Evolving Swiss Neutrality: Foreign Policy, Identity, and a Changing World

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Evolving Swiss Neutrality:
Foreign Policy, Identity, and a Changing World
By Dan A. Cohen

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Abstract

In the minds of many, both within Switzerland and abroad, when one thinks of Switzerland one thinks neutrality, and often when one thinks neutrality one thinks Switzerland. It is perhaps for this reason that when Switzerland chose to sanction Russia much of the world was caught by surprise. Sensationalist newspapers were quick to jump to the conclusion that the age of Swiss neutrality is over. The government insists that there isn’t a kernel of truth in the matter. However, as is always the case, the truth is much more nuanced than either extreme. Using previous publications, current and historical data on the economy of Switzerland, four interviews with historians and professionals in the field, as well as analysis of the official statements released by the Swiss government, this paper will attempt to answer and understand exactly to what extent Switzerland deviated from its traditional understanding of neutrality.

The paper will look at three distinct factors. Economic changes, political changes, and societal factors. Using each of these prisms one will see to what extent they can be blamed for Switzerland's decision to sanction Russia and what their impacts on Switzerland’s neutrality may be. Be it abandoning or evolving neutrality this paper will attempt to understand in what direction the winds of Switzerland’s understanding of its own neutrality are blowing.
Introduction

Switzerland’s Neutrality is more than just a foreign policy position, it is a principal part of its national identity. Not even during WWII when Hitler invaded all of Europe did Switzerland abandon its neutrality. Therefore, the decision by Switzerland to sanction Russia gives off an initial impression of being unprecedented. Some have even gone so far as to argue that Switzerland has deviated completely away from its neutrality. However, in a statement regarding exactly this issue, when asked if “the Federal Council has abandoned Switzerland neutrality,” the FDFA responded very simply and directly: “No, absolutely not: Switzerland’s adaptation of the EU sanctions does not alter its neutrality in any form.” (FDFA., 2022, September 9)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was undoubtedly a monumental moment. However, larger events had occurred in which the Swiss Government chose to retain its neutrality. What is different about the Russian invasion of Ukraine that brought about this change in policy where other events couldn’t? This case study on changing neutrality will then be used to assess its wide impact on the nation's perception of its own neutrality.

This research paper will examine this question by assessing three main suspects that may be the cause for this decision. These three categories are economic changes, political changes, and social conditions.

The political sphere will focus on the question of whether or not changing global norms have shifted Switzerland into more western leaning stances, and have those shifts challenged Switzerland's neutral stance. Establishments such as the UN are often criticized by their cynics as being more talk than substance and fully symbolic organizations. However symbolic organizations still have a role. The Swiss shift in policy towards sanctions did not come out of nowhere. The Swiss decision to join the UN in 2002 is often taken for granted. However, it in
itself can be seen as a shift away from pure isolationist neutrality and a precursor to the shift in sanction policy. The dominance of the UN as the representative of global norms and its anti-war mandate, as well as institutions such as the EU, may have contributed to the belief that humanity has reached a point in history in which war in Europe is a thing of the past. Therefore, while the war in Ukraine may not be as large as WWII it may have been a more shocking event in the sense that it broke perceptions of norms, which pushed Switzerland out of its neutrality. Therefore, as Switzerland was already integrating into the world (either directly by joining organizations like the UN or indirectly by increased economic integration with the EU), it also accepted its norms which would eventually lead to its shift in policy.

The second direction that will be examined is the economic sphere. Swiss neutrality relies on Switzerland’s “fortress” status. In other words, Switzerland can only maintain its neutrality if it is impenetrable to foreign invaders. For this reason, Switzerland has invested heavily in its military. However, Switzerland has never been economically isolationist. Therefore as the EU becomes more integrated and now fully surrounds Switzerland, the capacity of Switzerland to maintain its neutrality is put into question. If Switzerland mainly trades with the EU for most goods and even food, taking a stance that is against the EU may become increasingly difficult. It is important to therefore look if there is any correlation between Swiss trade with the EU/ EU expansion around Switzerland, and a Swiss shift towards a more directly Western-leaning policy.

Finally, the last sphere which we will examine is the social elements that affect Switzerland's neutrality. As mentioned, Swiss neutrality is not just a matter of foreign policy. It is a prime aspect of their national identity. Therefore, aside from external factors that may affect neutrality, we must also look domestically to understand the correlation between foreign policy decisions and the Swiss national identity narrative. In other words, to examine not only how
external factors affect evolving senses of identity, but also how identity seeks to defend itself in the face of shifting and evolving external factors.

**Literature Review**

Publication on Swiss neutrality varies in subject and form. Some of the publications such as *Swiss neutrality: its history and meaning* by Bonjour, E., and Hottinger, M discuss Switzerland's history in more general terms. These publications often focus on the most well-established and undisputed aspects of Swiss neutrality. These include consensus on neutrality being a staple of national identity, the origins of Swiss neutrality, and its pillars such as the belief in armed neutrality.

The usage of the economic, political, and social framework is in part inspired by previous literature that has warned about the dangers of each of these areas for the authenticity of Swiss neutrality. For example, Swiss neutrality and the *"American Century": two conflicting worldviews* by J. M Gabriel and *Neutrality and Morality: Developments in Switzerland and in the International Community* by D. Schindler highlighted some of the issues presented in the political section whereas others such as *From armed neutrality to external dependence: Swiss security in the 21st century* by M. R. DeVore hinted at some of the ideas hinted at both in the political and economic sections. However, most of these publications predate even the annexation of Kraimia.

The vast majority of up to date data as well publications on the impact of the current War in Ukraine on Switzerland are presented via official reports either by the Swiss government or the WTO as well as news stories from local newspapers and the like.
Research Methodology

The research process involved the collection of three types of data. Preliminary research was primarily done using secondary sources. Those secondary sources were used to establish a theoretical framework by which to structure the contents of this paper.

The second source of data was using interviews. Interviews were used for two primary purposes. After gaining some sense of the material at hand and the literature which exists on the topic, some interviews were used primarily to see to what extent professionals on the ground felt that these theories held true to their experiences. Two of my interviews which were with general experts on the topic were used mainly to assess the ideas researched on a theoretical level. The other two interviews with professionals currently working on the field were conducted with the purpose of trying to bridge between the theoretical and the perceived realities on the ground.

In order to maintain high ethical standards, all interviewees were informed about the subject of the interview, were informed of their capacity to remain anonymous on parts or all of the interview before and after the interview and were given a draft of the research for approval before publication.

As the Swiss government regularly publishes memos on its policy position, most assertions on the position of the Swiss government were derived from primary source reports on the government's position by various entities within it.

The positions of the government, interviews and secondary literature were then either challenged or supported by primary source data collected by organizations such as WTO, World Bank and others.
Analysis

Historical Context

When one thinks of Switzerland neutrality is undoubtedly one of the first associations to come to mind. It is for this reason that many may be surprised to discover that neutrality appears as a concept appears only twice in the entire 1846 Constitution. Both those instances neither define nor declare Switzerland as neutral, but rather affirms the responsibility of the Federal Assembly and the Federal council to act with neutrality however set neutrality looks like. Article LXXIV paragraph 6 declares that the Federal Assembly must make “measures for security against foreign aggression, for maintaining the independence and neutrality of Switzerland, declaring war, and concluding treaties of peace.” Article XC section 9 it states that “[The Federal Council] provides for security against dangers threatened from abroad, and takes measures for asserting the independence and neutrality of Switzerland.” In both cases, neutrality is paired with the idea of independence and notably comes second to it. (Wyss, C. J. (Ed.), 1867)

Nevertheless, most countries do not possess any mention of neutrality in their constitution at all. The fact that neutrality is mentioned in the constitution even in 1846 is a testament that the origins of modern Switzerland's neutrality had already been an established pillar of its foreign policy. Therefore to say either that neutrality was a firm, well-defined idea, since the dawn of the nation, or to say that neutrality wasn’t at all a founding principle of Switzerland, would be equally wrong. It seems the Swiss always knew they should be neutral yet from the beginning refused to tie themselves to a specific definition.

Despite the lack of clear-cut definitions in the Swiss constitution, neutrality is legally defined. However, this definition was not written by Switzerland. Rather it was written by the powers that surrounded it.
The Napoleonic Wars had devastated the European continent. Decades of revolution, wars, and embargos had finally convinced the Europeans to come together and lay down their weapons to find a long term solution to conflict in Europe. This meeting to form a new European order was the Congress of Vienna in 1815 which established the balance of powers system in Europe. As part of this system the European powers wanted neutral ground as both a buffer between the powers and a place to convene. As Switzerland was in the middle of the European continent, particularly as it was right in between France and the Austrian Empire the European powers agreed to recognize its neutral status. (Bassam, J. J. (Trans.), 2022, June 3) It is important to note that although Switzerland did not protest, Swiss neutrality was originally, ultimately not a domestic decision but a decision placed upon Switzerland to serve the interests of much larger powers.

The actual rights and obligations of neutral powers were codified into law by another multinational European treaty on October 18, 1907, at the Second Peace Conference in The Hague. This agreement sets up a long list of obligations to which a neutral country must adhere to. However according to a memo by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) the most important ones can be summed up with the following rules:

- “Refrain from engaging in war”
- “Ensure its own defense”
- “Ensure equal treatment for belligerent states in respect to the exportation of war material”
- “Not supply mercenary troops to belligerent states”
- “Not allow belligerent states to use its territory” (FDFA, 2022, April 4)
Switzerland has always taken pride in maintaining all of these legal conditions. Yet that is not to say that within these boundaries there was no room for changes in perception of what it meant to be neutral. In fact, the evolution of neutrality is a concept that the current Swiss administration takes pride in stating in its Q&A memo released on the 9th of September 2022 “Neutrality is not set in stone; on the contrary, it is an instrument of foreign, security and also economic policy that must be adapted to the prevailing political climate” (FDFA., 2022, September 9)

There have been multiple instances throughout history in which Switzerland had publicly reexamined its position on neutrality. According to historian Dr. Vautravers, the post WWII era saw a period of internal debate as to the extent to which neutrality had equated isolationism. It would be the anti-isolationist camp that would eventually win. Today Switzerland holds an embassy in almost every single country in the world. However, the first embassy that Switzerland had opened in Paris only in 1952. It was only during this (and to some extent during the two World Wars) period that Switzerland began developing its now world renowned diplomatic corps.

Another famous instance was the 1974 debate on military service. Switzerland’s neutrality should not be conflated with radical pacifism. It practices what is known as armed neutrality. It is in essence an extension of the age-old idea that “if you want peace, you must prepare for war.” Switzerland had been traumatized by the forcible usage of its people to fight in foreign wars. In particular, after the occupation of Switzerland by France during the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon forcibly recruited Swiss citizens to fight for him in Russia.(Vautravers, 2022) This move proved to the Swiss people that even if they seek to maintain their neutrality, if the Swiss will have no way to defend themselves they will be abused by the stronger powers
surrounding them. For this reason, from its earliest iteration the Swiss constitution includes mandatory conscription meant to bolster the defense capabilities of the nation.

However, in 1974 feelings began to change. criticism of the Vietnam war in the US had spread to movements across the world. One such movement was a student movement in Switzerland calling for an end to the draft. In other words, the idea was that Switzerland should abandon its understanding of neutrality from armed neutrality to one which avoids all conflict by not having any military capacity at all. Ultimately that movement did not succeed in its goals.

The Swiss army argued that it was not an aggressive organization towards any particular group or nation and therefore the Swiss military was not only compatible but essential to Swiss neutrality.(Vautravers, 2022) In this case, one sees that Switzerland had actually maintained a more traditional stance in its understanding of neutrality, as opposed to the 1950s example in which it was the reforms who succeeded in changing the Swiss understanding of neutrality.

Both these debates were more on theoretical grounds. They were battles of policy out which represented a deeper debate on identity and neutrality. However, there were instances in which Switzerland debated its neutrality in much more direct forms. Most notably is in 1993 when the Swiss Government actually commissioned a report to review its own neutrality. The Report on Swiss Foreign Policy for the Nineties was released on 29 November 1993. This review was a response to the post Cold War world. This period brought with it a time in which the strict bipolar world order was replaced with a clear unipolar hegemonic world order. This had brought seismic shifts. In the words of the report “On the one hand, it is now possible to envision the building of a unified Europe, free and at peace, capable of resolving peacefully any conflicts among its members and of calling to order any countries failing to respect international law. On the other hand, the collapse of the old political structures has allowed formerly repressed
conflicts to re-emerge and is even giving rise to new disputes creating a new form of instability”

In response, the report declared the government has “begun to re-orient the neutrality aspects of
Swiss foreign policy. The Federal Council intends to persevere in this course, as it offers the dual
advantage of safeguarding our national interests in the best possible manner and also of allowing
for international cooperation in all areas where common tasks need to be accomplished and
peace and prosperity are to be preserved.” (FDFA, White Paper on Neutrality, 1993)

The report summarizes its stance on neutrality by claiming the following policy stances
(1) The maintenance of permanent armed neutrality. (2) Directing its neutrality as an opportunity
to promote humanitarian causes. (3) “An Active Foreign Policy Which Transcends Neutrality
and Focuses on Participation and Solidarity” (4) Participation in coercive measures (5) Neutrality
is No Obstacle to Switzerland's Accession to the European Union, and finally (6) I continued
sense of open-mindedness towards changing policies for changing needs. (FDFA, White Paper
on Neutrality, 1993) Conclusion 3-5 are likely the most groundbreaking and provocative
changes. However, they will be discussed in greater detail. For now, it is important to note that in
the same memo that was released in 2022 on the Ukraine war the FDFA announced that the
“Federal council held discussions on neutrality on 7 September 2022. The Federal council
believes that the policy implemented since the report on neutrality, as defined and implemented
since the report on neutrality of 29 November 1993, remains valid.” (FDFA., 2022, September
9) Therefore the official view of the government on the issue of neutrality is still defined by this
report.

The examples above note only some highlights of the long and complicated road by
which Switzerland slowly defined its own neutrality. However, even with those fragments of
history the case for the coexistence of neutrality and the capacity to sanction become clearer. It is
clear that regardless of whether or not one believes philosophically or theoretically that the two are compatible, on a legal basis the Swiss had already determined it was. The third conclusion of the report says so explicitly. The question then becomes not “how was Switzerland able to sanction Russia?” but rather “why did Switzerland sanction Russia?”

**Economic Explanation**

The first possible explanation as to why Switzerland abandoned its neutrality is the changing economic interests of the country. In conversation with Counsellor Jean-Marc van Dril, who works for the permanent mission of Switzerland to the WTO, I was reassured that, with the exception of arms, neutrality has no impact on trade. In a purely legalistic sense, so long as Switzerland does not directly sell weapons to one group over the other, and even there there are a few caveats and exceptions, Switzerland has not violated its neutrality. As we've seen by the 1993 report this view is very much aligned with the official stance of the government. With very few and specific exceptions trade cannot de jure impact neutrality.

Nevertheless, I would argue that economics may still have a substantial de facto impact on neutrality. As discussed, one of the most important pillars of Switzerland's neutrality is its capacity to maintain its independence. As discussed in the previous section, neutrality is actually seen as a tool to guarantee independence and not the other way around. It is the reason why **armed** neutrality is so important to maintain neutrality. Switzerland can only remain neutral and independent if the price of invading it is so high no larger power would deem invading it worth it. However, there is an Achilles heel to Switzerland’s policy. Switzerland is like a fort but forts can be sieged. Essentially the argument goes as such: Switzerland can publicly proclaim that its foreign policy decisions are independent of any foreign influence and that they remain unbiased
towards any party. However, if Switzerland is exclusively economically dependent on any side of a conflict to what extent can they truly go against the wishes of that nation.

With that in mind some may argue that as the EU began to expand, both geographically and economically, Switzerland became more dependent on both the EU and the US for its economic needs. Therefore the likelihood that Switzerland will actively go against the wishes of these two countries becomes increasingly smaller. To put it in other terms, as neutral as Switzerland is, it is far easier to see it sanctioning Russia than sanctioning the EU even if theoretically the EU did something against the beliefs of the Swiss Government.

In order for this to be true two things must be proven. The first is that Switzerland is disproportionately and overwhelmingly economically dependent on solely western allies. The second is to show some sort of correlation between Switzerland’s increased dependency on its neighbors and its political decisions in regard to them. There is conflicting evidence on both these issues.

The increased reliance is significantly easier to prove. This can be seen both on a theoretical and empirical basis. Based on the gravitational model of economics it is only natural for Switzerland to become more reliant on the EU and US for trade. The gravitational model states that the two determining factors to the total volume of trade between two countries are the total size of both countries' economies and the physical distance between the two countries, with the distance of the countries being the variable that matters most. (Anderson, J. E., 2016) When Switzerland was founded it was placed in the center of the world’s competing powers. There is no data to show Switzerland's exact trading powers with the nations that surrounded it in the 1800s but it is likely that they traded with all powers of Europe. Switzerland’s location was advantageous for their economic independence and by extent economic neutrality. That is not the
Since the EU was founded, its borders almost surrounded Switzerland completely. When Austria joined in 1995, the EU did completely surround Switzerland, and as it continued to expand east and west the distance between Switzerland and any other nation continued to increase (Riegert, B. 2014, May 1). The size of the EU’s economy had also continued to exponentially increase until it stagnated in 2008. Growing from around 726 billion in 1970 to 17 trillion today. (The World Bank, 2021)

Using data provided by the OEC one can see that this theory holds some merit. Out of the $305 billion dollars in exported goods from Switzerland in 2020 around $130 billion went to EU nations as well as an additional $14.5 Billion to the UK. In comparison, only slightly less than $3 billion dollars worth of exports went to Russia. After the EU the second largest trade partner is the world's largest economy the US to which 20.3% of all Swiss exports were sold. In comparison, only around 5% of all exports were sold to China. Data from the WITS show these patterns are also true for imports. The top importer in Germany, then Italy. The other top ten are all EU except for the US, and UK which are part Western block, and China and Thailand. (WITS. 2020) Taking all this into consideration it is very clear that Switzerland is disproportionately reliant on the west for its economic means. This assertion would support the theory that even if Switzerland does not break its de jure neutrality it de facto can no longer truly stand against the wills of western powers, particularly when threatened by primary or secondary sanctions.

However, a deeper dive into the facts shows that even if the statement above is true the issue is still more complicated. Firstly, not all imports are the same. Switzerland is neither a food nor an energy independent nation. Two resources that are not a luxury but the most basic form of necessity goods. According to a report by OFEN, despite its current investments in energy
independence, in 2018 around 75% of Switzerland’s energy was imported. (OFEN, 2019, January 1). An additional report by the SWI news organization showed that Switzerland imports most of its food. (Bondolfi, S., & Hoi, G. W. S., 2018, October 5) This would have proven to be even stronger evidence for Swiss reliance on the west were it not for the fact that unlike the general trends in Switzerland's trade patterns, most of Switzerland's food and energy does not come from the West. Petroleum accounts for over 50% of Switzerland's energy consumption and according to the official website of the Swiss government “Switzerland imports nearly half of its crude oil from Africa (39% Nigeria, 6% Libya, 1% Egypt); the remaining half comes from Mexico (18%), the United States (12%), Kazakhstan (8%) and other countries.” (Discover Switzerland, 2019, November 27). This means that in the critical energy sector Switzerland relies more on nonwestern than on western sources. The food industry is a little bit more complex. Most food does come from the EU but other nations such as Thailand and Vietnam also supply critical amounts of fruits and fish. (Bestfoodimporters. 2020, June 11)

Therefore, whereas it is true that given the sheer volume of trade it would be difficult for Switzerland to risk angering the US or the EU, due to the sensitive industries in which Switzerland is invested elsewhere, it also can’t anger or sanction countries from across the political spectrum. In that sense, although the west holds significant leverage over Switzerland, particularly as the weaponization of trade has become ever more common, Switzerland's economic interests are not so overwhelmingly connected to the west that it can no longer maintain its neutrality.

In addition, as has become painfully clear, due to global markets a country does not have to be directly economically tied to another to be hurt by sanctions. As seen in the data above Russia accounts for only 0.5% of Swiss exports and is not a major provider of either oil nor food.
Nevertheless, with the introduction of global sanctions Energy prices increased in Switzerland by 28% and food prices by 2%. Notably, this is less than the increase of 38% and 10.6% in the eurozone. (Turuban, P., 2022, September 22) However, it nonetheless shows how despite Switzerland’s low trade connections with Russia, Russia's hold on the global market means Switzerland is “connected” to it and will feel the effects of any action taken by it even if very little direct trade is happening.

Nevertheless, all these elements show a danger to Switzerland's capacity to maintain its neutrality. As economic warfare becomes more and more of a norm it is hard to see how Switzerland will be able to stand up against the EU and the US if they ever threaten sanctions. However, the key phrase there is “if they ever.” Economics may predict a future Swiss neutrality crisis, but they cannot be placed as an explanation for Switzerland’s decision to sanction Russia for one very simple reason. EU and US Sanctions on Switzerland were never even on the table. Secondary sanctions were never adopted by the US. Therefore Switzerland was never in any imminent threat of sanctions by the US or the EU. Were Switzerland to refuse to sanction Russia it would have no doubt seen its ambassadors summoned to receive a sharp reprimand by their US and EU counterparts. Yet aside from a few angry sentiments and perhaps even a condemnation it is hard to imagine the US or the EU would have taken any future action.

This would suggest that the decision to sanction Russia was not a coerced one. Rather it was done under a full and sincere desire to sanction Russia as punishment for its behavior in Ukraine. The question then becomes, if Switzerland was not forced into sanctioning Russia, why would they actively want to do so knowing the effect it may have on their perceived neutrality?
Political Factors

The political argument is one that is much more suited to understand why Switzerland would voluntarily choose to sanction Russia. The argument goes this way. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the world entered a period of global US hegemony. This period also saw Swiss integration into multiple multinational organizations. Because of US hegemony, the world status quo was actually pro-US. Therefore as Switzerland became more and more integrated into the world system they have adopted US norms. As new powers began to rise to challenge US hegemony, Switzerland may not have ever made an active decision to side with the US but due to the norms they have developed over time they have become more sympathetic to US ideals of the post-Cold War such as Liberalism, and laws based world order.

Switzerland was well aware of the profound impact that the fall of the USSR would have on its notions of neutrality. It is not a coincidence that the USSR fell in 1991 and that report of reassessment of Swiss neutrality came in 1993. The report explicitly cites “The historic events that have changed the face of Eastern Europe have brought an end to the Cold War and to the confrontation between the two camps associated with it” (FDFA, White Paper on Neutrality, 1993) as the inciting event to the writing of the report. It was not just a change in words, it was a change in action. Today it seems almost ridiculous for neutrality to be considered in contradiction with the capacity of a country to participate in the UN. Yet up until 20 years ago, despite hosting the Geneva headquarters, Switzerland was not in the UN. The reason they gave for joining was also explicitly linked to the end of the cold war. The official response to why they had joined the UN was that “during the Cold War, the UN was often the scene of disagreements between the superpowers, and as such held little appeal to Switzerland as a neutral state. Nevertheless, Switzerland was sufficiently pragmatic to participate in a number of specialist UN
agencies despite its non-membership. In the ten years following the end of the Cold War, however, the UN rediscovered its universal vocation, making full Swiss membership possible.” (FDFA., 2022, September 30) In other words, without competing superpowers, Switzerland believed the world was now entering a new period of unified vision and therefore acting in solidarity with that vision was not a breach of neutrality.

If this was true for the UN it was true for a great deal of other international organizations. The following table is taken from a publication by Mark R. DeVore titled *Armed Neutrality to External Dependence*. In it, he summarizes the defense agreements Switzerland has collaborated with in the past 50 years and the reason for doing so. Switzerland will not go so far as to join these organizations yet nonetheless cooperation with them is a far cry from the original vision of independence and neutrality. It is also important to note the extent to which these corporations increased since the end of the Cold War. The logic behind cooperation with these organizations is the same as the logic behind joining the UN. If the world is under a unified vision, there is no reason not to join these security organizations. By doing so, one isn’t picking a side, they are simply preserving the status quo.

Note that most of the threats presented in the table after the Cold War are ones of terrorists, migration, etc. which are not issues of one country versus another but rather internal struggles against non-state actors. Once more we note that Switzerland is not violating the legal definition of neutrality, nor is it truly losing its independence. However, it is clear that this
approach marks a very different understanding of neutrality and independence than was envisioned at the height of the Cold War.

The most extreme example of change in perception is the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Joining the UN doesn’t just come with assurances, it also comes with obligations. Since 1999 Switzerland has sent around 190 men to help with the peacekeeping mission in the Kosovo which was approved by UN resolution 1244. Once again as it was adopted by the UN it was viewed as the world's “universal” position therefore not obstructing neutrality both legally and philosophically.

The sanctions placed on Russia are not a far-off stance from this philosophy. Yes, Russia pushes for this war to be seen as though it is a conflict between the west and the east. To some degree it is. But Russia is also in clear violation of International Law. Switzerland is fighting for American ideals explicitly, it is fighting for the global universalist status quo that is the international law-based system. Unfortunately, this law-based system is no longer so universalist. However, Switzerland has become so ingrained in it, it is hard to see how it can divorce itself from it. Following this logic, one can see how in good faith Switzerland never directly took action against its legal and even philosophical definition of neutrality, yet somehow found itself in a situation where it is clearly picking a side in a foreign war.

A counterargument to be made on the issue is no one is holding a knife to Switzerland's throat. Just because the US is the world hegemon doesn't mean that Switzerland must do what it asks of it. Indeed, there are instances where it didn't. As Dr. Vautravers pointed out in my discussion with him, in the early 1990’s Switzerland actually refused to comply with sanctions against South Africa despite the push by the US government. However, the Soviet Union only fell in 1991. It therefore actually goes to show the power of norms. These institutions do not
Social Factors

Now that we have found a reasonable response to why Switzerland sanctioned Russia, we are left with one final question. Yes, it is true that Switzerland has not legally acted against its neutrality yet Switzerland has purposefully taken action against a party in order to make a statement that they believe that one side and not the other are the clear aggressors in the war. Not exactly a purist definition of neutrality. This begs the question, if Switzerland is capable and willing to make such a partisan statement (however justified) why does it continue to insist on its own neutrality? What does it matter that Switzerland maintains its legal neutrality?

One way of looking at this question is to try and understand to whom this message of neutrality is directed. The key is to identify the Swiss government's audience when continuously messaging its neutrality.

The first suspect is Russia. It is possible that Switzerland is trying to maintain a “justice is blind brand” reputation. That is to say that Switzerland still wishes to maintain its relationship with Russia and so they are pushing for a narrative that says “yes, we sanctioned you but it isn't personal, it is simply because you violated international law.” This way Switzerland potently maintains its capacity to mediate between Russia and the West. However, if this is the case, it isn’t working. In August of 2022, Russia declared that in its view Switzerland is no longer neutral and therefore Switzerland cannot act as a mediator. (Liffey, K. (Ed.), 2022, August 11) This view from Russia had caused no movement in the Swiss position which continued to maintain both its claim of neutrality and would even increase its sanction policy. It is therefore
clear that Switzerland may care what Russia thinks but it is certainly not going to allow Russia to
define for it whether or not they are neutral. They are not looking for Russian approval.

The second suspect is the rising powers to the east. Particularly China and India. As we've previously examined, one of the driving factors in Switzerland's deviation away from classical neutrality is a unipolar world. As China, India and other non-western powers rise it is possible that Switzerland is reverting back to more traditional views of neutrality. This is a topic that likely deserves a research paper in its own right. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Switzerland is assuring its neutrality due to Asia. In conversation with Dr. Suddha Chakravartti, a professor of international relations and law at the EU Business School, asked to what extent the Asian powers cared for or needed Swiss neutrality. His simple response was they didn’t. Swiss neutrality worked during the cold war in part because there were two clear sides and Switzerland was physically in between them. If there is to be a shift away from American hegemony it will be to a multipolar world where each side plays to its own interests. In addition, the historical and cultural ties that Switzerland had with all sides in the European conflicts do not exist with Asia. Asia does not need nor care about Swiss neutrality. It should also be noted that of all the many reports by the Swiss government sighted in this paper, most had translations in all official Swiss languages as well as English. None had a translation to Chinese. There are no signs that Switzerland is making establishing its neutrality in the eyes of Asian partners a top priority.

While many nations may not care about direct Swiss foreign policy, many nations across the world still rely on the neutrality of the ICRC. The ICRC’s neutrality is historically tied to Swiss neutrality. Therefore the Swiss government may feel a responsibility to maintain its neutrality to maintain the integrity of the ICRC. However, in conversation with the Managing Editor of the Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog at the ICRC, Ms. Elizabeth Rushing, it became
clear that though the neutrality of the Swiss government and the ICRC are historically linked, there is little reason to believe that were Switzerland to abandon its neutrality nations would no longer trust the ICRC. One of the ICRC’s primary pillars is independence and throughout its 180 years of existence, it has developed a reputation of its own. The ICRC is also not governed in any way by the Swiss government and contains offshoots across the. Donors may be startled at first but so long as there is a continued need for the ICRC and there is no change in policy from the ICRC itself, there is no reason the ICRC should no longer be able to function if Switzerland changes its policy.

Therefore we remain with only one true contender for the true audience of the government's messaging. The Swiss people themselves. As stated at the very beginning of the essay, Switzerland’s neutrality policy is more than just a foreign policy decision. It is an issue of national identity. Switzerland is a confederacy of separate cultures and languages and neutrality is one of the principal shared narratives that holds it all together. And so here lies the main existential tension of Switzerland's sanctions against Russia. This is the reason why Switzerland simultaneously pursues policies that seemingly stretch the definition of neutrality and even tarnished its neutral reputation, while also insisting that it is maintaining its neutrality. Switzerland maintains its neutrality not because it is a viable strategy for maintaining its independence as was originally declared in the constitution. In fact, the changing world and the weaponization of economics make it almost impossible to remain purely neutral and that disengagement from international organizations actually threatens independence. Switzerland pursues its neutrality because, without it, it has no sense of self.
Conclusion

To conclude when inspecting the cause of Switzerland’s decision to sanction Russia the first suspect was economics. However, although economic factors may in the future grant foreign powers coercive means against Switzerland, as they were not used in this case they can not be the primary cause for Switzerland's decision to sanction Russia. Switzerland has made the decision to sanction Russia of its own volition. Instead, tracking Switzerland’s gradual integration into multilateral organizations after the Cold War, a correlation was made between Switzerland’s integration into the world and its internal sense of changing norms. As the world shifted back into a multipolar direction Switzerland found itself in a challenging position in which things that used to be considered universal, such as international law, were now becoming partisan issues between the rising powers trying to challenge US hegemony. This lead Switzerland to stretch its definition of neutrality as it tried to stand up for its belief in the international system against those who threatened it. For this reason, Switzerland decided to sanction Russia. Nevertheless, as neutrality is a core part of Swiss national identity, it is unable to completely discard it. If US hegemony continues to and with it the liberal world order, Switzerland will face increasingly difficult decisions in which it will have to balance its support for this system with its desire to maintain neutrality.

In truth, a crisis of identity in changing world is something that is not unique to Switzerland. From the rise far right parties to Brexit, to US “culture wars,” they are products of old notions of self clashing with new realities of the changing world. Switzerland must be commended for its openness to talk and think about these issues and its decisions can be used as a case study for the world. Switzerland like many other nations is at a crossroads and as challenges mount future studies should track the path it chooses to take.
List of Abbreviations

FDFA- Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
WTO- World Trade Organization
US-United States
EU- European Union
OEC- The Observatory of Economic Complexity
UK-United Kingdom
OFEN- Office Federal de l’Energie
UN- United Nations
PfP-Partnership for Peace
CSCE- The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE-The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
EAPC- Euro Atlantic Partnership Council
WMD- Weapons of mass destruction
NATO- North Atlantic Defense Treaty
ICRC- International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent
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Secondary Readings


**Interviews**

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Rushing, Elizabeth (2022) Interview. Nov. 17 2022 Managing Editor at ICRC Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog

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