

Wendelin Ettmayer ()*

NEUTRALITY AND MORALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In October 1955, the Austrian National Council passed the Federal Constitutional Law on the neutrality of our country. According to this law, Austria was to remain neutral in future wars and not allow foreign bases on its territory. Furthermore, Austria refrained from participating in military alliances.

In this way, in the middle of the Cold War, a contribution was to be made to peace and security not only for one's own country but for the whole region. This became very clear when Vienna applied to join the European Communities a generation later, where it says: "In preparing this application, Austria proceeds from the preservation of its internationally recognised status of perpetual neutrality, as well as from the continuation of its policy of neutrality as a specific contribution to the maintenance of peace and security in Europe".

This was successful: the decision was made for an "active neutrality policy". In contrast to Switzerland, Austria still joined the United Nations in 1955; Vienna became a place of encounter, where spectacular summit meetings were also held; an official UN headquarters and a venue for essential conferences that were to help reduce Cold War tensions.

And above all, one thing: while in the immediate neighbourhood at least one uprising or revolution took place every decade, Austria was already able to contribute to peace in the whole of Central Europe through internal peace in the country. Moreover, the trust in Austria was so great that exponents of our country were entrusted with leading functions in the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Austrian soldiers participated in numerous UN peacekeeping missions. Neutrality became part of the Austrian identity.

All these political goals were set in the spirit of Realpolitik and Staatsräson, which have shaped the nature of international relations for a thousand years. One of the characteristics of realpolitik is the inversion of values: behaviour that would be condemned in the strongest terms in the private sphere is given the highest honour when it serves the power of the state. In civilian life, for example, there is the

commandment "Thou shalt not kill"; for the destruction of enemies on the battlefield, on the other hand, one receives high medals. Theft and robbery are also punished by every penal law. For the sake of realpolitik and reasons of state, countries were divided and the seizure of whole swathes of land legitimised. Reasons of state and realpolitik could turn private sins into public virtues.

This reversal of values arises very clearly from Machiavelli's way of thinking and from the theory on which he based international relations. For if the independence of a state is only guaranteed as long as it prevails in struggle against the others, and as long as struggle is the basis of inter-state relations, then everything that serves its own interests must be permitted. Rules thus only apply as long as they serve these higher goals.

Now, especially after the horrors of the Second World War, a new way of thinking has developed. Violations of humanity and human rights are condemned in the strongest terms. Politicians and soldiers who now commit only some of those human rights violations, as did our "greats" in history, are accused of abuse of power and violation of basic rights. Their impeachment and conviction is demanded, sometimes enforced.

This is a good thing and it is therefore understandable that the claim is made, as now in the Ukraine war, that there should be no neutrality towards a policy that is brutally aimed at expanding one's own sphere of power. This is especially true when there are forces on the other side that are striving to fight for the good in the world, for law and order. Thus, questions arise: Must the neutral always side with those who morally justify their policies? To what extent does domestic democracy demand corresponding behaviour in foreign policy? Who is a free rider?

1. must a neutral support a morally based policy?

Even the American Secretary of State at the time, John Foster Dulles, was not enthusiastic about Austrian neutrality. Even at that time, communism was to be fought as an expression of evil in the world. The USA always saw itself as "a country with a mission". Peace and democracy were to be brought into the world based on its own military strength. In recent years, this tendency has been reinforced when, in both domestic and foreign policy, the "good Lord" has become more and more involved in one's own political goals. Jim Wallis describes this very well in his book "God's Politics-A New Vision for Faith and Politics in America".

George W. Bush was not the first and only American president who was convinced that he always did the right thing because his policies were grounded in deep religious conviction. The old Calvinist mandate to rid the world of evil experienced a new flowering. It was used to justify unilateral power politics as well as preventive wars. National political goals and the will of God became one. Every war thus became a moral struggle in which ultimately all means were permitted. "Moral", however, is only the justification, not the implementation of the respective policy. George F. Kennan wrote in Foreign Affairs: "The conduct of the foreign relations of a great country is a practical, not a moral, exercise".

In Vietnam, poison gas was used to such an extent that there were no more normal births in the affected regions for generations. For the liberation of Afghanistan, the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the flight of millions of people was accepted, and Iraq was plunged into wild chaos under the slogan "democracy-building". People like General William G. Boykin are firmly convinced that the CIA and US Special Forces are serving Christianity's fight against evil. This is despite the fact that the USA has never ratified essential human rights covenants of the United Nations and has even fought the establishment of the International Criminal Court. In return, opponents who are to be eliminated are stylised as a "new Hitler", such as Muammar Qadhafi, Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic, and now Vladimir Putin, even if they have cooperated with them in the meantime when this served their own interests.

For a neutral, therefore, the question is not whether one should adopt an equidistance between "good" and "evil", but whether one must side with "the good", even if its policies are in practice carried out just as much in terms of power politics as those of the other side. Especially states with a sense of mission, which all great powers have - from the "mission civilisatrice" to the "white man's burden" - always find a moral justification for their political actions. However, this is then very often shaped by realpolitik and reasons of state and in practice differs little from how wars were traditionally waged and peace concluded.

2. To what extent does domestic democracy require corresponding behaviour in foreign policy?

When it comes to promoting democracy in the world, the question is which is better: to build democratic institutions at home; or to pounce on other countries under the pretext of "democracy-building".

Now, the USA's sense of mission is based to a very decisive extent on bringing "democracy" into the world. The founding fathers were already convinced of this, and alliances were formed and wars waged for this purpose. In fact, after the Second World War, democratic institutions and democratic rules of the game were successfully established under American auspices in both Western Europe and Japan. Moreover, a theory was developed according to which democracies would hardly wage war among themselves. This is another incentive to establish as many democratic states as possible in the world.

However, as much as Americans' enthusiasm for "more democracy in the world" has increased since the end of the Cold War, it can also be said that criticism of political institutions at home has increased greatly in recent decades. For example, Joseph S. Nye, then Dean at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, published a text years ago entitled "In Government We don't trust". In it, he argues that trust in America's political institutions has already declined sharply in the last decades of the 20th century; that citizens are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their respective governments; and that Vietnam and Watergate have already contributed to this development.

Another reason cited by Nye is that the scope of government has greatly expanded, resulting in waste and inefficiency. Moreover, citizens have become more critical in the information society. As early as 1996, only 10% of Americans had great confidence in Congress; 31% still had great confidence in the Supreme Court; while the military was even held in high esteem by 47%. The overall economic development as well as the perceived personal material situation also play a role in the assessment of those in power, who are also losing more and more authority.

Now, one can argue that criticism of one's own political system is an expression of a living democracy. That is correct. However, domestic political developments in the US have become so polarised in recent years that more and more authors are writing about the failure of the political system. In practice, a political civil war has been

raging in the USA for years. The president is denied the legitimacy to govern by the other side. Supreme Court rulings on socio-political issues further polarise the situation. In many companies, workers find it difficult to organise themselves in trade unions.

It is therefore not only about criticism of the political system, the system itself is increasingly being called into question. In their book "How Democracies Die", professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have shown how democracies in individual countries have turned into authoritarian regimes and have also identified corresponding developments in the USA. They see one major reason in the fact that the social, ethnic and cultural basis of the parties has changed accordingly. Today, Republicans and Democrats not only represent different political programmes, but also live in different communities and different cultures. In this context, the religious component has a very strong influence on the values represented in each case.

The extent of this upheaval is evident from the fact that the proportion of non-white people in the USA was only 10% in 1950; in 2014 it was already 38% and will form the majority in 2044. The right of minorities to vote or the question of immigration are thus correspondingly contested. The media play a decisive role in polarising the political discussion and socio-political debates.

Now it is a political decision of the USA to want to impose its own political system worldwide even under these circumstances, if necessary also in the form of armed "alliances for democracy". It is another question whether Austria should give up its neutrality to participate in this.

There is no doubt that Austria's political life has been marked by various turbulences in recent years. But the political system of our country is characterised by the fact that there are not many states in which the formal possibilities for co-determination are as pronounced as they are here: we not only have a parliament at the federal level, but also nine provincial parliaments and hundreds of local councils. Through works councils and staff councils, there is the possibility of co-determination in companies and departments. Chambers are supposed to enable individual occupational groups to have a say, and ombudsmen exist at the most diverse levels and in the most diverse areas. The question naturally arises as to whether and how these institutions are filled with life through corresponding active engagement and actually contribute to a political quality of life. But the institutional possibilities exist.

After all, Switzerland has succeeded in developing a "democratic radiance" far beyond its own borders. For a long time, Sweden was considered a model for the expansion of the welfare state. In terms of its institutional possibilities, Austria has the chance, as a living democracy, to develop a radiant power that also has an effect on the outside world. Giving up neutrality is not necessary for this. In any case, these possibilities are more effective than "democracy-building" after armed incursions.

3. who is a free rider?

Austria is repeatedly accused of doing too little for its security as a neutral country. Thus, our country would be a free rider, others would have to bear the burden for our defence.

Now, it is very difficult to determine how much military expenditure a country must have in order to guarantee its security. How strong does an army have to be to be able to win a battle, a war. Before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, there was a discussion about this. When the 150,000 soldiers then deployed were very strong in defeating the Iraqi army but unable to establish a peaceful order, there was another discussion about how many additional troops would be needed to do so. The question remained contentious.

Now one could read in the New York Times (of 29 June 2022) under the headline "Europe has an American Problem" that all Europeans are "freeriders" because they rely on American military largesse in security matters. In fact, the US already spent \$800 1 billion on its armed forces in 2021, which is about 40% of the military spending of the whole world. Within the framework of a "Grand Strategy", the USA repeatedly determines which goals it wants to achieve internationally. For example, as early as 1950, the National Security Council adopted the famous NSC 68 strategy, in which the containment of the Soviet Union was set as a goal. President Bill Clinton's developed the concept of "humanitarian intervention" for his term in office. In another "National Security Strategy", the right of the USA to wage preventive wars was laid down. This then became the policy document for the "global war on terror".

Now, it is a political decision of a world power like the USA how they want to secure their interests worldwide and use the military for this. But is everyone a free rider who does not participate in a US "Grand Strategy"? European and American interests do not always have to be in harmony. Already years ago, even in media that are

connected to America, one could read: "The USA is isolating Russia from Europe". (Die Welt; 3 November 2017). Is such a policy in Austria's interest? In connection with this, it must be noted that American foreign policy is primarily determined by the Pentagon, i.e. by the military. Diplomats often have little say even in important decisions.

Even close allies judge them accordingly. For example, 83% of Canadians believe that Washington always puts American interests first. An exponent of American politics, such as Jesse Helms at the time, clearly stated in a keynote speech to the United Nations that an international organisation must not interfere with American sovereignty.

This does not mean that this policy has not also found supporters in Europe. Even Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the "old" and the "new Europe" after the end of the Cold War. What was new was that the former countries of Eastern and Central Europe had been freed from communist rule and in many cases adopted a nationalist, aggressive stance against Russia. This coincided with American interests in extending NATO to Russia's borders; curbing trade with Russia; and unilaterally dissolving treaties, such as the ABM Treaty.

While in Western Europe a "revolution in inter-state relations" succeeded with the founding of the Council of Europe, traditional enmities were transformed into friendships and confrontation into cooperation, the USA stuck to a traditional foreign policy based on military strength. The former communist fringes did become members of the Council of Europe, as did Russia, but a reconciliation, such as between Germany and France after the Second World War, did not come about. Resentment, which in some cases went back to the time of the Tsars, was too great in the Baltic States, in Poland or in former Soviet republics. Appearances by leading American politicians, such as those of John McCain or Lindsey Graham under the slogan "Your fight is our fight" further inflamed the mood. It is clear that policies aimed at raising tensions must lead to an arms build-up. Another question is whether Austria should support such a policy.

Austrian foreign policy should be oriented towards peace, security and the well-being of our country, quite in line with the other members of the European Union. Supporting the global ambitions of a great power does not necessarily have to be part of this policy. As far as Russia, for example, is concerned, a policy of

cooperation has proved better than confrontation for decades. "More security" does not necessarily have to go hand in hand with "more armament", but can certainly also be based on more diplomacy. Such a policy has distinguished neutral Austria in recent decades, which is why there is no reason to depart from this proven model.

(*) Dr Wendelin Ettmayer; former MP & Ambassador; author; www.wendelinettmayer.at