone else tell us that? And in a sense, you can understand it from an abstract position. But when it comes to on the ground, you know, no one would expect a country in Latin America or in the Caribbean to pursue certain policies because who their neighbor is and their sort of understanding that perhaps that applies more broadly as well.

Anatol Lieven 56:24

One of your chapters, a very interesting one on Vietnam, and how Vietnam, of course, is, is neutral, and a little bit like Finland, I suppose, has some very deep anti Chinese prejudices. But has to be very careful, because it is next to a much, much, much bigger country with, you know, potentially, you know, aggressive ambitions.

Naman Habton 56:51

And when the US was weaker, it had a more, more accommodating position. And when it's stronger, doesn't, and most countries act accordingly.

Anatol Lieven 57:00

One, one last question, what can countries in the Global South, you know, for example, through BRICS and necessary do to show that their neutrality is substantive and making a positive contribution to global governance, rather than mere fence sitting and hedging? This is something which comes up very much, you know, in internal discussions, in in BRICS as well. You know, how can we give this some real positive content? What do you think on that score?

Naman Habton 57:32

So this was one way of indicating neutrality. Is, for example, by having a diversified arsenal, for example, like not being overly blind on one arms rider, or doing military exercise with multiple countries. You know, I think that's what the South Africans are trying to do. You know, one day they'll do naval exercise with the Washington and the Chinese, and another day with the Germans. Whereas I think it's less credible if you only do it with the one side. You know, beyond that department, honest, I don't think, I think ultimately, it's just a country like the US or China for

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that matter, will reach a decision, if a country's neutral on the basis of its own interests, that if it helps China, countries neutral in a positive sense, if it hurts China, it's aligned with the US. So there's very little. Sometimes what countries can do, I think they can, as long as they're not actively antagonizing. There's not much. On the other hand, one thing I would note that is that I think neutrality can have a regional flavor to it, so what it means to be neutral in Europe is not the same as being neutral in Asia. And I think just keeping that in mind, fundamentally, I think sanctions, perhaps, given the increasing role, it's perhaps the new frontier of neutrality. And, for example, having a consistent line for only imposing UN sanctions, for example, would be one way to show a substantive but of course, if the US is unhappy with the UAE trading with Russia, then now there's not much they can do beyond that. You know, they will maintain incredible neutrality. So I think you just have to strengthen on your strengthen your own leverage, really, and then proceed accordingly.

Anatol Lieven 59:16

So in the end, I mean, we are returning, I mean, hopefully, in a in a non bellicose or war like way to the pattern of most of human history, in which, you know a range of different states maneuver according to their the realities of their situation and the perception of their own of their own interests. And if they can try to balance between, you know, the great powers, and if they can't, are compelled to take one side or another, as long as, of course, historically, that has so often led to war and conquest. So we must hope that that. Doesn't doesn't return. I mean, I think from that point of view, you do see a cultural shift, despite what's happening in Ukraine, compared to any previous era of human history, at least against war in principle.

Naman Habton 1:00:18

And I suppose the final remark is that neutrality can take polar opposite forms. You know, total isolation is form of neutrality, and total integration in the UN system is also, can also be neutrality. So I think countries can show their substantive neutrality in different ways, at different times, on different issues.

Anatol Lieven 1:00:38

Well, thank you so much. And thanks to the audience. I'm sorry I couldn't get around to all your questions. This is a fascinating discussion, and just a reminder, we have a webinar tomorrow on the Middle East and another on Thursday. And actually, in the chat, I don't know if I mentioned this, you will find links to the Quincy report on the Georgian elections, and also to an article on that subject. So if any of you, I hope, can attend on Thursday, you might also want to read those. Norman, thank you so much. This was a fascinating discussion of a really important subject, and I look forward to discussing it with you again in future.