

# 'Neutrality: A really dead concept?' A reprise

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## Abstract

This article approaches 'neutrality' as an essentially contested concept and traces its meaning and purpose over centuries-long historical timelines and situated political, societal and security contexts. It distinguishes neutrality from other concepts such as 'neutralization' 'non-belligerency', 'non-alignment', 'military non-alignment', 'military neutrality' and 'non-allied'. The article explains the politics of defining neutrality in the current European political and legal landscape and in the context of shifting definitions and practices of war, peace, security and state sovereignty. This episteme-based analysis focuses on changes to neutrality in accordance with the rise and fall of particular empires and international actors over time, and changes to its status linked to the development and reification of particular meta-theoretically-based subfields of International Relations and Political Science, setting the background to this special issue of *Cooperation and Conflict*. A renewed emphasis on the normative aspects of neutrality (i.e. the role of domestic values, politics, preferences, history and mass publics in foreign policy formulation) is achieved by employing a range of perspectives, characterized by increased pluralism in levels of analysis and theoretical approaches. Through this pluralism, authors engage with (1) the strategic and normative drivers underpinning the norm of neutrality, (2) the potential for neutrals to serve as norm entrepreneurs in the field of peace promotion, (3) the tenuous legal status of elites' quasi-neutral foreign policy constructions underpinned by tensions between discourses and practices and (4) the discursive strategies underpinning the move from neutral states' traditional forms of neutrality to what is termed 'post-neutrality' in the current politico-legal context.

## Keywords

Conceptualizations, epistemes, military non-alignment, neutrality, security

In this journal, in the year 1999, Laurent Goetschel explored whether neutrality was a 'really dead concept', noting that it persisted as a principled belief and could contribute to European security cooperation in a unique manner. Separating the legal and political core of neutrality, he argued along broadly constructivist lines that the norms of neutrality

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and their importance to national identity meant there was still something left of value. Indeed, this was manifest as neutral states actively contributed to European security, notably in terms of conflict management and the promotion of non-military security solutions (Jørgensen, 1999; Ingebritsen, 2002; Eliasson, 2004; Miles, 2005; Strömviik, 2006; Väyrynen, 2006; Björkdahl, 2007). Since the end of bipolarity, and as Member States of the European Union (EU), Austria, Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Malta now devise their security policies in line with broader European priorities, and, subsequently, neutrality has been slowly disappearing as a description and concept of security policy for these European states, which now define their status as *militarily non-aligned* as opposed to *neutral* (Sundelius, 1994; Miles, 1995; Goetschel, 1999; Ojanen, 2000, 2002, 2003; Ojanen et al., 2000; Tiilikainen, 2001; Munro, 2005; Möller and Bjereld, 2010).

As a result of the altered external security environment and international structure, the purpose of neutrality has come under scrutiny. Non-territorial security problems and greater interdependence have redirected the security priorities and practices of the militarily non-aligned states, as seen in the restructuring of their defence forces and greater involvement in European and NATO security initiatives and operations. In this context, it is certainly questionable whether neutrality or military non-alignment has any particular strategic or security value, and, if it does, whether it currently comes in the form of their engagement in wider security initiatives and working alongside NATO and other European partners. In formal terms, the European militarily non-aligned states also refer to the EU in their security formulations, with countries such as Austria and Sweden arguing that membership of the EU means that any claim to neutrality is unsustainable. Commitment to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the *acquis* of the EU appear to rule out the possibility of being neutral, and as solidarity and mutual defence obligations were increasingly mooted as an integral part of the profile of the EU's foreign and security policy there appears to be little space to be neutral, particularly in the post-Cold War context where the concept of sovereignty is more porous, security threats are no longer confined to military and territorial matters, and non-state actors play a greater role. It is therefore unsurprising that much of the scholarly work on the foreign and security policies of these states works on the assumption that neutrality is part of the past, and even the current status of being militarily non-aligned is a temporary phase before these states commit fully to NATO and European defence initiatives (Dahl, 1997; Dörfer, 1997; Penttilä, 1999; Jopp and Ojanen, 1999; Ries, 1999; Vaahtoranta and Forsberg, 2000; Forsberg and Vaahtoranta, 2001; Sivenon, 2001; Winnerstig, 2001; Honkanen, 2002; Pursiainen and Saari, 2002; Ferreira-Pereira, 2007: 318; see also the various contributions in Bailes et al., 2006).

Additionally, against the background of a global war on terrorism, neutrality appears distinctly antiquated and state-centric. As security becomes more complex, the demarcation between internal and external security erodes the neat lines of sovereign division that provided the rationale and context for neutrality. For the militarily non-aligned member states of the EU, this takes on deeper resonance and has policy implications. Ekengren observes that even though the EU's response to 9/11 was essentially 'non-military in nature', it goes far deeper in integrating a form of 'functional security' designed to protect a different referent, aiming to secure democracy and, governance and to safeguard the functions of governmental and societal institutions, further cemented

through the solidarity clause. The shift to a concept of ‘comprehensive security’ in the Nordic countries, for instance, moves away from military defence to safeguarding the basic functions of society (2006: 274–81; see also Forsberg, 2002; Rieker, 2002; Möller and Bjereld, 2010).

Despite these significant changes, both to the structure of international politics and to the widening of the meaning and scope of security *per se*, these states still find it politically sensitive and problematic simply to make the final move officially to join a military alliance. Instead, the shift has been gradual and, at the present time of writing, still inchoate, so it would be limiting intellectually simply to assume that the story of neutrality has concluded. The changing doctrines of neutrality over the centuries bear testament to this. This special issue aims to explore these aspects of change and the possibilities that remain in conceptualizing neutrality by expanding on some of the themes that emerge from this current juncture in the policy positions and scope of action available to militarily non-aligned states in the European context. Before elaborating the special issue’s scope and methodology, however, it is important to provide some conceptual clarifications about the various labels and definitions of neutrality, before briefly discussing some key aspects of its development as a concept and practice, and how the available literature on neutrality analyses and conceptualizes it, before discussing our own approach and contribution.

## The definition(s) and the historical lineage of neutrality

### *Definitions of neutrality*

In the current era of *post-neutral states*, *former neutrals*, *militarily non-aligned states* and *non-allied states*, it is unsurprising that confusion abounds over the terminology and labels used to denote this particular foreign and security policy stance.<sup>1</sup> As these states tried gradually to distance themselves from the Cold War baggage associated with neutrality, since the 1990s the above terms have increasingly come into use. These labels, however, sometimes denote different practices and contexts, which should be read in conjunction with the historical development of neutrality which follows.

At its simplest, neutrality means not taking part in a war. Over time, the development of neutrality as a concept and a practice has gained legal definition and acceptance, and has been adaptable to the changing international system and central ideas of what constitutes security. Expectedly, variations in how neutrality has come to be defined also merit attention – at certain historical junctures, the form of neutrality takes on a certain shape, commensurate with the dominant ideas about war and security prevalent at the time. The way in which neutrality is defined is important because the variations in meaning convey the scope of neutrality, and, at times, certain descriptors, such as non-alignment, are used interchangeably with terms intended to define a different position.

In formal terms, *permanent* or *perpetual* neutrality refers to a state maintaining neutrality in times of both war and peace. Often, this form of neutrality is codified constitutionally or in treaty form. Swiss neutrality is cited as an example of this form of neutrality, since the status was recognized by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (Ørvik, 1953: 28; Ogley, 1970: 3). ‘Classic’ or ‘traditional’ neutrality is activated when war erupts and is

often not codified, as in the example of Sweden (Wahlbäck, 1986; Ross, 1989: 7), but differs from *ad hoc* neutrality, which refers to a state wishing to keep out of a particular war as it chooses (Ogley, 1970: 2–4).

Important distinctions also need to be made when it comes to the categories of neutralization and non-alignment. The former generally refers to the status of neutrality as imposed on a state by outside powers. This can be either voluntary or coercive (see Beyer and Hofmann [this issue] for a discussion of this). Belgium and Luxembourg count as examples, and Austrian neutrality has been regarded as a case of neutralization because neutrality was agreed as a condition of its independence after the Second World War. Likewise, Finnish neutrality has largely been interpreted in this manner because its neutrality originated in the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (TFCMA) with its larger neighbour, the USSR. However, in the case of Finland, neutrality became unjustly associated with ‘Finlandization’, or dominance by its Soviet neighbour. This has been a sensitive point in Finnish history and politics, and the label of neutralization is often one that such states reject. Hence, the origins and manner in which neutrality comes about are quite significant for how the concept develops in each case (Maude, 1982; Rusi, 1987). Neutrality, even if externally imposed in origin, can develop into a ‘customised’ variety, as Hakovirta elaborated: from the laws or rules of neutrality, states can customize neutrality according to their specific interpretations, producing the norm of neutrality (1988: 18), which can become ‘crystallised’.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, *non-belligerency* is also a category associated with neutrality, but requires careful qualification. Where neutrality means non-participation and impartiality, non-belligerency means a state is not involved in a conflict, but favours one side over another (Raymond, 1997: 125). An example of this is Sweden, which, because of its close relations with Finland, adopted a position of non-belligerency rather than neutrality in the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union 1939–40 (Häggblöf, 1960). Another is the US, which, prior to its entry into the Second World War, gave its support to Britain with the Lend-Lease Act of 1941 (Wilson, 1941; Wright, 1941). Similarly, being in a military alliance does not stop an actor from adopting non-belligerency towards a conflict unless the conflict involves an attack on one of the signatories of the Alliance Treaty.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most important distinction between definitions needs to be noted with regard to non-alignment. Since the 1990s, states such as Finland and Sweden have described their security policies as ‘militarily non-aligned’ or in the Irish case as ‘military neutrality’ or in the Austrian case ‘non-allied’. There is a vital difference between these descriptions. *Non-alignment* derives from the context of the Cold War. It is not a legal position, merely a political one (Ogley, 1970: 3; Raymond, 1997), and meant avoiding entanglement in superpower conflicts (Lyon, 1963: 15–16; Vukadinovic, 1989: 40–2; Widmer, 1989: 21). This, however, did not preclude non-aligned states from participating in conflicts affecting their own national interest that did not involve the superpowers (see the special issue on non-alignment of International Studies (1981), for numerous articles). The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) represented such states and maintained a presence in the UN as part of the Neutral and Non-Aligned Group (N+N Group). To be militarily non-aligned, militarily neutral or non-allied, as it is now described by various states, simply means that the state is not a member of a military alliance.

Relevant to these definitions, there are also distinctions between neutrality as a *legal* position and as a *political* position. In the former, this concerns the formal rights and responsibilities of neutral states, enshrined in international law under the Hague Conventions, during wartime. The political meaning of neutrality has come to include a number of state attitudes and policy practices during peacetime, so the evolution of neutrality as a peacetime concept in the twentieth century goes beyond its legal meaning (Andrén, 1991: 69, 74). As Karsh puts it, the political approach to neutrality is ‘far more permissive than the jurisprudential’. Neutrality as a political meaning is less instrumental – violations of neutrality might be acceptable because such transgressions of international law and neutral state obligations might serve underlying interests such as protecting sovereignty or state survival (Karsh, 1988: 5). Writing in 1998, Vagts conceded that the Hague Conventions were outdated, having a ‘slightly musty quality to them’ (1998: 84), but the political position of neutrality is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon. As Vagts suggests, rules regarding neutrality have a temporal aspect, so it is a vital critical endeavour to trace how they shift and change within particular contexts – the following section explores the historical development of neutrality as a concept and practice to this end.

### *Historical lineage*

The definitions of neutrality and distinctions between the different labels suggest that it is a modern phenomenon. The codification of neutrality coincides with the rise of the state, and, in its modern context, neutrality is indeed a state-centric concept.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as a concept and practice, neutrality predates the sovereign state. The possibility of adopting a neutral stance is observed in antiquity, and while not formalized in terms of specific legal instruments and codifications in the absence of a concept of international law, neutrality was not only practised but a ‘surprisingly common feature’ of ancient Greek warfare (Bauslaugh, 1991: xix). One of the earliest lessons in power politics has neutrality as a central part of its narrative, as demonstrated in the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War. The Dialogue is revealing not simply because it establishes the much-cited maxim of power (‘the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must’), it also demonstrates that minor actors may not opt for great power protection (despite its consequences). The Melians are chastized by the Athenians for rejecting the opportunity for alliance in exchange for security. Neutrality was not considered a rational security choice and the Melians ‘incur disgrace more disgraceful as the companion of error, than when it comes as the result of misfortune’ (Thucydides, 1951: 331–6).

Over the centuries, neutrality occupied a morally suspect category: during the Middle Ages, religious and imperial unity defined political relations (Rubin, 1988: 14) and jurists debated the acceptability of neutrality in the context of just war (even Grotius, who accepted a neutral position, privileged the justness of the cause over the right to be neutral) (Ørvik, 1953: 10–12; Ross, 1989; Walzer, 2006). Indeed, prior to the state, it was difficult to support a neutral stance; neutrality was often analogized in terms of the individual – just as a person could not be neutral if another needed assistance, it was difficult to see what Walzer called the ‘moral basis’ of neutrality: ‘In both political and moral life, the “neuter” is not a person one instinctively likes’ (2006: 235).

In formal terms, it was trade rather than morals that elevated the status of neutrality at the end of the fifteenth century. This period marked the opening of vast new seas: Britain, Spain and Portugal were discovering new lands in the Americas and this set the stage for keen commercial rivalry at sea. Attempts to claim sovereignty of the seas prompted the development of legal rules to overcome the anarchic situation. Maritime law gave neutral ships rights and obligations to protect trade, and the rise of positive international law and the development of the Westphalian system shifted the focus away from the just war doctrine, elevating states and recognizing their interests (Brown, 2007: 60). The *Consolato del mare* is the earliest full statement of neutral maritime rights, a set of rules that was required to deal with the actions of private merchants at war with one another. The establishment of state navies during the seventeenth century marked a turning point in the development of neutrality, as state navies began to assume control of the seas. The precarious responsibility of private, merchant men-of-war to defend themselves (that had led to the practice of private reprisals for attacks on armed merchant trading ships) was replaced by the 'collective responsibility of the sovereign state' (Jessup and Deák, 1935: 16).

Although interests dictated how well the treaties were honoured, neutral and belligerent rights were largely crystallized through the medium of treaties of this time, both in terms of the substantive law that states, defines and regulates rights, and the adjective law that sets out the methods of enforcing rights, e.g. compensation decided through prize courts. Despite these rules, belligerents regularly violated neutral shipping. Since the early seventeenth century, neutral states banded together and formed armed leagues to protect neutral commerce, such as the First League of Armed Neutrality in 1780, which formed in response to British incursions on neutral shipping during the U.S. War of Independence. The Second League of Armed Neutrality (1800) prepared the ground for what would later develop – armed neutrality and rights and duties (Karsh, 1988: 16–17; Ross, 1989: 6–7). Even so, during this time, neutrality was not practised uniformly (Jessup and Deák, 1935: 21–2). The eighteenth century saw limits on the partiality of neutrals introduced. During the Napoleonic Wars, aid to a belligerent was considered a breach of neutrality, and partiality was justified only if the action was taken due to a prior treaty obligation. It was during the nineteenth century that neutrality became recognized as a concept that could be used to satisfy moral 'natural law', in particular to accomplish humanitarian purposes. The Congress of Vienna (1815) gave weight to the right to practise neutrality as a strategic policy and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 established the rights and duties of neutrals (Ørvik, 1953: 11–32; Karsh, 1988: 18).

The Hague Conventions assumed a system of international relations where war was inescapable, but would not involve all great powers in a systemic global war. The laws stipulate that the territory of neutral states is inviolable: belligerents cannot use neutral territory for transit of troops or war supplies, or operate bases on neutral territory. Neutral states must treat belligerents with equal impartiality and resist attempts by belligerents to violate its neutrality (Hague Conventions, Section V, 1907; Jessup and Deák, 1935; Leonard, 1988). The neutral state was obliged to observe impartiality, but not its citizens.<sup>5</sup> The Convention specified that measures taken by neutral powers to prevent violations of its neutrality could not be considered a hostile act.

Under the League of Nations, attitudes towards war changed again, as it was assumed the private conflicts of the past would never occur; instead, war would always be a



struggle of an outlaw nation against the united police forces of the world (Jessup, 1936: 149; Ogley, 1970). In this context, many neutral states indicated that they would gladly abandon neutrality if a workable international order could manage conflict. International solidarity, however, did not survive. The descent into the Second World War also proved to be a crucial test for neutral states, stretching the legal and moral dimensions of this status. Neutrality was deemed a failure – states such as Norway, Belgium and Denmark were unable to maintain their neutrality, and those that survived, such as Sweden, Switzerland and Spain, were deemed to have violated their duties to do so (Ogley, 1970: 16–20; Wylie, 2002). But during the Cold War, neutrals such as Sweden, Finland and Austria also carved out a distinctive role for themselves as mediators and bridge-builders, while supporting various peace initiatives (Sundelius, 1987; Hakovirta, 1988; Kruzel and Haltzel, 1989). The anti-imperialist values and postcolonial heritage of the Irish state, similarly, feature strongly in explanations of the success of Irish UN peacekeepers in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, neutrality was still seen as deviant behaviour, refusing to ‘play to the tune of balance of power politics’ (Albrecht et al., 1988: 1), but it had found a niche role in the bipolar international system.

Neutrality was not a passive foreign policy stance from the perspective of practising states: on the contrary, during the Cold War era of international tension, elites used their neutral states’ history, values, culture and past foreign policy practices to play an active role in decreasing tensions and contributing to mediation and conflict resolution. This form of ‘actorness’ was based on impartial and ethical rather than an interests-based diplomacy that was often associated with military intervention or the threat of intervention. These interpretations of the uses of neutrality inspired a ‘value judgement’ or normative distinction between neutrality as a ‘status negativus’ (realist, limited to own borders, inward looking, negative security conception) and a ‘status positivus’ (activist) (Binter, 1989; Stern, 1991: 22–6, 39–43).

Neutral ‘good offices’ also provided a different form of security when bipolarity came to an end. As the EU expanded and developed a political and security identity during the 1990s, the benefits of neutral ‘soft security’ expertise again found a place in the emerging European security architecture. In the context of civilian crisis management, for instance, the value of political neutrality ‘is key to maintaining access to affected populations for humanitarian actions, but is also important in other contexts, for example, when operating in former EU Member State colonies that are sensitive to direct interventions by Member States, even under an EU umbrella’ (Gourlay, 2006: 63). At the sub-state level of analysis, as a foreign policy stance, neutrality still has resonance with and value for the public in many European states, precisely because such practices of ‘active’ neutrality are seen as a way to exist independently and promote peace in the world. It is this normative element to neutrality that this special issue is deeply engaged with. Surprisingly, however, it has received less academic and scholarly attention in the literature on neutrality, which the following section covers.

## Locating neutrality in the academic literature

In the academic literature, European neutrality has traditionally been understood in a variety of ways. The bulk of the literature on neutrality is in international law, with legal scholars debating the rights and obligations accorded to neutrals historically and in

conflict situations where these rules were blurred in practice (Oppenheim, 1906; Vagts, 1998, 1999). It is a topic of the literature on 'small states' in the international system which enjoyed some popularity in the late 1950s–1980s (Baker Fox, 1959; Bjøl, 1968; Keohane, 1971; Väyrynen, 1971; Amstrup, 1976; Katzenstein, 1985; Wiberg, 1987; Gstöhl, 2002; Ingebritsen, 2006). As many of the European neutrals were classified as 'small states', they were often treated in the historical and realist International Relations (IR) literature as 'weak' and 'vulnerable' in a material and geopolitical sense (Handel, 1985; Karsh, 1988). The nature of 'Security Studies' as a US-oriented, policy-driven sub-discipline before the end of bipolarity (Walt, 1991) is perhaps a key reason why neutrality is strikingly absent as an appropriate and relevant subject of academic interest. In the post-war era, the dominant realist–rationalist focus was firmly on conflict and alliance-formation. Liberal internationalism's preference for collective security and lesser concern with territorial sovereignty meant that realism was the only dominant theory to have something to say about neutral states (Agius, 2006: 18). In this vein, much of the literature produced during the Cold War on neutral states focused on how these states could survive in the international system, and the sort of strategies they could adopt to do so, such as adapting to or influencing greater powers (Karsh, 1986; Mourtizen, 1988, 1991; Labs, 1992; Hanf and Soetendorp, 1998), while noting the novel positions and opportunities small states occupy and have at their disposal, even if this was limited (Liska, 1957; Vital, 1967, 1971; Rothstein, 1968; Väyrynen, 1971, 1989; Lindell and Persson, 1986; Reiter, 1994). Yet, outside this specific literature, there was some consideration of the specificity of small, neutral states and what they could contribute to international relations, particularly in conflict management and resolution, or even the possibility that they might offer an alternative to great power politics (Albrecht, 1981; Binter, 1985, 1992; Joenniemi, 1989).

In the wake of the 'neo-neo' theoretical slipstream, a substantial literature was forming around the linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Holbraad, 1991; Holsti, 1970). A growing number of (largely Scandinavian) scholars, using the Nordic countries as empirical examples, developed this theme: Kjell Goldmann and Ole Wæver developed models that avoided separating international and domestic politics; Wæver also put forward a 'Scandinavian Approach' for foreign policy analysis that offered an alternative to the dominance of Anglo-American models (Goldmann, 1989; Wæver, 1990). These approaches, which turned the focus more towards domestic values, preferences, history and norms, provided important insights into foreign and security policies of neutral states and helped to pave the way for the introduction of social constructivist thinking. From Goldmann, the intricate relationship between the Swedish Model and its norms and values at the domestic level were evident in its approach to the international realm, shaping Sweden into a particular type of neutral actor (1991). Kite likewise points to the importance of these traditions in the Nordic countries' participation in European security policy (2006: 107), while Miles has elaborated the importance of domestic pressures from a 'fusion' perspective (2006; see also Hallenberg, 2000). Further comparative studies bring in both domestic and ideational factors as well as strategic and security policy considerations: Engelbrekt's study of the impact of 'affluence values' in the security policies of Sweden and Finland envelope a range of differing security perspectives and approaches (2002). By 'layering' more nuanced and complex levels of analysis, these works point not only to



divergences between states, and the need to take specificity seriously, they also demonstrate that beliefs and values also have an important connection to more institutionalized methods of understanding foreign and security policy. In addition to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) contributions, including the recent advent of 'second generation' Foreign Policy Analysis with its sympathy for constructivist approaches to International Relations and focus on agency and sub-state levels of analysis (Carlsnaes and Smith, 1994; Neack et al., 1995; White, 1999; Manners and Whitman, 2000; Carlsnaes et al., 2004; Ekengren, 2004; Hudson, 2005), this permits a more nuanced look at the characteristics of neutrality and the states that practised it (see Miles, 2000; Phinnemore, 2000; Tonra, 2000). Möller and Bjereld (2010) have more recently attempted to meld interests and identity into a framework that sees neutrality as an 'institutionalized' idea, with causal and principled beliefs as well as strategic and security variables to show distinctions and convergences between Finland and Sweden.

In more recent times, the persistence of neutrality has been explained in works that adopt a constructivist or normative approach, as the dominant realist approach fails to explain why neutrality has persisted with the end of the Cold War. Here, these works asked the pivotal question: If it is axiomatic that neutrality was to dissipate once the structural conditions of the global system had altered, then why did it not disappear? Constructivists instead looked to domestic sources of identity in relation to neutrality policy and practices, building on the work already identified (above) that took domestic beliefs and values into consideration in foreign policy analysis, as well as public support for neutrality (McSweeney, 1985; Joenniemi, 1989; Bukovansky, 1997; Goetschel, 1999; Malmborg, 2001; Agius, 2006; Devine, 2006, 2008). This literature has also developed to focus on the question of what neutral or militarily non-aligned states can contribute to European security cooperation. Here, the literature on norm entrepreneurship has demonstrated that these states can indeed project their preferences to the EU level and, in doing so, impart some of their own normative preferences to complex issues of security and defence (Jørgensen, 1999; Ingebritsen, 2002; Rieker, 2004; Miles, 2005; Strömvik, 2006; Väyrynen, 2006; Björkdahl, 2007).

In recent years, historical accounts of neutrality have also been revisited. Reiter has argued that it is historical experience rather than rationality that determines the adoption of neutrality (1996: 3–13). In the 1990s in Sweden, government-sponsored reports were commissioned and state archives, which were only available to a few scholars, were opened up in an effort to learn more about Sweden's role as a neutral during the Second World War (Gilmour, 2010; see also Ries (2002) for a discussion on the Finnish side). This interest also aimed to critique the more positive associations of the neutral state as a 'good actor' in global politics (Johansson, 1997).

While the direction of military non-alignment appears to indicate that it will gradually lose salience at the elite level as European security cooperation deepens, neutrality (or whatever form it takes) is not yet dead. Its political and legal definition and scope have been stretched, possibly beyond the original intent and meaning, but it has not yet disappeared. It is at this juncture that this special issue takes its cue and finds much still to ignite scholarly interest. Although the historiographical vein is showing evidence of work still to be explored, one of the key contributions of this special issue is to develop the critical and post-structuralist perspectives in the debates on neutrality and non-alignment. Despite existing work on norm entrepreneurship and transfer, much of this literature does not go far enough in questioning the ontological and

epistemological aspects of research on neutrality that this special issue takes up, including the development of the peace potential of neutrality, a critical exploration of what it means to be militarily non-aligned, how the processes of definitional transitions matter, the politics of research reflected in significant gaps in research agendas and the ontological status and role of non-state agents. In the following methodological section, this is further elaborated.

## **Methodological approach**

This special issue is essentially concerned with the proposition that neutrality – or, as it is referred to by state elites, military non-alignment – is still worthy of academic investigation, because the premise that the ‘death of neutrality’ idea rests on relies on some uncontested assumptions about neutrality which require greater attention. The majority of the existing literature on neutrality is dominated by rationalist approaches and legal debates, with a proliferation of literature emerging during the Cold War. Largely concerned with the ability of neutral states to navigate their security preferences in a bipolar setting, these studies at times reflected the premises of the literature on small states and strategic studies. With the demise of bipolarity, the explosion of alternative approaches to rationalism emerged, but by this stage neutrality was widely seen to be a historical footnote. The setting that permitted neutrality to flourish was over, and from the 1990s neutral states sought to reformulate their security policies, particularly in the European context, in relation to EU membership. Neutrality as a subject of investigation via these new approaches was not widely taken up, except largely to examine how neutral states transition from being neutral to post-neutral. Alternative approaches have highlighted how identity, norms and values have become central in debates on European security.

The previous section of this Introduction highlighted changes to the concept of neutrality in terms of the rules it embodied, the behaviours it demanded from a range of actors and the values and norms that were associated with it over time. These questions of neutrality have traditionally been limited to a rationalist treatment in the academic literature and the methodologies deployed to understand neutrality, and its success or failure, have on the whole been positivist. Although acknowledged as state-centric, the study of neutrality can go beyond this using different approaches that support analysis of potential contributions to reducing conflict at the international level, and the agency of supra-state and sub-state actors in processes of conceptual and policy change.

This special issue contributes to the existing literature by extending some of the key debates that stem from these new research approaches into a focus on the dynamics of neutrality in the late Cold War and post-Cold War eras. The period of investigation coincides with an important shift in disciplinary attitudes to methodological pluralism, with the realization that traditional forms of social science enquiry are not adequate to wholly explain contemporary international relations. In the wake of the dominance of rationalist–materialist theories of IR, the late 1980s and early 1990s produced the themes of explanation and understanding in IR (Hollis and Smith, 1990) and the first forays into constructivism (Onuf, 1989) and poststructuralism (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989) that paved the way for developments in the late 1990s of critical constructivism (Weldes, 1999), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and poststructuralist

discourse theory (Torfinn, 1999) in analyses of foreign policy and international relations. Neutrality, traditionally a 'left-over' subject for theories of realism, deterrence and alliance formation, suffered lacunae in the analysis of important factors in foreign policy such as identity, and non-state agents such as mass publics, due to the dominance of objectivist, essentialist approaches (Devine, 2006). This is not to deny the continued importance of rationalist approaches, but to acknowledge that room has been made for alternative and complementary approaches to the dominant styles of scholarship that are (nearly) considered as acceptable. Journals traditionally resistant to critical approaches and unconventional research questions are starting to accept new issues in their research agendas, while the 'sociology' of IR (Wæver, 1998) and sub-disciplines such as Security Studies (Wæver, 2010) have been benchmarked and appear to be developing in more pluralist directions. Syntheses of theoretical and methodological approaches were always ascribed to e.g. deconstruction with constructivism (Connolly, 1989), but have recently experienced a significant renaissance; liberals (Moravcsik, 1997) seek a synthesis of liberal and constructivist theory; conventional constructivists (Wendt, 1992: 425) want strong liberals and constructivists to engage; while others promote realist constructivism (Barkin, 2003) and 'a serious dialogue by both mainstream scholars and conventional constructivists with critical constructivists' (Jacobsen, 2003: 60).

This special issue is a concerted reflection of these methodological and theoretical developments; for example, Beyer and Hofmann's approach combines rationalist and constructivist premises and Goetschel's expeditionary normative theoretical investigations engage with idealist aspects of neutrality and the role of neutrals as norm entrepreneurs, providing fertile theoretical ground for future evaluations of the foreign policy activities of neutral and non-aligned states. Devine blends aspects of several critical approaches including critical constructivism, critical discourse analysis and poststructuralist discourse theory in understanding the most recent changes to the concepts of neutrality and military non-alignment, while Agius takes on a singular post-positivist view of discourses on neutrality and post-neutrality across time.

## Summary of the contributions

Stephanie Hofmann and Jessica Beyer combine a rationalist and a norm-driven approach in explaining why and how the four neutral states, Austria, Sweden, Finland and Ireland, have unevenly loosened their understandings of neutrality in their journeys toward adherence to a norm termed non-alignment. Hofmann and Beyer identify four interrelated factors that explain variation in each state's willingness to modify its interpretation of neutrality vis-à-vis the new operational and strategic ambitions of the international military institutions of NATO and the EU: political elite opinion, public beliefs and values, the reasons for and timings of the institutionalization of neutrality (coerced or voluntary) and the form of institutionalization (*de jure* or *de facto*). Their study offers insights into the variable impact of European integration on the practices of European neutrality in terms of membership of international organizations and participation in military activities associated with NATO, the EU and the UN, attitudes to Europeanization and state behaviours, and the discursive use of the concept of neutrality at the elite level.

Laurent Goetschel moves beyond the traditional focus on the *realistic* functions of neutrality to examine how neutral states supported normative change in international relations by promoting humanitarian and human rights instruments, and by committing themselves to restrict and regulate the use of force in international relations. The *idealistic* functions of neutrality provided a value-basis for the policy itself and also underpinned the national political identity of neutral countries. Neutrality provides a comparative advantage in brokering new ideas in international relations, and this article investigates the opportunities afforded to neutral states to act as norm entrepreneurs and to contribute to norm development in highly sovereignty-sensitive areas, illustrating this argument with the example of peacebuilding.

Karen Devine investigates a set of paradoxical discursive claims as to the status of neutrality within the European Union: that neutrality has been re-conceptualized by elites in EU 'neutral' member states (specifically, Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) to the point of irrelevance and inevitable demise, and whether the 'military' concept of neutrality is not only compatible with, but also an integral part of, the CSDP. A blend of critical constructivist premises and poststructuralist discourse theoretic tools is used to analyse neutrality in elite discourses and public opinion data. A divergence in public 'active' and elite 'military' concepts of neutrality is found, with each embodying competing foreign policy agendas that are found to be either incompatible or competing with the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The article suggests that the incompatibility will eventually be reflected through the disappearance of 'non-alignment' in state discourses – and in the event that public opinion on neutrality appears to soften – paving the way for elites to sediment discourses of solidarity and the merits of the EU's 'global actor' ambitions.

This dovetails with the final article, where Christine Agius adopts a poststructuralist approach to the question of neutrality and considers how it is discursively constructed to provide different conditions of possibility for the post-neutrals' foreign policies and practices. Arguing that there is a 'politics of post-neutrality' at work, the article investigates an extensive range of meta-narratives that have animated and dominated the debates on neutrality over time, and examines how these discourses are used interchangeably to gradually remove neutrality as a viable security policy choice.

The articles in this special issue draw different conclusions about the viability and the longevity of European neutrality or military non-alignment in the future, but they also demonstrate that the debate about neutrality is far from over, as neutrality is a vibrant research subject suitable for a range of empirical and theoretical approaches and still resonates politically across levels of analysis. Even if one accepts that neutrality is for all intents and purposes legally 'dead' in many European states, some aspects of it stubbornly remain part of the remit of different political agents and continue to offer significant and alternative ways to think about security.

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## Notes

1. At the time of writing, as Sweden contributed fighterjets in a limited capacity to operations in Libya under NATO command, the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt announced: 'We don't call ourselves nonaligned, we never call ourselves neutral either.' In the same news item, the Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb likewise declared: 'We are not a neutral country, have not been so for the past 20 years. And we are not a militarily nonaligned country but we are a country which does not belong to a military alliance' (see Ritter, 2011).
2. Hakovirta argues that the more 'crystallized' the norm, the more a norm such as neutrality exists. 'Crystallization' is dependent on four factors: (1) degree of norm ambiguity due to belligerent evaluation of neutral behaviour according to different criteria or due to varying interpretations and practices of neutrality by neutrals; (2) degree of consistency in relation to the degree of dependency on norm objects or situations; (3) degree of internal compatibility (i.e. whether exercising one norm means violating another norm) and (4) degree of extension of scope (in terms of actors/behaviours) or domain (in terms of circumstances/situations) of norms (1988: 22–23, 32).
3. We thank one of the anonymous referees for this point.
4. The centrality of the state has not prevented neutrals from working together at the international level, as evidenced in the leagues of armed neutrality and the Neutral and Non-aligned Group in the UN. The question of how neutrality can be applied or enacted at the international level, nonetheless, remains an interesting one that is beyond the scope of this discussion.
5. Similarly, the first multilateral Geneva Convention of 1864 provided for hospitals and ambulances to be 'neuter', that is, to be protected and respected by belligerents as long as they were used by the sick or wounded and not occupied by military forces. It became possible to incorporate moral arguments in the design of a concept of neutrality that would maximize the values implicit in the moral system of the international order.
6. There is potential tension between attempts by the post-neutral EU members to exercise aid delivery using this distinct status, as that action may result in the loss of that same status through engagement in regional, European Union flag missions, should the aid recipients view all EU personnel as quasi-'Imperial soldiers' (Duggan, 1991: 272).

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