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研究課題：国際化系における中立性 (Neutrality in International Relations)

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My research agenda is the holistic study of neutrality as a concept in world politics. Neutrality as a political position of states and international institutions (ICRC, IOC, etc.) is a neglected topic in political science but an important concept for the maintenance of peace among nations and the working of world trade and diplomacy during times of conflict. International relations most often conceptualizes the behavior of neutral actors as a form of “balancing” or “bandwagoning” but these concepts cannot adequately capture the experiences

or motivations of neutrals. It is my goal to write a comprehensive account of neutrality across periods and geographies and deduce a theoretical framework to understand the concept as a phenomenon of global politics and conflict sociology. I am using an eclectic research design, integrating historical case studies, literary works, and philosophy with qualitative and quantitative political science methods to achieve this goal.

Neutrality is not studied comprehensively as a phenomenon of IR

In Japan and overseas, the discipline of International Relations has produced much knowledge on war and peace through the research of military alliances. During the Cold War, an entire sub-field of alliance literature emerged due to the importance of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the US-Japan alliance. Even after 1989, such studies continued to flourish, investigating everything from alliance formation, their maintenance, challenges, and their unraveling. However, a crucial part of this discussion has been missing for decades. Neutrality—the opposite of military alliances—has largely been ignored by the IR community. Although historians and area studies specialists did not entirely forget about the topic, systematic IR scholarship on neutral strategies is rare. This is a large gap, as neutrality and its cousin concept, nonalignment, are important components of the international system and the contemporary balance of power. Neutral strategies have historically been crucial and useful to great powers like Britain, the USA, Russia, and Japan, among others, and neutral buffer states have been contributing to the reduction of the security dilemma for centuries.

Misunderstandings about neutrality

Critics argue that neutralism does not matter since “the weak suffer what they must” (Thucydides) and neutrality is a form of institutionalized weakness. But this view is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of neutral actors being pacifist and isolationist, which are both exceptions, not the rule. Modern neutrals tend to be strongly armed and diplomatically engaged in world affairs. Also, neutrality as a political paradigm and field of study goes far beyond “classic neutrality” like the permanent neutralities of Switzerland or Austria. It encompasses forms like “nonalignment,” which, in the Cold War, led to the formation of the Nonaligned Movement counting today more than 120 member states. It also includes neutral strategies of great and small powers that reject alliances, it includes “neutralism” as a foreign political preference of populations, and it includes the policy choices of states and international organizations (NGOs and other corporations) trying to maintain positive relationships with belligerent forces.

Studying neutrality as a reaction to conflict

To accommodate all forms of the phenomenon, I approach neutrality as an expression of a most fundamental relationship

between political actors, generated by conflict. War, in this scenario, is but one extreme form of conflict, but any kind of contest creates a “conflict constellation” which affects third parties that are not part of the primary conflict. Those who maintain active relationships with both sides of a conflict are neutral actors in my definition. This creates a triangular constellation in which neutrality is directed toward a conflict, not toward conflict parties.

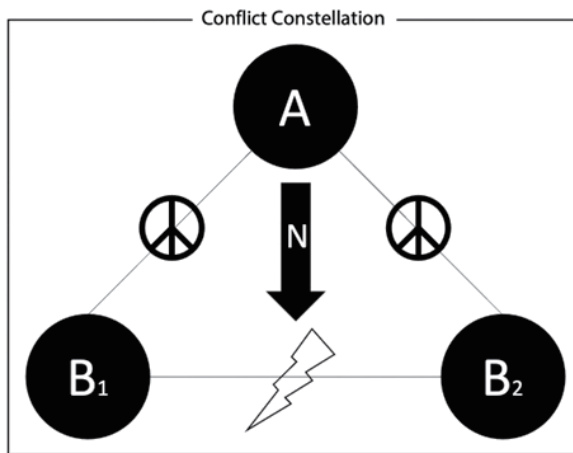


Figure 1: Actor A is neutral toward the conflict between B1 and B2. A remains at peace with both belligerents (© P.Lottaz).

This framework allows for new ways of understanding conflict constellations with neutrals part of the equation. For instance, one can approach the situation in WWII in which the USSR and Japan had signed a neutrality pact that made sure they remained neutral in the wars they fought with the other’s allies on opposite ends of the globe.

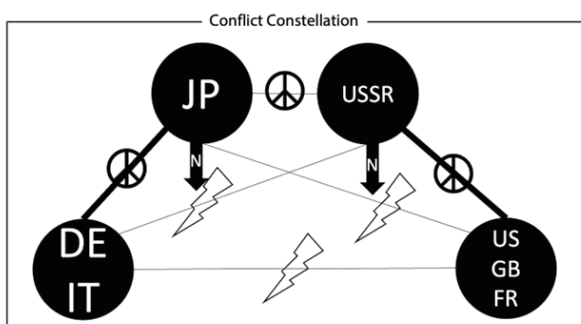


Figure 2: Japan and the USSR remain at peace for the longest time of WWII, maintaining neutrality toward the war the other party was fighting with their allies (©P.Lottaz).

Understanding neutrality means understanding world politics

The reemergence of indigenous neutral strategies in unlikely places like Serbia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, ASEAN, and even Taiwan is evidence of the unbroken attraction of neutralism as a political force. Furthermore, the recent warfare in Europe, Moscow’s demand that Ukraine become (again) a neutral state, and the reaction of non-western countries staying nonaligned (condemning Russia but not joining the international sanctions against it) also show the importance of studying neutrality as a tool of statecraft. Even the People’s Republic of China is following a neutral strategy in this conflict and in the sense of avoiding military alliances, similar to the United States in the nineteenth century when Washington tried to avert “European entanglements.” With the strengthening of NATO, new alliance building in the Pacific, the resurgence of Russia, and the ascendance of China as a great power, the global security architecture is headed toward a multi-polar constellation that we have not seen since the nineteenth century. In this new context, the impact of neutrality, neutralism, and nonalignment on the global balance of power needs to be understood to help avert crises and foster stable international relations. The study of alliances alone is only half the picture and needs to be complemented by the holistic study of neutrality, so as not to miss the significant opportunities buffer states and non-alliance-based security strategies provide. Neutrality as an analytical approach has much to offer to IR theory.

References

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