On the Meaning and Uses of Neutrality

NILS ANDRÉN

Andrén, N. On the Meaning and Uses of Neutrality. *Cooperation and Conflict, XXVI,* 1991, 67–83.

This paper deals with four aspects of neutrality. The *first* is the changing use of the word — from a purely legal concept to a broad political term. Behind this transformation lies a number of factors related to the development of the post-World War II political system. The *second* aspect bears on the use and understanding of the concept in Swedish foreign policy — and its ensuing role in domestic politics. The *third* aspect concerns the various kinds of judgement to which the Swedish policy of neutrality has from time to time been exposed. One conclusion is that Swedish policy of neutrality is criticized both on the basis of imprecise definitions of neutrality and because of ambivalence in Sweden's own application of the principle. A *fourth* and final observation deals with the possibilities for a revised paradigm for neutrality as an effect of the new developments in the European security order.

1. THE ILLUSIVE CONCEPT OF NEUTRALITY

Neutrality and the basic conditions for its external credibility — in diplomacy, defence, economic self-reliance, etc. — were for a long time undisputed axioms in Swedish security politics. Their major foundations were historical tradition, restrictions imposed by the Cold War bloc confrontation and, gradually, the importance of an unaligned or "neutral" profile as a platform both for diplomatic activity in the United Nations and in relation to the emerging Third World. The character and significance of these factors have been greatly transformed in recent years.

The extent to which the Swedish policy of neutrality was taken for granted may be illustrated by the fact that its popular support was not even tested in official opinion polls until the 1980s. Only when it became fashionable to claim that changes on the international scene created new conditions for unaligned states also, it became, at long last, essential to test the popular support for the predominant neutrality component in the basic, national security policy.[1]

The polls reveal a very solid support for the traditional security stance. The change between 1988 and 1990 is modest but the tendency is almost dramatic. More important, however, is the growing recognition that the political implications of the policy of neutrality have changed; they are not the same in the post-Cold-War era as during the Cold War itself. This fact was recently underlined by the Swedish Foreign Minister (Sten Andersson) in the *Riksdag* debate on foreign policy (20 February 1991). All in all, neutrality is developing into a different political animal; having been hailed as a "sacred cow" for almost half a century, this is a process that is difficult to admit or accept.

The new situation is the result of various factors — the impact of European détente and the growing hope for a durable, albeit not eternal, realm of peace or at least the substitution of a stable system of Common Security for the old monolithic bloc dichotomy. The new developments in the European Community are another factor. Old and new Swedish critics have become less restrained, more

fearless. Basically, there are two types of criticism involving the policy of neutrality.

One type is related to the long irreconcilable clash between two major Swedish political interests: to reap the economic benefits of participation in European integration and to preserve the credibility of the policy of neutrality between rival power blocs. In these contexts — to which Mr Andersson's remarks refer — many traditional analysts deny their incompatibility in a new Europe, while more "modern" critics argue in favour of changing the priority, putting Europe before neutrality. The critics of old style security concepts have met with remarkable response during the second half of 1990. In a longer perspective, this is a surprising and fundamental change in the perceptions of the conditions for Swedish foreign and security policy.

Some major explanations for the new European policy, adopted by the *Riksdag* in December 1990, seem to be obvious: (1) The long recognized need for Sweden to avoid all kinds of discrimination by the EC; (2) the emigration to the Common Market area of a growing number of major Swedish industries; (3) the emergence of a clear majority in public opinion in favour of Swedish EC-membership; (4) the international détente, which seems to have removed the fears that a Swedish membership would stir Soviet doubts in the genuineness of Sweden's security policy; and (5) the need in a situation of serious domestic economic crisis to make a gesture capable of restoring credence in the soundness of Sweden's economic policy.

The other type of criticism is normally directed against alleged or real inconsistencies in the actual conduct of the policy of neutrality. These critics often belong to the "conservative" (without party-connotation) or traditional Swedish school of security policy. The targets of the criticsm are past aberrations as much as present policies and actions. This kind of appraisal can lead to different conclusions. For the traditionalists, it stirs demands for a more balanced and consistent policy of neutrality. Sometimes, however, the contradictions have also been cited by the modern critics as proof that a considerable freedom of action — at least officially —is, or has always been, compatible with the Swedish policy of neutrality. Their conclusion is that Swedish liberty of action is in fact wider than officially assumed; hence the government need not shun policies that have normally been avoided for fear that they would undermine the credibility of the policy of neutrality. Arms imports and exports and European integration have been obvious instances (Braconier 1989).

Among these objections some are obviously based on an insufficient or different understanding of the meaning of neutrality. Some qualms may nevertheless be perfectly relevant, especially when they deal with the hypocrisy of incompatible political messages and actual policies. It is undeniable that the contents of the policy of neutrality have not always corresponded to the official profile exhibited to the public, at home and abroad. This does not necessarily mean that policies are wrong: they may be both wise and necessary.

The inconsistencies may, however, betray at least two kinds of difficulty, the one of keeping strictly to a clear concept of neutrality, the other of exposing and explaining the real facts of a complex situation to a large public, less used to terse realism than to lofty idealism, and to hungry mass media.

The political development has contributed to transforming the meaning of "neutrality" in common political language. It is open to many interpretations. Hence, it should hardly be surprising that many discussants of foreign and security policy use the word

with different connotations. This certainly applies to many critics of Sweden's international behaviour: they often seem to have in mind a definition of neutrality decided by their own normative or political evaluations. These views do not necessarily coincide with what neutrality means or meant, neither according to international law nor in official Swedish interpretations of the concept during the period to which their criticism applies.

The use and misuse, or sometimes abuse, of the notion of neutrality in both political language and political practice underline the need for conceptual clarity in the debate. Such clarity need not necessarily mean that all discussants have to subscribe to the same definition of "neutrality". A minimal demand is, however, that all serious discussants are aware of their own interpretation, and that they make this well understood. This is said in full awareness of the fact that lack of clarity often serves a deliberate political purpose.

2. NEUTRALITY — BOTH SIMPLE AND COMPLICATED

In international law neutrality signifies a relationship during war. A state that is neutral does not participate in the war; the right to remain outside involves duties to respect the neutrality rules in international law, especially on impartial treatment of the warfaring countries. Or, in the terms of a classical textbook in international law: "Neutrality may be defined as the attitude of impartiality adopted by third states towards belligerents, and recognized by belligerents, such an attitude creating rights and duties between the impartial states and the belligerents" (Oppenheim/Lauterpacht 1951: vol. II, p. 653).

During the second half of the 20th century, several political factors have contributed to obscuring this original, legal concept of neutrality. There is, however, already in international law different aspects of neutrality. The basis is always the concept just referred to: a state is neutral if it, respecting certain principles, stays outside an armed conflict.

A state can be neutral to one conflict but at the same time adopt a different position to another conflict. Sweden's role during World War II can serve as an instance. Sweden had declared itself neutral to the Great Power war. In relation to the Finnish–Soviet Winter War (1939–40) in which it became heavily involved by economic support, volunteers and matériel supply, Sweden stayed outside as a "non-belligerent" only.

A state may be granted the status of "permanent neutrality". Switzerland is the classical example, permanently neutral since the Vienna Congress 1815, Austria has since 1955 claimed and subsequently obtained recognition for the same status. To be sure, an international guarantee is no insurance against being attacked; *inter armas silent leges*, laws are silent when arms are speaking, applies in this respect also. Neutral Belgium fell victim to aggression, according to the strategic necessity imposed by the "Schlieffen Plan", in the German offensive against France in August 1914. Denmark (and Norway) was assaulted by Nazi Germany on 9 April 1940, in spite of a previous Danish–German undertaking of non-aggression.

A state that neither has sought nor received an internationally guaranteed, permanent neutrality may unilaterally proclaim its intention already in peacetime to remain neutral, should a war break out. Such a declaration may not only be of general character; it can also apply to a particular class of conflicts, in the first place between certain powers or between belligerents in the own vicinity. An early formula for the Swedish policy of neutrality was "unalignment *between*

great power blocks [my italics, N.A.] with the purpose of staying neutral in war" (Andrén 1967:62).

A total unalignment with an unconditional pledge to neutrality was at that time (1948–49) out of the question, in fact for two reasons. As a member of the United Nations Sweden had certain obligations. In extreme cases these might rule out the stance of neutral in a conflict. For a long time, the use of the veto power in the Security Council Cold War had spared Sweden and other neutrals. Only in November 1990 the Security Council reached an unvetoed decision to allow military sanctions against Iraq. The awareness of this constraint on the danger of getting involved in armed conflict was very strong in the years immediately after Sweden's accession to the UN in 1946. Further, a major Swedish security goal was at this time to establish a Scandinavian defence alliance in collaboration with Denmark and Norway.

Later Sweden's attitude changed. The idea of a Scandinavian, not to say of a broader Nordic defence community, vanished from the agenda of practical politics when Denmark and Norway in 1949 joined NATO. The Cold War obscured the obligations on sanctions according to the Charter. While Sweden through the 1950s chose to be unaligned in order to have the option of neutrality in war, from the 1960s she has in fact also claimed recognitions as a kind of permanent neutral. Sweden must, however, more than Switzerland, create international recognition by her own political deeds, deliberately rejecting the support of an internationally guaranteed neutrality.

In 1956 the Foreign Minister, Östen Undén, commented proposals for such a guarantee. "... it is obvious that if we were to place ourselves in this way under the protection of other Powers, they would feel that they had been put in a position to see that we pursued a policy which they considered to be in line with the declaration (pleading a policy of neutrality) we had made. In other words, we would be inviting other Powers to judge how we ourselves conducted our foreign policy" (*Documents* 1956:115).

On reflection, this rejection of a warranty according to international law hardly in fact provides more freedom of action for Sweden than that enjoyed by the *de jure* neutral countries. It may even, irrespective of UN restrictions, have made it more confined in some respects.

According to Prime Minister Tage Erlander, in his crucial "Metal Speech" on Sweden and the EEC in August, 1961, the purely formal difference between Swiss/Austrian neutrality and Swedish neutrality "cannot be thought to mean that Sweden has greater freedom of action when interpreting and applying her policy of neutrality" (*Documents* 1961:22). As late as in the very recent parliamentary declaration on Sweden's ambition to join the Common Market her traditional permanent and unconditional purpose was underlined, "by consistently abstaining from military cooperation with other states successfully to vindicate our neutrality in cases of war" (12 December 1990). For the last thirty years, at least, Sweden has claimed recognition as a *de facto* permanently neutral state.

3. THE INSISTENCE ON POLITICAL RECOGNITION

All this is not said in neglect of the fundamental formal difference between *de facto, ad hoc* and *de jure* permanent neutrality; Switzerland has an undisputable international, treaty-bound guarantee, Sweden has not.

Disregarding the formalities, it is however obvious that Sweden, in political rather than juridical forms, has also obtained some kind of international recognition of her "neutral" status. Since the

1960s positive references were for many years made to Sweden's unaligned and neutrality-focused foreign policy in joint communiqués from meetings at the level of heads of government and the like. Some instances through the years illustrate this point. They appear as stable variations on the same theme, with some minute differences only, that may or may not reflect changes in the mutual relations or in the international climate. (Italics in quotations have been added to underline key concepts.)

— *Communiqué 1967* issued after the official visit by the Foreign Minister to the Soviety Union; 1st December: "It was once again established that Sweden's policy of neutrality is an *important factor in the preservation of peace and stability in northern Europe*" (*Documents* 1967:200).

1970. At Prime Minister Olof Palme's official visit in Moscow June 19 the joint Communiqué included the following passage: "The Soviet side declared again that the policy of neutrality of Sweden is a *useful and important contribution to the maintenance of peace in Europe*" (*Documents* 1970:225).

1972. In the Joint Swedish–Soviet communiqué in conjunction with the Foreign Ministers, Krister Wickman, visit to Moscow it was "emphasized" by the Soviet representatives "that Sweden's policy of neutrality made an *important contribution to the preservation of peace and security in Europe*" (*Documents* 1972:214).

1973. Prime Minister Kosygin's visit to Sweden in 1973 was another occasion for a Joint Swedish–Soviet communiqué, in which "the parties noted that Sweden's policy of neutrality has been *generally recognized as an important factor in strengthening peace and security in Europe*" (*Documents* 1973:261).

1976. In a joint Swedish–Soviet communiqué on the occasion of an official visit by Prime Minister Palme to the Soviet Union "the Soviet side reiterated that Sweden's policy of neutrality is an *important contribution to the preservation of peace in Europe*" (*Documents* 1976: 246).

It should be noted that this practice of issuing communiqués was observed only in relation to "East Bloc" states. Further, the reference to neutrality seems to appear only in communiqués on meetings with Soviet counterparts, not with leaders of minor nations in the erstwhile Warsaw Pact.

It is not quite clear if this method of seeking recognition should be regarded as a logical solution for a unilaterally "neutral" country to receive recognition without invoking international law or if it was a signal from the Soviet side of the kind of behaviour that it expected from Sweden, always suspected of too close involvement with NATO. It is obvious that the various positive references to Sweden's policy on no occasion amounts to a pledge to respect Swedish neutrality in times of war.

The positive references range from acknowledgement that Sweden's policy of neutrality is generally regarded (whatever it means) to be a useful factor for regional peace and stability to recognition of the policy of neutrality as an important contribution to the preservation and strengthening of peace in Europe.

As recognition of Sweden's unilateral policy of neutrality, pledges of this character might in peaceful times be as good as legal assurances. However, if Sweden's policy would waver or if a situation would arise with conflicting strategic interests, this kind of recognition would be of little or no value. Courteous expressions in communiqués are no valid proof of credibility.

4. THE PERENNIAL PROBLEM OF CREDIBILITY

Up to this point defining the meaning of neutrality has met with few problems. The difficulties begin with the analysis of the *conditions* for a successful policy of neutrality, and for two reasons. The conditions can hardly be defined on purely objective grounds. Political events and reactions are normally open to different interpretations. Further, there is in the political debate a proneness for mistaking the conditions for a credible policy of neutrality for neutrality itself.

The conditions of credibility are, seemingly at least, of special importance for *de facto* permanently neutral states, lacking, for whatever reason, the support of contractual undertakings according to international law. For this reason the problem of credibility has always been central in Swedish security policy and analysis. It has constantly been emphasized that it is essential to behave in peace-time in a manner that creates confidence in the intention and ability to remain neutral in war. Again quoting the parliamentary declaration of 12 December 1990, Sweden had to abstain from "linkages which may make our ability to carry out the declared policy appear as illusory".

This demand points to another similarity between the unilateral Swedish and the treaty-bound Swiss permanent neutrality. Quoting a Swedish academic expert in international law: "In order to maintain the necessary credibility for Sweden's declared will to take a neutral position in future military conflicts, Sweden cannot disregard the peace-time obligations *de jure* following from permanent neutrality. The legislation on neutrality in international law hence should draw indirect limits to the formation of Swedish peace-time policy" (Cramér 1989:100).

The only restriction that international law on neutrality in war could impose on a prospective or permanent neutral would be to prohibit all actions or undertakings that must, in a war, force the neutral to violate obligations imposed on neutrals. Some implications of this conclusion are obvious. They rule out all contractual obligations to give one-sided military support in a war. But other inferences are more uncertain and depend in the final analysis on political, or moral, interpretations and judgements. Who decides that an action will in the future make it impossible to respect the war laws on neutrality? And considering the policies of both Sweden and Switzerland during the World Wars, who decides that a deviation from the rulebook should lead to the end of neutrality — to war?

It may well be argued that the aim of neutrality imposes the same conditions whether it is required by treaty or is wholly voluntary. Because of past performances, some doubt has, however, also been cast on Sweden's claim to the title of a *de facto* permanent neutral. They include the non-belligerent status during the Winter War 1939–40, as well as the Swedish efforts to create a Scandinavian Defence Alliance in 1948–49 (Cramér 1989: 96, 100, 126).

Again, it may seem doubtful that events almost half a century ago should retain a decisive influence on the understanding of Sweden's present or future policy of neutrality, unless later events have confirmed the same impression. In spite of the uncertainties involved in the expected membership of an integrating Europe, the declared purpose obviously remains to maintain a strict policy of neutrality. However, a future membership of the Common Market may necessitate a redefinition of the restrictions for such a policy (Andrén 1990). Tomorrow, it might hence, perhaps, be apposite to add *ad hoc* to the characterization of Sweden's neutrality as *de facto* permanently. But if

ad hoc has to be added, the claim to performance is dubious.

Credibility is a problem with many elements: political, legal and resource-related. It is obvious that none of these factors is in itself sufficient to ensure external respect. The policies of neutrality of the contemporary European neutrals represent different mixes of the three elements. For example, in Finland, Sweden and Switzerland, all the elements are present, but with different emphases. Traditionally, Finland's sensitive neighbourhood has made her give higher priority to the *political* aspect than Sweden and Switzerland. Formally, at least, the *legal* aspect stands paramount in Switzerland — as well as Austria. Since the war and through the 1960s Sweden has put very strong emphasis on *defence* aspects and resource support for the national defence.

Later, in the early 1980s, a heated debate arose over the issue of the relative importance of diplomacy and defence for the credibility of Sweden's policy of neutrality (Olof Palme in the Swedish *Riksdag, Documents* 1983:21, 1984:52). The importance assigned to defence still marks Sweden's basic security attitude, in spite of a succession of Swedish reductions of the armed forces. The curtailment of the relative military strength has not reduced Sweden's official claim for respect as an armed neutral in any future European war. In this regard at least, Sweden seems to have moved in the direction of other European "neutrals", who have long made the same claim but supported by substantially weaker defence capabilities.

The fact that international law is not enough to safeguard the respect for or even the right to neutrality can explain significant similarities between the defence and security policies of Switzerland and Sweden.[2]

The aforementioned factors have greatly influenced the perceptions during the long European peace since 1945 of what neutrality really means. Throughout these long years the debate has dealt less with the rules on the rights and duties in war than with the credibility problem in peace. The conditions that may be stipulated for a credible policy of neutrality vary from time to time and from place to place; totally objective criteria of universal application can hardly be established, not even if the problem is uniquely focused on the credibility of the will and ability to retain neutrality in a war.

The uncertainty cannot be removed by any academic, legal views that certain obligations *de jure* follow from the permanently neutral position (cf. Cramér *loc. cit.*); historical experience and, in fact, common sense can also provide some guidance. The definite answer "how much is enough" will nevertheless remain unknown so long as war is avoided. Fortunately then, as far as Sweden is concerned, there is thus far no real "empirical" truth available.

However, the truth that neutrality has *de facto* also assumed a political peace-related dimension increases the difficulties in defining patterns of acceptable behaviour or credibility. They all depend on the specific objectives, again in peacetime, constituting the political values that "neutrality" is presumed to preserve. It is always a question of neutrality between whom and for what purpose. Also, it may be difficult to reconcile all urgent peacetime goals with accepted long-range interests in retaining the credibility of neutrality in war.

Uncertainty invites subjective speculation. Politicians, commentators and analysts have taken advantage of this opportunity and added to the confusion around the concept of neutrality. They are strongly supported by the penchant in politics and in media for drastic terms and exaggeration. Among obvious examples,

the best known is of course the insistence on calling the longest period of uninterrupted peace in European history the "Cold War". The idea of a peace condition named the Cold War has made it natural to apply concepts of war, including neutrality, to this "warlike" peace. Basically, this is not a legal concept of neutrality but a political application; however, often described in the terms very similar to those of international law.

Not only has neutrality been broadly adopted as a peace-time concept, in total contradiction to its legal meaning, even the practicality, not to say the validity, of the whole legal concept of neutrality in war seems to have been questioned. The late Urho Kekkonen (President of Finland) insisted that a condition for neutrality was that peace was preserved in Europe (Brodin 1975:37). This would mean that the concept of neutrality should signify rather a relationship in peace, not in war, as presumed in international law. Hence, there were "as many kinds of neutrality as there are neutral states" (Kekkonen 1970:199). The Kekkonen idea has also been followed up academically, adding scholarly prestige to a now historical, tactical move in the difficult balance between East and West (Hakovirta 1976, 1988, Joenniemi 1988, cf. also Sundelius 1990). After the substitution of warmer superpower relations, the importance of the Cold War — or rather the Cold Peace — for the new, *political* concept of neutrality, which is a rival to the legal concept, may too easily be overlooked. This is, however, susceptible to rapid changes in the political climate.

It was the anxiety both to ensure better possibilities for neutrality in future wars and to contribute to peace-time détente that has made some countries abstain from alliances. Without formally or officially admitting it, they — including Sweden — may from time to time nevertheless have enjoyed at least passive protection as a result not only of the bloc–dichotomy but also of the massive American presence in NATO Europe. As Herman Kahn used to say: "You are all under the umbrella" (lectures in Sweden and Finland, 1970). Other countries — e.g. Denmark and Norway — which have abandoned "neutrality" have at the same time tried to limit the provocative peace-time implications of alliance membership by imposing restrictions on the presence of their allies. In this way, it seems, both the unaligned and the aligned tried to enjoy the best of both worlds.

Not to be aligned is often perceived as a kind of peace-time equivalent of neutrality. This interpretation has led to further consequences. The security-related behaviour of unaligned states is evaluated more or less in accordance with the norms and practices set for neutrality in war. Accordingly, a policy of neutrality is thought to demand balanced relations and impartial treatment of rival states and alliances. The perfect peace-time neutral should, according to Hakovirta, avoid interference in conflicts, give equal treatment to parties and avoid influencing the outcome of a conflict (Hakovirta 1988).

Up to a point, such a pattern of behaviour can be warranted, not by any rulings of international law but by simple, political common sense; a certain measure of impartiality and balance may support the credibility for which a prospective neutral state is striving in order to ensure respect and contribute to peace-time détente as much as to war-time neutrality. The demand for a permanent linkage between a policy of neutrality and economic relations has always been absurd in a position between the industrial West, to which the Nordic neutrals belong, and the economically underdeveloped East. Not even Finland has, in spite of efforts, managed to reach a balanced position in her foreign trade. And to stretch the demands to

cover cultural and ideological neutrality would be highly dangerous, opening the gates for various forms of political pressure. Ideological neutrality has always been clearly rejected by the Nordic neutrals (*Documents* 1959:47, Kekkonen 1982:167).

Finally, the international attitude to neutrality and unalignment, as well as the changes in the overall, post-colonial international structure, have contributed to the conceptual opaqueness and equivocality of neutrality. They have also been conducive in enhancing its versatility as a tool for a variety of political purposes. Immediately after the war neutrality was an internationally criticized and in many quarters despised position. Subsequently it was, for several reasons, assigned a higher value. The era of Cold War and constant diplomatic confrontation created a need for uncontaminated brokers and uncontroversial international office-holders. The UN Secretary-General has always been selected from an unaligned country (the Norwegian Trygve Lie was elected *before* the formation of NATO). Gradually, the unaligned states became a real power factor in the United Nations by the sheer number of ex-colonial states that opted for an uncommitted position in relation to the power-blocs.

5. DOMESTIC ASPECTS

In the present context, one pertinent observation is that this new situation made it possible to exploit the positive connotations of the concept of neutrality for various, more or less unrelated political causes. Again, this use, or abuse, of neutrality as a political argument has further contributed to a lack of precision of neutrality as a concept, at least in non-legal language.

Consequently, in Sweden, neutrality was until very recently an effective and hence a politically rewarding tool both for mobilizing political support and for reinforcing political argument and altercation. In domestic politics it could be argued that measures, unlikely to mobilize sufficient backing on their own merits, had to be supported for reasons of genuine or alleged usefulness in supporting the credibility of the policy of neutrality. In Sweden this has applied in many situations to a variety of issues. For a long time neutrality — with self-reliance as a condition — was a strong argument in favour of various forms of subsidy, especially for agriculture. This argument has now been rejected in favour of economy and more free trade.

So long as the policy of neutrality is regarded as indispensable, it may remain both tempting and rewarding to convince an emotional and excitable public that an opponent is not reliable in respect to neutrality. Situations to which such a judgement might apply are, however, both complicated and sensitive to evaluate. In August 1959, a visit to Sweden by Nikita Krushchev was planned to take place. In view of the strong criticism by — according to a Soviet memorandum in July — both "reactionary representatives of certain right-wing organizations", the Swedish bourgeois opposition and even "the Press of the governing Social Democratic Party", the visit was cancelled.

Later the same year the conservative leader, Jarl Hjalmarson, was passed over as a parliamentary member of the Swedish delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. Reference was made to Hjalmarson's previous criticism of the Krushchev visit — "we are going to greet the representative of an inhuman political system, the prime instigator of the threat of war" (*Documents* 1959:87 and 48).

According to Erlander's memoirs, it is evident that the attack on Hjalmarson served a domestic party purpose by seriously disturbing the confidence in the judgement of the Conservative leadership

(Erlander 1976:347f.). Obviously, the reaction may also be regarded as a corrective in order to reduce the impression of a lack of balance in the official attitude to the power blocs. The domestic use of neutrality is often ineffective, if it cannot be credibly combined with a genuine security concern.

More recent examples seem equally conclusive. They include in the first place the clashes of Olof Palme and Ingvar Carlsson with conservative leaders, such as Ulf Adelsohn and Carl Bildt, not only over the notorious Soviet submarine issue and the reliability of the Conservatives as upholder of the Swedish neutrality (Adelsohn 1987:274f.) but — ironically enough — as late as until summer 1990 also on the position to European integration (e.g. *Documents* 1984:52, 1985: 29f.). The recent virtual agreement of the major parties out of the European issue to the neutrality argument has deprived the linkage between the European issue and neutrality of most of its political usefulness on the domestic scene. Only the formerly "Communist" Left, since 1990 styled the "Left" only, and the Environmental Party the Green, still stick to the old guns.

6. THE WORLD WARS AND THE MORAL PRICE OF PEACE

In Sweden, domestic criticism against the time-honoured, "sacred cow" — as neutrality has often been described both by its critics and good humoured friends — deals not only with the present but also with the past. Sweden's behaviour during the World Wars, especially WW II, has always been an obvious and easy target for criticism. During WW I, the Swedish, strictly legalistic approach to neutrality, as interpreted by the Prime Minister (and former professor of law) Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, was said to have favoured the Germans more than the Entente (Gihl 1951:143ff.). Political and economic pressure from the maritime powers forced Sweden to change its position.

During WW II the feelings for Germany — which had been very warm among considerable sections of the population during WW I — were by far much colder. However, the pressure from the victorious *Reich* of the first years of the war forced Sweden to considerable and humiliating concessions of various kinds (Carlgren 1977). They included transit of German soldiers and materièl, even of a fully battle-equipped division ("Engelbrecht"), and the provision of iron ore for the Nazi arms production. Towards the end of the war the concessions shifted to the West. Allied armadas of bombers could unpunished cross through Swedish air space in connection with their operations against Germany (Leifland 1987:153f.). And when Sweden was told to discontinue trade with Germany, it complied (Carlgren 1977:545ff., Acheson 1969:58).

A flexible policy helped Sweden to escape direct involvement in WW II. In spite of several aberrations from the rule book of neutrality, it consolidated the perception of a successful tradition of neutrality. As the years since the war have passed by and as the Swedish policy of neutrality was fortified by repeated assertions of spotless behaviour in future crises, resentment over past violations of international law has clearly increased. So have scholarly, critical evaluations from new generations of historians against past leaders who gave higher priority to peace than to ideological and legal consistency. Not only implicitly, the question has been raised whether the moral price for amoral self-interest was too high (Boëthius 1991). So far, it has been generally accepted that the preservation of peace was the supreme value. It could even justify the loss of respect and of the credibility of the will to take up arms against demands

for unreasonable and humiliating concessions. An ironical paradox is, however, that many of those who now attack these concessions, made in the past by a militarily too weak Sweden, reject more recent demands for a credible defence.

A writer belonging to the generation which a cautious external policy spared the extreme ordeal should perhaps be wary of attempting to evaluate Sweden's war-time foreign policy, at least in a neutral and moral perspective. A judgement may be based either on the normative principles of international law, or on the purpose and ultimate result of the policy, or on moral concepts of right and wrong in foreign policy behaviour. The outcomes of such evaluations are partly obvious. In a legal sense much criticism may be directed both against the Swedish way of fulfilling the obligations of a neutral nation and against the lack of respect for the rights of neutrals exhibited by the warfaring nations.

World War II was no heroic period in Sweden's history. Historically, the cautious policy of adaptation was rewarded. It was an instance of a pragmatically successful policy with the overriding purpose of keeping Sweden out of the war, at any price, or rather at almost any price. "Almost" is important. Obviously, the extreme limit was never passed. However, sometimes the critical point was very close (e.g. Carlgren 1977).

7. "WE ALONE DETERMINE SWEDEN'S POLICY OF NEUTRALITY"

This assertive Palme quotation (*Documents* 1968:32) means, in principle, that the Swedes themselves define just as much the concept of Swedish neutrality that they want to realize as the policy they want to conduct in order to fulfil it. It is another way of asserting Sweden's rejection of formal guarantees linked to international law. In practice, however, there are, clear limits. Obviously, the "Swedish" concept of neutrality should nevertheless be in accordance with the principles of international law. It is equally obvious that the forces and views in the immediate environment play the predominant part for the choice of policy. The conclusions in this respect have constantly been reflected in concern for the credibility of the policy of neutrality. In this sense, the policy of neutrality is always more reactive than active, although "active policy of neutrality" has become a prestigious concept, both in Sweden and in other European "neutral" countries.

Hence the question: Is there a constant, unchangeable and unchanged Swedish doctrine of neutrality that can serve as a rule for judging the political or moral consistency of Swedish foreign policy behaviour? Or is it rather a flexible concept, adjusted to changing strategic needs and political ambitions? In order to find the answers, it is not only necessary to go back to the basic definitions at the time when the principles for Swedish post-war foreign policy were laid down. It is equally important to ascertain whether the original formula has prevailed or if concepts of unaligned policy of neutrality have undergone any major changes or significant adjustment. Strangely enough, no complete investigation has as yet been made of the second problem. Nevertheless, the major phases in the development of Sweden's neutral attitude are well known.

In 1948, the Cold War was a fact, but the Scandinavian states still hesitated about their response to the new situation. We have already noted that the Swedish government declared that Sweden did not want to deprive itself, by any arrangements in advance, of "the right and possibility to keep outside a new war" (Andrén 1967:48f. and 62f.). For this reason

Sweden refused to align itself with any military alliance or other security arrangement for mutual protection and with unconditional mutual undertakings. This remained the Swedish position for the next decade. The definition did not imply an unconditional pledge to neutrality in war. It expressed an absolute demand to retain liberty of choice, obviously with a strong preference for neutrality. In this way it was also flexible enough to satisfy both unflinching neutralists and those who would have preferred to meet the Norwegian demands at the abortive alliance negotiations for some kind of cautious westward linkage (Möller 1986:291ff.).

The unconditional pledge to neutrality which has been characteristic of Sweden's foreign policy during the major part of the post-war years was only formulated more than a decade after the war. It was defined by Foreign Minister Östen Undén as early as 1957, in a highly political, semantic exposition. Undén wished to avoid giving the impression that Sweden was not resolute in its will to keep neutral in war. Neutrality could be a temporary, waiting position "for a suitable moment to plunge its people into war". Unalignment or "freedom from alliances" was also "ambiguous, even more so than the term a policy of neutrality. It did "not express a resolute intention to pursue policy of neutrality in the event of war". Such interpretations had to be avoided. Undén wanted an absolutely unambiguous position and this was in his view best expressed by the term, "a policy of neutrality" (*Documents* 1957:27f.).

The new terminology was consolidated during the following years. In the words of Prime Minister Erlander in 1959: "The policy of neutrality means that we are seeking to obtain the advantage of being able to avoid immediate involvement in a future world war. Such a policy, however, also imposes obligations on the country pursuing it and calls for fixity of purpose and consistency. The policy of neutrality presupposes that the world around us can have faith in our will to hold steadfastly to our chosen line of foreign policy; it must not be made dependent on transitory factors but must remain an expression of a lasting programme" (*Documents* 1959:45). The same position was also reflected in Erlander's 1961 "Metal Speech", referred to above, with its claim that Sweden should in fact be regarded as permanently neutral. After him, all spokesmen for Swedish security policy have, with Palme, asserted that the Swedish policy of neutrality should carry the imprint of "firmness and consistency" and not "raise expectations on the one side and apprehensions on the other" (*Documents* 1984:51). For reasons further elaborated below, this steadfastness was — on the whole unjustly — doubted by many of his critics, both at home and abroad.

This means firstly that before and after the closing of the 1950s there was a clear change in the interpretation of the meaning of Sweden's unalignment in peace in order to be neutral in war. One may argue that Undén's definition seemed to transform neutrality from a means to the ultimate end of Swedish foreign policy. Such an interpretation is possible, but not necessary, and in all likelihood not correct. For in 1936, Undén had stated that "a policy of neutrality is not a formula valid for ever without regard to the development" (Andrén–Möller, p. 5). The position on neutrality may simply mean that such a policy was in the foreseeable future of high bloc-tension likely to be the best for Sweden. Obviously, the doctrinaire position was deemed necessary in order to make the policy efficient, irrespective of whether Sweden would, at some future juncture, have to abandon it. There was a need for stability, in order to reduce tension in a borderline area between mutually hostile power blocs.

Further, it must always be kept in mind that Sweden, when it first adopted the unaligned policy (of neutrality) was probably more concerned about optimizing peace time conditions in Northern Europe than security in war. Note Tage Erlander's statement, as late as 1961, that Swedish foreign policy had as its aim "just as much to preserve our national interests in peace and, in addition, to put us in a position to contribute towards the peaceful development of the world..." (*Documents* 1961:118.).

However morally justified, it seems hence clearly unhistorical when the critics of today judge Swedish actions and positions in the 1950s on the basis of later, often oversimplified formulas about the meaning of Sweden's policy of neutrality and its credibility implications. Many recent criticisms seem often to assume that a pure policy of neutrality presupposes absolutely equal or parallel treatment in peace-time of the major adversaries and that this principle is so important that all other national interests have to be subordinated to it. This is again a manifestation of the mistaken idea that neutrality and the policy conducted in its support represent the goal, not the means in Swedish foreign and security policy. It should hence be self-evident that the Swedish policy of neutrality in its practical application is strongly — not to say primarily — influenced by the international environment at the time, and by the Swedish idea of the threat that might emerge from the international environment.

During practically the whole post-World War II period, the most serious threat, indeed the only serious threat, against Sweden would arise in connection with a war between the power blocs. In Swedish strategic analysis, it has always been understood that the Soviet Union (or WP) rather than NATO might be assumed to take the first step towards violating Swedish territory, and hence neutrality. This assumption has always influenced Swedish defence planning, a fact to which the Soviet Defence Minister Gretchko made negative references during a visit to Sweden in the autumn of 1970.

Irrespective of the strictly neutral, official attitude of NATO, Sweden has never made a secret of the fact that she would expect some kind of cooperation with NATO, should she be attacked. What some people seem to forget is that such cooperation would not be a violation of Swedish neutrality. For Sweden would in fact have ceased to be neutral, not by her own decision but because she had already been attacked. It is obvious that NATO for this reason regarded Sweden as a potential ally. The Soviet Union seems to have shared this view (Petersson 1990). Some NATO officers, not too well informed, to be sure, even seem to have mistaken Sweden for a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

8. FOREIGN POLICY AND "ACTIVE NEUTRALITY"

The foreign policy of "neutral" countries is often called "active neutrality". This has applied not only to Sweden (*Documents* 1975, Frei 1969). The term has been used with different meanings and ambitions. The first phase was connected with Sweden's role in the United Nations: "In the World Organization we have found a natural framework for the pursuit of an active foreign policy by a neutral nation, whether it has been a question of participating in actions to preserve the peace, as in Ghaza and the Congo, the multilateral contributions to aid the developing countries or of other spheres of activity" (*Documents* 1963:15). This was a reflection of the useful role that unaligned states could play in various contexts during the Cold War.

The prestige derived from this process

was an important part of the political capital that Sweden could use during the second phase of the "active neutrality". This phase carries the imprint of Olof Palme. It meant using other fora than the United Nations and methods which to many appeared as highly unconventional, to put it mildly. Palme had a genius for using the massmedia. His controversial and widely broadcast "moral interventions" were often criticized as incompatible with the Swedish policy of neutrality, especially but far from exclusively in relation to the US–Vietnam conflict. This is understandable, but hardly correct. Leaving aside the important function of active neutrality in the domestic power game, three arguments stand out as important for the neutrality evaluation of Palme's foreign policy (cf. Huldt-Misgeld, *passim*).

The first is the fact that it was well adjusted to the old Swedish interest in far-away exotic countries. What provoked Palme's strong comments was not primarily the situation in nearby countries dominated by foreign or domestic dictators who could be regarded as potential or real threats against Sweden also. It was, instead, countries like Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile and Vietnam, in which the United States were seen as the oppressor. Partly, but by no means only, the "new activism" was more a matter of style than of policy. There is evidence that Undén could also react strongly, however more discretely and diplomatically.

The second argument is that irrespective of the fury at times directed against Sweden, especially after Palme's biting comments on the US bombing of Haiphong, Christmas 1972, they did not affect the basic credibility of Sweden's security policy. Nobody could seriously believe that Sweden, because of its involvement in the Far East or in Central America, would join the non-democratic bloc, should a major conflict arise in Europe. So long as this was the litmus test for Sweden's policy of neutrality, the new activism could not be ruled out as incompatible with the basic principles of a 'neutral' security policy. With a broader, not exclusively security oriented definition of "peace-time neutrality", which, particularly in tense domestic situations, could colour partisan verbiage, the judgement must obviously be different.

Finally, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the steady focus in the active foreign policy on American shortcomings could — or even should — be understood as an attempt to balance the negative impression in the East of Sweden's total alignment with the West in most significant respects, except the formal security policy. The USA, as much as Sweden, has in this respect been a victim of the Cold War.

9. THE FUNCTIONS OF NEUTRALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL INTEREST

In conclusion, it may be argued that the Swedish unaligned policy of neutrality during some 45 years has served a number of purposes or functions. Sometimes they have represented conflicing interests. Further, the policy of neutrality has raised a number of credibility issues that have not always been compatible with other vital Swedish interests. To recapitulate:

1. The basic function has always been to maximize the chances of not being involved in a future European war.
2. A second purpose, in practical politics often more important — in view of the stability of the European peace system — has been to promote regional détente in Northern Europe.
3. The "neutral" stance has also provided Sweden with a useful position in order to promote wider international interests in various contexts, e.g.

— in arms control negotiations,
— in the United Nations, and the like.
— as a platform for moral intervention on the international scene.

Sometimes, not only in the earlier stages of the Cold War period, the third function, too, seems to have served the purpose of legitimizing, domestically as much as internationally, Sweden's isolated "egoistic" security and defence policy in the eyes of both pacifists and internationalists. The pacifists could be told that Sweden certainly aimed at a credible defence but did so solely because of the primitive international society which Sweden had always strived to transform into a peaceful international order. And the internationalists could be told that Sweden, simply because of her "egoistic" policy, could serve numerous useful purposes in the service of building a new international system.

It is obvious that the three motives for neutrality in some respects are closely connected. The first defence line is always to try to make the international system more peace-prone, especially in the own region.

By and large, the three major objectives of a policy of neutrality are clearly typical not only of Sweden. This means that the problems for the future are in many respects similar for most European "neutrals". The basic question is in which way the currently dominating trends in European politics will affect the neutrals and the future viability of their security policy. Is there a place for unalignment and neutrality in a Europe without bloc-dichotomy and with increasing integration between its states? Many would claim that the answer is no, that we are in fact facing a new paradigm for security in Europe and that this fact must have obvious consequences for the "neutrals" also.

The ideal of a policy of neutrality is, however, so solidly rooted in the Swedish tradition that it is likely to remain in form longer than in substance.

It is, however, in this context pertinent to observe that as neutrality has, at least since the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War, always held the second place in the predominant Swedish hierarchy of confessed security ideals. The first position has always been reserved for world-wide international solidarity in the framework of such organizations as the League and subsequently, the United Nations. Only when these structures for preserving global peace and security have failed in their task has Sweden fallen back on the second position — a policy of neutrality in isolated unalignment. This happened in the 1930s in relation to the League and again in 1948–49 in relation to the United Nations. Should Sweden become a member of the EC, as most people in Sweden now seem to want and to expect, and should the EC, in accordance with numerous current declarations, be transformed into a security organization, the policy in relation to the United Nations might serve as a model.

This would mean that Sweden accepted the EC as a wide organization for mutual solidarity and that Sweden, so long as the EC kept together, would abide by its rules. Admittedly, this would meet with much criticism in many quarters. For however wide, the EC can never claim to be a global organization. Should the organization be divided in mutually hostile camps, the natural course for Sweden would be to adopt the traditional full-back position, that of a "neutral" in relation to the contending parties. This would mean that Sweden need not relegate the policy of neutrality to the historical scrap-box but retain it as a potential resort for the future.

So far, the official Swedish attitude would hardly accept this line of argument. The position of the government, as

announced in April and confirmed in June 1991, is that Sweden should apply for full membership, without mentioning — as Austria — neutrality as a condition but with a clear declaration that Sweden would not participate in European defence cooperation. The reason should be regard for its position between major powers with large military resources.

This may appear as a step towards a redefinition of the old neutrality, but not yet as a step towards its abolishment.

The ultimate goal, as most Swedes would probably agree, is not the unviolability of the principles of unalignment and neutrality but the maintenance of peace *with* prosperity. EC-membership is considered as a condition for the prosperity, while numerous arguments would seem to indicate that it is not a danger to peace.

Quoting a recent Swedish study (Huldt & Herolf 1991): "Could membership in a European Economic and Security Community negatively affect Sweden's national security? "Could it increase the risks of being exposed to aggression or of being forced to participate in foreign wars? Who would want or dare to attack a jointly defended Europe? With or without an American alliance, a European Security Community — as long as it can stick together — would be more than a match for any conceivable aggressor. Hence, it would in fact serve as a genuine guarantee for security and peace in Europe, probably superior to any other conceivable system." Green and Red critics of the Community have painted a grim picture of a Defence Community as an aggressive, imperialistic power. It seems, however, very unlikely that such a community consisting of a great number of mutually competing powers with varying interests would be able to agree on joint, major offensive, or punitive undertakings.

If, for nostalgic or traditional reasons, the terms of unalignment and neutrality would be preserved also in such an EC-context, this would obviously mean that new definitions and interpretations would be added to the accidence of neutrality.

NOTES

[1] The investigations indicate that the support, albeit sliding down, still (1990, figures in parentheses represent position in 1986) remains overwhelmingly strong, with ca. 79 (93) percent in favour, 9 (2) percent, against and 13 (4) percent "don't know". The polls were initiated by the Swedish National Board of Psychological Defence and published, in Arvidson, *Opinion 90*), by the Board of Psychological Defence.

[2] Military expenditure (defence budgets) in the four neutral countries was according to data in the IISS, *The Military balance, 1990–91* (in billion US$) in Sweden 5.5 (pop. 8.4 mill.), Switzerland 3.8 (6.5), in Finland 1.8 (5.0), in Austria 1.6 (7.5). Corresponding figures for some comparable NATO countries: Norway 3.4 (4.2), Denmark 1.9 (5.1), Belgium 2.9 (9.9). The Netherlands 7.5 (14.8).

REFERENCES

(titles in Swedish translated wherever necessary)

Acheson, D. 1969. *Present at the Creation*. New York: Hamish Hamilton.

Adelsohn, V. 1987. *Partiledare. Dagbok 1981–1986* (Party leader. Diary 1981–1986). Malmö: Gedins.

Andrén, N. 1967. *Power-balance and Non-alignment, A Perspective on Swedish Foreign Policy*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Andrén, N. 1990. Inför det sista steget mot Europa (Before the final step to Europe), *Svensk Tidskrift* 79, 466–472.

Andrén, N. & Möller, Y. 1990. *Från Undén till Palme. Svensk utrikespolitik efter andra världskriget* (From Undén to Palme. Swedish foreign policy after WW II). Stockholm: Nordstedts.

Arvidson, P. 1991. *Opinion 1990*. Stockholm: Board of Psychological Defence.

Böethius, M.-P. 1991. *Heder och samvete* (Honour and conscience). Stockholm: Norstedts.

Braconier, F. 1989. *Som vi behagar, Svensk neutralitetspolitik från Napoleonkrigen till EG* (As it pleases us. Swedish policy of neutrality from the Napoleonic wars to EC). Göteborg: Timbro.

Brodin, K. 1975. *Hot och försvar, Några centrala frågeställningar i finländsk säkerhetspolitik* (Threat and defence. Central issues in Finnish security policy). Stockholm: Folk och Försvar.

Carlgren, W. M. 1977. *Swedish Foreign Policy during the Second World War*. London and Tonbridge: Ernest Benn.

Cramér, P. 1989, *Neutralitetsbegreppet. Den permanenta neutralitetens utveckling* (The concept of neutrality. The development of permanent neutrality). Stockholm: Norstedts.

Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy. Annual publication since 1950. Stockholm: Royal Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Dörfer, I. 1983. *Arms Deal. The Selling of the F-16*. New York: Praeger.

Erlander, T. 1974. *Tage Erlander 1949–1954*. Stockholm: Tidens förlag.

Erlander, T. 1976. *Tage Erlander 1955–1960*. Stockholm: Tidens förlag.

Frei, D. 1969. Aktivere Aussenpolitik der Schweiz. Eine neue aussenpolitische Standortbestimmung der Schweizerischen Regiergung. *Europa Archiv* 24, 651–658.

Gihl, T. 1951. *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia, IV. 1914–19* (A history of Swedish foreign policy, vol. IV. 1914–19). Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt och Söners förlag.

Hakovirta, H. 1976. Neutral States and Bloc-based Integration. *Cooperation and Conflict* XIII, 109–132.

Hakovirta, H. 1988. *East–West Conflict and European Neutrality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huldt, B. & Herolf, G. (ed.) 1991. *Yearbook 1990–91. Towards a European Security Order*. Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

Huldt, B. & Misgeld, K. 1990. *Socialdemokratin och svensk utrikespolitik, Från Branting till Palme* (Social Democracy and Swedish Foreign Policy. From Branting to Palme). Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). 1990. *The Military Balance, 1990–91*. London: Brassey's.

Joenniemi, P. 1983. Models of Neutrality. The Traditional and the Modern. *Cooperation and Conflict* XXIII, 53–67.

Kekkonen, U. 1970. *Neutrality: The Finnish Position*. Heinemann: London.

Kekkonen, U. 1982. *A President's View*. Heinemann: London.

Leifland, L. 1987. Brittiska kränkningar av svenskt luftrum under andra världskriget. (British violations of Swedish air-space during the second world war). *Krigsvetenskapsakademiens handlingar och tidskrift* 191, 143–164.

Möller, Y. 1986. *Östen Undén. En biografi*. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Oppenheim, L. & Lauterpacht, H. (ed.). 1951. *International Law*. London: Longman.

Petersson, Bo. 1990. *Sovietunionen och neutraliteten i Europa*. Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

Sundelius, B. 1990. East–West Conflict and European Neutrality. *Cooperation and Conflict* XXV, 207–214.