

Neutrality Studies

—In International Relations—

My research project focuses on the study of neutrality as a concept in International Relations. I am trying to understand the behavior of neutral actors in inter-state conflicts and their impact on the genesis and development of wars.

This topic used to be a significant concern of historians, scholars of international law, and political scientists but has fallen out of fashion after WWII. The Cold War's bipolar security environment made the law and logic of neutrality—inventions of earlier centuries—largely redundant. Although the post-1945 era saw the unprecedented flourishing of nonaligned states, this loosely defined sister concept has also lost most of its usefulness after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dawn of the current unipolar security architecture.

Nevertheless, the historical record suggests that neutrality policies are 'natural' occurrences that survive not in the heads of theoreticians but on the chessboard of international power-politics. The nature of neutrality, meanwhile, changes with the nature of war, which would suggest that new approaches to war breed new approaches to neutrality. But do these observations hold true under any security environment? What are the limits of neutrality policies in terms of their systemic security function? What are their potentials? What are the humanitarian implications for the twenty-first century? And how are new neutral actors interpreting and managing their policy choices?

To investigate this complex of questions, I am using a mix of historical case studies combined with statistical analysis of different neutralities over the past centuries. The spectrum of this research project is broad, and I am as much interested in uncovering particular issues of individual neutralities, as I want to understand the global ramifications of neutral positions during negotiations, conflict, war, and in the global nuclear regime. I am working on several sub-projects to approach the overall goal of this research.

In this presentation, I will focus on the major historical and conceptual issues to introduce the relevance and logic behind the study of neutrality.

