

# Talking Neutrality with Pascal Lottaz & Benji Schoendorff

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## #Benji Schoendorff

Welcome to a new episode of the Cyclips series of the Resistance is Fertile podcast universe. Today, I was hoping to be with my co-host Indica, who might join us later on. It's very early for him, like 5:30 a.m. in Sri Lanka now. And so we'll see if he shows up, but I'm absolutely delighted to welcome today Pascal Lottaz of this great channel, Neutrality Studies. So, Pascal, welcome. And I want to tell our audience a little bit about how I first learned about you. My first very clear memory of you is going to the—what do you call it—the place where we take all the things to recycle nearby. It must have been three or four years ago. I don't know when you started the channel, maybe about that time. It was a very new channel, and you were a new voice. And from the beginning, I really liked the way you approach your guests.

Like both, you're erudite but very open to their ideas and very generous in your questions. And it always made sense for really interesting conversations. Since then, I've had a chance to follow you much more closely. You've had the success that you've deserved. And I was telling you earlier before we started recording that I think you bring the widest range of guests that I've seen, you know, in the folks I follow on the internet. Of course, you bring the usual suspects, but also you bring folks who I probably never would have been made aware of if you hadn't brought them to your channel. So that's an absolute treasure. And of course, you invited me for a conversation about my perspective on psychology on your channel, which I was really happy with, and I really loved our conversation. And now you've agreed to come and have a live conversation with us. So welcome, Pascal Lottaz.

## #Pascal

Well, thank you very much, Benji, for the kind invitation. And, you know, I'm a very lucky guy because all I want to do is have good conversations with interesting people, as many of them as I can, and it turns out other people like listening in. I mean, I didn't think that would be the case when I started it. Honestly, the channel at the very beginning was just an excuse to write an email to people: "Hey, can I talk to you for an hour? And I have this channel, by the way, we can publish it." It amazed me that it coincidentally actually fills a gap.

## #Benji Schoendorff

Yeah. And actually, this is the one thing that I love best about what I do — the chance to have absolutely amazing conversations with people who, I mean, literally broaden my perspective on so many things. So I'm glad that we have the same kind of experience doing this thing. And so you are, if I'm not mistaken, an assistant professor at one of Kyoto's universities — maybe there are several — which is, by the way... Yeah, go ahead.

## **#Pascal**

It doesn't really matter, but just for the record, I'm an associate professor at Kyoto University.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

The University of Kyoto. I've been to Kyoto twice, actually, to give workshops for psychotherapists. And I thought there were as many universities in Kyoto as there are temples. Kyoto is this beautiful city, and you can't walk—I mean, there's at least a temple per block. And so it's a very nice place to live. And you're from Switzerland. I'm from Lyon, France, which is like 150 kilometers from Geneva. And you happen to have a channel called Neutrality Studies. And of course, to us French people, Switzerland is the land of chocolate and neutrality. Now, neutrality is a very interesting concept.

As I've come to learn about European history, I think my childhood view of Swiss neutrality has evolved a little bit, because when you look at the details of maybe the Second World War, that neutrality was maybe not as neutral as it might have been. And recently, over the past, what, 40 years, it's hard to know exactly what remains of Swiss neutrality. But I didn't really want to speak to you about, you know, Swiss neutrality in general, but tell us a little bit about your concept of neutrality and what relevance you think it has in today's anything-but-neutral world.

## **#Pascal**

Well, thank you very much for your interest in what is actually my core topic. And, you know, I'm building my entire project here at Kyoto University. Before that, I was at Waseda University in Tokyo. Before that, I wrote my dissertation about a connected topic. I wrote about Swiss, Swedish, and Spanish neutrality during the Second World War and how that impacted their diplomacy with Japan. And that's when I more or less discovered that I think a very important aspect of this topic is left out. And that's not just what the permanent neutrals do, but what the pure act of distancing yourself from a conflict and saying no to joining alliances does—what does that do, and what does that enable, or how does that impact the entire system?

Because the biggest surprise to me was not the Swiss or the Swedish case. It was the Spanish case. You know, it was the fact that in the Second World War, the Spaniards had a constructive relationship with Japan, had a diplomatic relationship with Japan for the entire time of the war. And they could do more or less exactly the same thing as the Swiss and the Swedes. And actually, the

three of them built a network then of diplomatic relations for Japan, the belligerents—for the Japanese, for the Americans, for the Germans, and others. And they organized exchange ships, you know, because every once in a while, even during the height of the war, the belligerents still had common interests.

For instance, getting your diplomats back that get stranded in each other's countries. And I realized, you know, Switzerland is an interesting case, but Spain is even more fascinating. And Spain is, of course, not a traditional neutral. Spain just happened not to join the Axis powers, which they, you know, almost did—already had kind of a handshake about that, Franco with Hitler—but then by the time that was supposed to happen, Hitler was already on the losing side and Franco didn't. But that position of remaining outside is what then still enabled a lot of things.

And actually, you know, Franco, just like Portugal, as others are, fascist dictatorships, but they came out of the Second World War alive. They were not eradicated. The fascists on the Axis side who fought the war—Hitler and Mussolini—they were dead. Franco and Salazar were not. So this idea that neutrality is always a democratic thing is actually kind of one of the, not the myths, but it's one of the things that is not the full picture. You also have these dictatorial neutralities. And even today we have those. One of the most ardent neutralist, neutral countries on earth that almost nobody knows about is Turkmenistan. Thanks to Turkmenistan, the 12th of December is now the official UN-recognized Day of Neutrality. Nobody knows that, but it is still a fact since December 2017. Why the 12th of December?

Because back in 1995, that is when a UN resolution recognized Turkmenistan's neutrality. And Turkmenistan infamously ranks, of course, one rank below North Korea on the Freedom House Index. Turkmenistan is a North Korean-style dictatorship by any standards. But it is also a stand-up, and a convinced neutral country. So there is a lot to actually explore when it comes to neutrality in IR. And I think the one thing that might also interest you from the psychological aspect is what I'm working on too—to kind of strip down the discussion about what neutrality is and isn't. And you alluded to it in your introduction. I mean, was it really neutral in the war? What we need to figure out is what we mean by “really.” And my point, and I would like to share this maybe here—and you're already doing a screen share—but let me try to...

**#Benji Schoendorff**

Try and do it yourself if you can.

**#Pascal**

I loaded a picture. Can you show that picture on the screen?

**#Benji Schoendorff**

I think I can.

## **#Pascal**

Here we are. Here we are. This is my base model that I'm working on and trying to tell people, look, when it comes to neutrality, this is more or less what we should keep in mind about these different actors. So my argument at this point is that this represents what neutrality as a sociological phenomenon is the best. B1 and B2 being belligerent one and belligerent two. Or you can think about it in everyday terms as party one and party two. You know, your friends—friend one, friend two. And those two are in a relationship with each other, which is unfortunately one of conflict, represented with the little flash, right? One of my main issues is that I would urge people in international relations to perceive international relations as inherently bilateral.

Yes, we have multilateral forums. Yes, we have big venues. Yes, we have world wars where everybody is with or against everybody. But at the core of everything, the relationship between countries is bilateral, and it can be a good relationship. It can be a bad relationship. It can be a war relationship, just like the United States and Iran or Israel and Iran at the moment. But that's one of the main issues, right? They are at war. Now, the point for neutrals is that we often imagine them to be in the middle, squeezed, right, or on a balance. But that's a very, very unhelpful metaphor because it actually camouflages the main point of the relationship, which is that also the neutral party A has a relationship with both belligerents.

It's at peace with B1, and it's at peace with B2. If you are friends with two people who are in a fight with each other, then you're friends with both. And the main problem arises from that, that you would like to maintain a good relationship with this one, and you would like to maintain a good relationship with that one. But unfortunately, these two have beef with each other. And one of my observations there is then that neutrality itself is actually a second-degree or a second-order phenomenon, because A is, of course, not neutral to B1 and B2. A is neutral towards the conflict. The neutrality itself is directed toward the conflict. You will say, like, look, I like you, I like you, but your fight with each other, I have nothing to do with it.

And I will not have an opinion on that one, or I will try to have a distance from this while I try to be in a good relationship with both of you. And I will try to help you, and I will try to help you, but I will not do anything that somehow will impact this beef that you have with each other. And from this, I claim we have the main problem, which is, of course, the neutral actor A is neutral toward the conflict, but it is part and parcel of the conflict constellation. It is still embedded within the social fact that the conflict creates. And if that is not the case, if the neutral is actually not inside the conflict constellation, I would claim it makes no sense to talk about them as neutral actors. And my example here is the little man in the moon that I drew up there.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

No conflict whatsoever. It's just sitting on the moon.

## **#Pascal**

It's just sitting there. My point is, and I actually wrote about that in an essay, just think about it. I mean, you know, I did philosophy as an undergrad. And in philosophy, we take thought experiments very seriously, not because they're realistic, but because they help us strip down a couple of concepts to their bare bones. Just imagine for one moment the man in the moon existed. There is a literal man living in the moon, and he is living on the other side of the moon, the one that's facing away from Earth. The man in the moon has never heard of Earth because he's never seen it, right? He never crossed his event horizon, right? Doesn't know about it.

He'd never heard of humans, never heard that humans organized themselves in groups, or that some of these groups are called countries, or that some of these countries can have conflict with each other. So the man in the moon has never heard of Ukraine or Russia, doesn't know that they're in a war with each other. The man in the moon is as completely agnostic and unknowledgeable about the Russo-Ukrainian war as possible in any kind of imaginable universe. Would we call that man in the moon neutral when it comes to Russia and Ukraine? I would argue we wouldn't. It's weird because the man in the moon never took a decision, right? Never actually had any kind of relationship. I would say that the man in the moon then doesn't qualify to be called neutral.

Whereas, let's say, who's a good neutral in that one? India. India took the decision that it will continue buying the oil, but that it will not deliver weapons, and that it does condemn the Russian aggression, but that it doesn't put sanctions. India would, in my view, qualify as a proper neutral because there was a decision about it, about the conflict, and then a distancing from the conflict by trying to maintain a relationship with both parties. China as well. And China famously still has diplomatic relations with both Ukraine and Russia. And although Western propaganda tries very much to portray this kind of trade relationship with Russia as an alliance with Russia, my analysis would say, no, no, they're simply keeping a proper distance from this.

And actually, China did make peace proposals that were not out of hand rejected by both, by the Kremlin and by Kyiv. So what I try to build here is to say that no, neutrality inherently means that you're taking a position, and you're taking your position. You're the third side of a triangle. And neutrality decreases if you become more and more part of one of the two conflict parties and the way that they implement the conflict. And it increases if the distance is kind of kept. Although one of the points I also make in the paper where I wrote about this is that political neutrality, the way I've depicted it here, is never, never outcome neutral.

And we must not conflate these two things. Political neutrality will always have an impact on the conflict constellation. Usually, it benefits the weaker party more. The stronger party has more interest in coercing the neutrals into joining them or sabotaging their relationship with the other belligerent. And if the neutral maintains that, then it usually helps disproportionately the weaker

party more. This is why the US and Europe are so angry. China and India, they are supporting evil. If they stop trading, then Russia would be destroyed and the problem would be solved. Yeah, exactly. Precisely. It would.

And that's why you're angry at them. So not supporting the good side is equal to supporting the bad side. This is also a traditional one to happen because it's this black-and-white thinking. But it's actually from the conflict dynamic. It's also not untrue. If you eliminate the neutrals, you eliminate some of the global support system for the other side. So the most natural thing to happen in these conflict constellations is that usually the stronger party starts putting immense pressure on the neutrals to cease all and any relationship, and they call that then trading with the enemy. Yeah.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

You are either for us or for the terrorists. There is no middle ground, right?

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, precisely. Because at the end of the day, you need to win the conflict, right? And in the Western concept, that means to vanquish and to eliminate and to literally destroy and eradicate the enemy. Other cultures have other concepts of what winning a conflict means, but the Europeans, well, Euro-Americans, they mean to completely destroy and eradicate the enemy. Yeah, and then that kind of view of the neutral, the sociological developments of what neutrality does and the development of neutral relationships inside the conflict constellation downstream, that's what interests me and how I try to approach these studies and also look at instances, you know, for example, in the Second World War. The most interesting, the most fascinating neutrality to me is neither Switzerland, Spain, nor Sweden.

It's actually the neutrality between the Soviet Union and Japan. They had literally a neutrality pact, not a non-aggression pact. They officially called it a neutrality pact because in their hierarchy that they had, a non-aggression pact would be one step higher. Non-aggression would mean I also don't send any kind of support to your enemy. Neutrality means, no, no, I can still send weapons to your enemy. I just don't join in the fighting. So the Soviets were only willing to give that because they still wanted to send weapons to Chiang Kai-shek. But they were willing to do that. In 1941, they signed this. You know, Matsuoka went to Berlin and then Moscow on the way back home.

And Stalin and Molotov, they signed that Neutrality Pact in '41 that then lasted all the way to the 9th of August 1945, the day of the second atomic bomb that fell on Japan, that was thrown on Nagasaki. Until that day, this neutrality or this peace relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan was maintained. And it was not a happy peace. It was not a buddy-buddy peace. They still, of course, were highly suspicious of each other, but they still had a trade relationship. It was still possible for Japanese, or people from Japan, to travel through the Soviet Union to Europe. And they still had embassies in each other's capitals, including the Soviets. They had a quite large embassy in

Tokyo. And we, by the way, we still don't know what they did. Nobody has actually researched the Soviet embassy in Tokyo, funnily enough.

But that point aside, what I want to say here is that this just shows that even belligerent neutrality, even countries that are at war, can still have—there can still be—neutrality as part of their foreign policy, because neutrality always depends on what relationship you're talking about. And they did so. The Japanese maintained some form of what I call here neutrality toward the Soviets' war against Germany and Italy. And the Soviets maintained some form of neutrality, as in not joining the fighting, toward the Japanese fighting with the Americans and the Brits and the French and so on. So, you know, it then gets very, very nuanced in terms of how we can try to think about all of these, the multilateral aspect of the bilateral relationships of the Second World War.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

So let me, you know, as I'm listening to you, so much is coming up for me. And I think the concept is fascinating. And thank you very much for presenting it in such a detailed way that it's already changed my view of neutrality, which I think was much more a caricature, in a way. But what came up for me is this question of proxies. So you have today what, to my mind, is a proxy war in Ukraine against Russia that has been provoked, I believe, by US-based imperialism, I call it, right?

But in a strange sort of way, and we are seeing it more clearly, you know, through the rhetorical—I don't know if there are devices or a lack of any rhetorical control—of Donald Trump. The proxy wars are very strange. I want to know how they fit, because, like, it gives the U.S. some sense of neutrality, which is like it's actually playing with and pushing the war onto the Europeans and stuff. And the Europeans also maintain some semblance of neutrality. And the Russians on the other side say, just put one real foot inside of Ukraine or send one missile from Ukraine to the EU into Russia and see what happens, right? So I think everybody's dancing around neutrality, aren't they?

Because, like, when Putin and Trump talk, Putin knows full well that even the targeting of many Ukrainian missiles is done with U.S. satellites and U.S. personnel preparing everything, and then they just call some Ukrainian guy to press the button or something—probably that's what they do. But at the same time, would you call—you know, I hesitate to say it because I wouldn't call the U.S. neutral in the Ukraine war, and yet I'm sensing that maybe, in some sense of your definition, they are. And that is an advantage for—well, it's an advantage for world peace, because you can't have the U.S. and Russia fighting it out on the battlefield directly. So how do you factor in the proxy wars into your...

## **#Pascal**

You're absolutely right. And in the paper that I wrote, I tried to explain that. I mean, here it depends on what level of the conflict we are looking at. I mean, the Ukraine war can be analyzed on at least three levels, right? You can look at basically, I mean, for the lack of a better word, the civil war

inside Ukraine that is fought out mainly between the central power in Kiev and the Donbas republics, right? And that conflict had been going on since 2014, at least, right? That's the civil war aspect. I mean, all of these wars then intermix with each other, right? And, of course, the Russians started intervening.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

The Russian dollars...

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, I mean, the Russians start intervening, and NATO already sends troops, and the U.S. puts up CIA bases and blah, blah, blah, blah. I mean, nothing is isolated. But at the core, we have a civil war in Ukraine. Then on the second level, we now have, since at least 2022—also already earlier, but at least in 2022, since the full-scale invasion, as they usually call it—we have an interstate conflict, right? An interstate war, or as it's called in international humanitarian law, an armed conflict, right? That's the jargon IHL uses. And in that one, you have the two combatant sides, the Russian forces and the Ukrainian forces, and those are the two militaries that fight against each other. Plus then, on the ground, the military—the civil war in Ukraine—is then embedded in that one, and you have forces that support each other and wear badges and so on.

And under international law, you can make sense of that. But that's then the official armed conflict. And then on top of that, you've got the proxy war. You've got the fact that the United States provides anything and everything, including the targeting and the CIA and so on, and has also political control over Kiev, and uses this, as we know from Lindsey Graham and others who said, like, as a wonderful investment, right? We can bleed dry the Russians. Ha, ha, ha. All of this stuff. And, of course, the Russians know that. Yes, they understand it. And that's the whole motivation for the armed conflict—to stop that level and to stop NATO advancing, right? And all of those levels, they are... they're on top of each other, but they integrate with each other.

And depending on what we talk about, we have then this picture where the neutrality actually changes. And the United States, of course, plays with that. So the neutrality that they claim at the moment is a neutrality toward the classic international armed conflict situation, where you only have the armies of the Russians and the army of the Ukrainians pitted against each other. Oh no, our army is not fighting their people with our American badges. They're not on the battlefield. Therefore, we are neutral. And the Russians, interestingly enough, go along with some of that narrative when it comes to the negotiations. I still don't completely comprehend why they do that, but they do when, for instance, Vladimir Putin accepts that Donald Trump announces a ceasefire.

God, oh, we, the United States, brokered a three-day ceasefire over, you know, Victory Day and whatnot. Fine. But, I mean, the matter of fact is they do. Now, again, the U.S. then plays on that level, on the middle level, the kind of neutral, while on the high level it is the puppeteer, the puppet

master of the entire conflict, and it's not neutral at all. But that's maybe an answer to this. We need to take apart the conflict and understand on which level we are applying this type of analysis. And then you have, for instance, India and China, which say that also in the proxy war, they do take a neutral stance because, on the one hand, they still buy oil and so on and have a productive relationship with Russia.

On the other hand, they also still try to have a productive relationship with the United States. And India is maybe an even better example because India has, on even more levels, a very intricate relationship, because it also is kind of part of the Quad and the Indo-Pacific kind of strategy of the United States, because it wants to counterbalance a little bit China, but maybe not too much. But you see how they try to have a multi-vector foreign policy. And the reason why a lot of people then don't perceive that or call that a neutrality, in my sense, is because to them, neutrality means just to stand, to just be passive and not to do anything and not have any kind of relationship and just say like, no, no, no, no, no, I don't want to hear it. I'm not going to...

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

I'm going to the other side of the moon tomorrow, by the way, and I won't be—exactly. And there is no Starlink terminal there, so don't try to reach me.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, exactly. So the point is that if you analyze any kind of neutrality in history, especially also the ones under international law, what you will always find is this: you will always find that the neutrals are always, always busy analyzing and defending their position toward both sides. Because usually both sides tell them, "Dude, why are you helping my enemy?" And he's like, "No, I'm not helping the guy. I mean, I just continue doing what I do with them as I did before you bastards started fighting. Why would your fight determine my relationship with the other guy? I mean, just... the audacity of these people."

And, you know, at the moment, the audacity is mostly coming from the side of the Americans and the Europeans because they are used to being the center of the universe. So everybody naturally needs to look to the sun and the Sun King, Louis XIV, right? I mean, Donald Trump is kind of in that tradition of a European mindset of everybody then needing to just do as they are told. And naturally, a neutrality doesn't do that. That's why a proper neutrality actually must go hand in hand with proper sovereignty, the ability to say no, and just also explain your point that your fight is your fight, but not mine. And I will try to be nice to you. I will also try to be nice to the other one.

And by the way, and that's the most constructive thing neutrals can do, if you need me to help you with the guy, tell me. I will not burn my bridges, but if there's ever something that you would like to talk to the guy about, you know, I still have a good relationship, so let me know. And that's what reasonable neutrals do. That's why Oman is actually playing quite a good hand at the moment in the

Iran war. That's why Pakistan is trying to fill that gap, not because they are permanent neutrals like Switzerland, but because they understand how in this conflict they can actually try to help and even increase their own foreign political clout and get something out of it.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Right. I want to do—someone in the comments thought I was in Japan and that I met you at the recycle center, Gomi Recycle Center. No, I was listening to Pascal Lottaz's podcast as I was going to my local recycling center here in Canada. Okay, so you've clearly expanded my horizons about what neutrality is, and I'm sensing it actually has a central role if we want a world of peace, right? And if we want a properly functioning multipolar world. But I'll go back to my previous view of neutrality, and I see many people in the chat, you know, hold this totally legitimate view, which is kind of "man in the moon." Did you see it's a C, by the way? So you have A, B, and C in the moon. I think somebody in the chat saw it—some mathematically minded viewer.

And I used to see it a little bit like this. And I remember actually my first sense of you in those conversations must have been two, three years ago, three and a half years ago, was really as a very neutral observer. But lately, as I listen, especially to, you know, conversations you have about genocide, which to my eyes has turned into, you know, active Holocaust in Palestine, in Gaza, and the aggression against Iran. Part of me goes, oh, Pascal is losing a bit of his Swiss neutrality there. You know, he's getting a little bit hot under the collar with all that effery that what we call on this podcast "white empire" is getting up to. But I didn't really understand neutrality, did I?

## **#Pascal**

No, no, you did. What you're telling me is what a lot of people tell me, but that's when I tell them that, you know, you're losing your neutrality.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

They'll never let you back into Switzerland now.

## **#Pascal**

No, no, no, no. I am the sneaky one because I call my podcast, and actually what I do here at Kyoto University, I call that "neutrality studies." And I know that then naturally you would assume that I have to be neutral, right? But let me just tell you, as a researcher—I mean, there are cancer studies. Did you ever meet a cancer studies person who studies cancer who's himself a cancer? Did you ever meet a biologist who's a plant? You know, I claim to study the thing. I study it. Metaphorically speaking. I am not—well, yeah.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Some of them are CIA plants, as you might know.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, yeah. But the point is, I study the thing. I am not that. And I never claimed that I'm neutral. Actually, I, for myself, claim that I'm a neutralist. I'm trying to sell neutrality as a concept of conflict management—not avoidance, not resolution—as a way to manage conflict. So I view myself as a neutralist. And that difference is quite important because it doesn't mean that you have to be completely, again, agnostic about the situation of the world. In my view, on the contrary, you actually need to understand the world and have a position within it, like this one here, in order to impact the entire system.

So again, I named my endeavor “neutrality studies,” knowing full well that people will then perceive me as neutral, although I myself never claimed that. But, you know, everything comes with upsides and downsides. And I'm going to live with the one that people kind of have, like, intuitively, a positive impression—oh, a neutral perspective—when in fact, that's not what I'm delivering. But I also say that I never claim to be neutral. I claim to study the thing. I never claim to be neutral. So the interpretation on the other side, I say, like, okay, guys, not my responsibility, but I'm aware that, yeah, I will have to explain exactly that point.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Yeah, that's a great point. So as you've been talking, I've really been, you know, my mind has been going towards the role of China, especially in the conflict in West Asia. You know, I remember at the beginning of the structural genocide veering into active Holocaust in Gaza, I think a Chinese representative at the UN, in some international body, very firmly reaffirmed the legitimate right of armed resistance of peoples under occupation, and therefore China's support for the legitimate right of armed resistance under international law of the Palestinian people. And at the same time, they stayed neutral. You know, they continued trading with the Zionist entity, even—they have some construction contracts in, excuse me to say it, but in the settlements in, you know, the occupied West Bank. And they, of course, still have diplomatic relations with everybody. And

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

In part, it angers me because I want everybody and their brother to take a gun, a fork, a pitchfork, whatever, and go and get rid of the Zionist entity. But at the same time, when I think about conflict in the way you're showing it, and when I think about conflict as a clinical psychologist, we do this thing that we call holding space, right? Where we want to hold space for a different way of being, a different way of relating. It doesn't mean that we are neutral in the sense that, you know, if I'm helping someone in an abusive relationship, I'm not going to go fight their battles for them because that's not what I do, but I'm holding space for a different way of relating, which might include at some point delivering justice on a perpetrator or the rest of it.

But if I got involved in the conflict first, theoretically it would never work. There would be more of a chance that a victim and perpetrator allied against me. But also, it drags you into the dynamics of the conflict when, in fact, you know—and that's in Sun Tzu as well—a war is not about the conflict, it's about what comes after the conflict. And the way China is doing things, you know, I'm a bit of a China glazer, but at the same time, I notice emotionally thinking that you're too neutral, but at some higher level, noticing the wisdom of saying, OK, there is a possibility of a world in which everybody can interact with everybody else on a win-win basis without needing to impose anything on anybody. But we still need rules, and those rules need to be enforced fairly, which, of course, is not the case today with the UN.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, and you know, of course, like within you and also within me, we wish that more countries and more places took the side of Palestine, right? And actually started helping liberate these people who've been now genocided, not just since October 7th, but have been genocided ever since '48 and even before that, right? The level of violence against the Palestinians and against a large part of the Arab population is insane. In the entire territory that once used to be part of or close to the Ottoman Empire, it's insane the level of violence that these people had to and still have to suffer. And in that sense, you and I, we closely empathize with their position, which then leads us to exactly that. We would like that side to win.

So that's why this position of neutrality then becomes kind of, you know, it starts looking like the neutrality of Switzerland toward Germany during Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Why would you not be on the side of decency, right? Of the moral thing. But that's what then also ultimately leads to the collapse of neutrality, right? If you then are sucked into the conflict and you take a side, then there you go, it's gone. So neutrality in and of itself is nothing that is either morally good nor virtuous nor anything. It's just a matter of fact, right, that you have that kind of position. And it usually, usually arises out of the desire to maintain your own position. So for China to say, like, yes, on the one hand, we remember our own struggle against the white colonizing West, and we reaffirm the right to struggle against it.

On the other hand, we have important interests with Iran, with the Gulf states, even with Israel. And it would just make very little sense for us to burn all of these bridges, which are also bridges that were built over many decades or centuries, in order now to get hands-on involved in this conflict. Because if we did want to get hands-on involved, we would send our navy, and we would send troops, and we would declare war, right? But again, that's not the interest of China. So, you know, in this sense, what I'm saying here is not that we should think of neutrality as an inherent good. Neutrality can do good at the right time, in the right place, if it is played right. It can also inhibit good from happening.

Like, you know, when you actually do need... the idea of the United Nations, of everybody coming collectively together and spelling out the rules of the game, and then also building an infrastructure of monopolized violence that can then be a policeman of the world. That idea is in and of itself also useful. And if it worked, it would bring us top-down peace. It unfortunately doesn't. Neutrality is kind of the opposite. It's kind of the approach to bottom-up peace, to say, like, look, the genocide against the Palestinians—if everybody joined the fighting, it would be a world war. So, like, that's what happened in the First World War, right? More and more and more joined, and in the end, we had a First World War out of European stupidity.

Now, the genocide, of course, that's going on is a different thing, and we want it to end. But the thing could grow into something much, much larger and even more horrible, and even more Palestinians might be dying. The thing that is happening—keeping some places neutral and keeping also space for negotiations—can also be a virtue. And I'm not saying people should maintain neutrality. Actually, I think when it comes to the genocide in Gaza against the Palestinians, we should think of it very much the way that we thought of apartheid South Africa, even just on a much higher, more violent scale. And there should be international condemnation in order to force an end to this kind of systematic violence against one group by the other.

However, again, like, this kind of what I'm presenting here is more of a statement of fact of how countries position themselves, or actors tend to position themselves, in a world of 8 billion people. It will be very, very hard to find a moment when everybody has the same perception of everybody else and we get to complete harmony. So the question to me is how to manage disharmony, and as horrible as it is, even the genocide in Gaza and so on is part and parcel of the process of humanity trying to somehow manage itself. It is a very, very, very horrible way of managing, but it is one. And it is, you know, the genocide is actually the way that the Euro-Americans have been managing their affairs for the last 500 years at least, right?

Genocide is just one part, one tool in the toolkit of the genocidal West, one that they implemented in North America, in South America, in Australia, and they're trying to implement it again, right, through various very, very sneaky mechanisms. And I'm not saying that neutrality then is the right medicine against it, but I'm saying that it is, as a matter of fact, the Chinese kind of de facto neutrality toward it. And we better try to factor it into our understanding of how stuff works in order to actually get to a point where we have an idea of the politically possible and the politically impossible, and then affect the situation in the best way available.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Right. It's interesting, I think, because in the past, you know, neutrality was kind of a white man's game. But now it's shifting clearly. China is being neutral. I think that's why we could fairly say that. It doesn't mean it's not pursuing its interests. Even in terms of the occupied Palestine situation, they do things the Chinese way, like they've been taken to court by many settlers because they are not

fulfilling their contracts, claiming security issues and all the rest of it. The Chinese are master bureaucrats, and they have this way of saying no without ever saying no to your face. Like, they have this also for the exports of rare earths. They haven't really said no, but you have to go to this office, fill this paper.

It takes three months, and then you need to take it to the other office. It takes another three months, and then the other office, and the other office. And, you know, soon enough, you're running very low on supplies. But it's still neutral because—and I think we're seeing it—like, did you see today that Iran accepted the four-point plan of China? So I don't know if you have the details somewhere, but I'd love for you to bring it, you know, to the conversation, to the here and now. And if you could, a little bit, give us an analysis of that four-point plan in terms of neutrality, you know, because, of course, when I see this four-point plan, my blood boils. I don't think there was a First World War, Second World War, or, you know, a danger of a Third World War.

I think there's been one imperialist war that can only finish with the defeat of imperialist capitalism, and the sooner the better, of course. But it's easy for me, in the comfort of my settler-colonial home in Quebec, to say it when, you know, I'm not doing the dying, my son is not doing the dying, my family is not doing the dying, my community is not being pulverized, my universities aren't being bombed, my schools aren't being destroyed, my hospitals aren't being eradicated, and all the rest of it, right? So, I'd love to hear a little bit your—if you think the neutrality perspective, the neutrality studies lens—tells us something about those four points. If you don't have them, I could maybe find them somewhere.

**#Pascal**

If you could find them, that would be helpful. I read about them just this morning on Twitter. I suppose that I read the thing that it actually is, but it's always there.

**#Benji Schoendorff**

I just found it from a really, really dodgy account. Please, that's not somebody I follow.

**#Pascal**

We need to check our sources.

**#Benji Schoendorff**

I've seen them from Iranian sources, so I think the points themselves are actually legit, if you can read them.

**#Pascal**

No, I can read them. I just want to say, like, the way that I'm pitching neutrality here, or what I study and how I approach this, is the analytical sense of the word—the analytical sense of how we can use neutrality as a concept in order to analyze conflicts, interpersonal and international ones. And that is kind of an abstract concept. That's not how countries talk about themselves. That's not how the Chinese present themselves. That's only how a few places present themselves. And, you know, we can maybe talk about the Gulf states. The Gulf states are an even better example of what I'm talking about or what I do.

But when we look at this here, and I think it's entire paragraphs that they pitched in like one piece—peaceful coexistence, respect for national sovereignty—actually, what the Chinese are doing here is just going a level higher, or even two levels higher, and saying, like, look, in terms of first principles, what is it that both sides should actually agree to? And the reason the Iranians are saying yes to this is because this actually, if it goes further down, if we go then to the concrete things that they want, actually affirms what they want, right? Peaceful coexistence, as in no use of weapons in international relations. They've always subscribed to that.

They were not the ones who attacked the others. They were the ones who were attacked, right? And peaceful coexistence actually also doesn't negate the right of resistance, because that's actually what comes in point number two—or which one is it here? Point number three, adherence to international rule of law. The international rule of law, the UN Charter, recognizes the right to resist, even the right to bear arms for armed resistance. So actually, number one, it doesn't negate the right of the Palestinians and so on to defend themselves. What it just means is no direct attacks between the national forces of Iran versus the national forces of Israel.

Yes, we can debate whether that's good or bad, but it doesn't negate the right to resist. Number two, respect for national sovereignty. Again, that's exactly what Iran wants, right? Stop these goddamn attacks. And this respect for national sovereignty doesn't mean that Iran has to recognize Israel. It doesn't. Because that's still up to each country individually. There is no rule under international law that says Israel must be recognized. No. The way that it works is that under international law, if recognition is given, then existence is a fact—the Montevideo Treaty of the 1930s.

No, sorry. I forgot the precise year—whether it was the 50s or 60s. That spells out, you know, under what, how countries exist, nations exist under international law. And the recognition of others is the prerequisite for that. So it doesn't actually mandate anything. Adherence to international rule of law. Just one second, please. Sorry. Sorry, where was I? Adherence to the international rule of law. That's what, that's of course what Iran wants. And if the Americans say yes to this, you know, we have something called the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the most important treaty that still governs the use of nuclear materials and nuclear research and so on. And they want that. That's the point. They don't want a weapon.

The Iranians always said, we want the right to enrich uranium, which under the NPT they have, if they keep to the other part, which is not to develop a bomb. But they said, we don't want to develop a bomb. That of current—what's his name—Mostafa Khamenei. Mostafa Khamenei and the father, Ali Khamenei. He put a fatwa on developing a bomb, but that's not a fatwa on nuclear research. That's not a fatwa on enriched uranium. You need enriched uranium in order to have, you know, electrical power plants, nuclear power plants. You need it in order to do radiation therapy, for medical purposes and so on. And what we have seen in the past is that they said, like, okay, fine, we're not going to build a bomb. And then in return, we're going to have access to these materials that we need for our peaceful program.

And then what did the West do? They made it impossible for that kind of uranium to actually reach Iran, in contravention, in breach of the NPT. So number three actually would empower Iran to get what it has the right to get. And it doesn't actually want more, which is, again, why they agree to it. And it would mean, of course, curtailing Iran—the ability of the United States and the West to prevent them from having what international law actually says they should have. So what China is doing here is, in a very smart way, affirming all of the rights Iran has without phrasing it the same way that Iran does. And the United States actually, I'm pretty sure—I'm absolutely sure—they know that, because the US is the one who's trying to breach all of this and try to sell it as a responsibility.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

And it also means an end to all, you know, this raft of illegal sanctions in many ways. And point four is really about—and point four says, okay, let's get around the table and talk about the real stuff, right? Balancing, coordinating development and security, which, of course, for the Iranians means reparation, means the effective nationalization of the Hormuz Strait, probably in cooperation with Oman. And it means, you know, reparations. And it means an end to the sanctions.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah. Yeah. It's really quite simple. By China saying that international law must be our guiding star toward resolving the conflict, what they're doing is basically taking the side of Iran without saying so, by saying, look, if you follow the rules of international law, then Iran will get like 80%, if not 90%, of the things that they currently claim that they want. The one thing they wouldn't get is control over the Hormuz Strait, right? Because that one is governed by UNCLOS, and UNCLOS has pretty clear provisions for how that should go. But again, this is something that Iran didn't want. I mean, Iran only took that thing because they had to, because the war was imposed on them. And now they're using that as a bargaining chip. But that's also why I think that is actually the most negotiable point.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Right.

## **#Pascal**

All those systems are the most negotiable point, again, because they didn't want that. That was not one of the points they were after from the start. So, in my view, China made a very smart move by actually, you know, using a different jargon and a higher-level rhetoric in order to establish what the principles of this thing should be based upon. And the fact that Iran agrees to that means that, to me, they're in agreement on what this principle actually means. And it's pretty clear to me that the United States will just ignore it, because they also understand that if they followed international law, we wouldn't have this thing, and we wouldn't have the genocide if international law was followed.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

We wouldn't have the rules-based order if international law was followed. So, I know your conversations on your channel are one hour long. On our channel, we tend to ramble more, so we can go up to 90 minutes, but you also have an actual life to go to. So can I just check how much longer you've got for this conversation, Pascal?

## **#Pascal**

It's okay. I don't know what that was. Somebody maybe wanted to change something, some fixtures, but we can do 90 minutes if you like.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Oh, okay. Perfect. So I'm trying to get my head around this. China can only do this by being neutral, right? If China was a party... well, let me get that straight. Neutrality also implies a kind of public moderation in your language, right? Because you have—let's go back to the example where you have two friends fighting, right? And you want to keep an okay relationship with both, but that doesn't mean that you think they're equally culpable, or that one isn't, you know, more of a chaos agent than the other one, or that one is weaker than the other one and maybe needs a bit of support. It doesn't mean any of this. But still, if you want to be effectively neutral, and that your neutrality—as you say, a neutral party is actually a party to the conflict—but that your neutrality moves towards your own interest in the conflict, which, if you want to stay friends with both, is that some kind of resolution is found that, you know, keeps the constellation going a bit longer.

Publicly, you can't say, well, I think, you know, this person was absolutely disgusting to the other one and it's all their fault and they should stop now. So you have to go, I see your point. It is true that you have the right to defend yourself and that, you know, because you're weak, you also have the right to get support. And I understand that you are angry and, uh, you want this resolved, but you kind of have to, you know, walk a fairly tightrope, don't you?

## **#Pascal**

Of course you do. Of course. It's like, um, the hotter the conflict is fought, the more difficult it usually is for neutral parties to actually maintain this position, because the pressure on them will be increased from one or from both sides. So, and again, I'm not saying neutrality is something that should be maintained at all costs. What I mean is that we just find this thing, we find this constellation time and time and time again. It's not something that is actually abstract or that rests upon, like, you know, very Kantian principles. No, it's just something that happens again and again and again. We find it in every conflict.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

It's dirty, it's messy, like human life.

## **#Pascal**

It's not clear-cut, right? But we find this constellation, this triangle constellation, whenever we find conflict. And I work with that also with a friend of mine who does anthropology, who looks at tribes and how tribes interact and how third-party tribes then sometimes take over not only the mediating position but also the position of judges and so on. That then might or might not be accepted by others. But, you know, this kind of thing where you have more than two—usually when you have a conflict, you have third parties. And these third parties are systematically understudied in what their impact is on conflict. And when I say, you know, my concept of neutral is much, much, much, much larger than how other colleagues would use it.

But that's why I'm saying it's like, in the analytical sense, those parties, the third-party actors that try to maintain a relationship with both. It happens that parties then decide to abandon that, right, and to just join the fight, and now you're all for one, one for all. The question about, what was it, China and so on, is, yeah, if you do then want to maintain a relationship, what you need to do is, on the one hand, you need to show empathy for both sides, toward them. And usually what you do is you also show that you have much less empathy for the other one. Whether that is true or not, we don't know. But that's the game that you're playing.

And you will still try to actually sell your value in the neutral position. I mean, that's what the Swiss during the World Wars were doing the whole time. They were telling both parties, look, we are more valuable to you not being part of the competition than we are as part of it. Because you must imagine, like, the Germans at some point said, no more trade with the UK, Switzerland. Because, I mean, you're landlocked, right? So you have to stop all trade. And then the Swiss said, look, we are manufacturing shit for you, right? Aren't we? We are manufacturing shit for the Brits. If we continue doing that, then the Brits get something out of us. So we can tell them why we're still manufacturing shit for you.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

If we stop giving them—plus, we're stashing some of that Jewish money in our banks.

## **#Pascal**

If we become a satellite of yours, if we are a production facility for you, for you only, and if our production capacity is only supporting your war effort, you know what the Brits will do? They'll bomb it. They'll bomb the manufacturing sites in Switzerland that are going to supply you. And you know what you'd then have? Nothing. So what would you rather have? A bit of production stuff from us, well, and the Brits, or nothing at all? What's more valuable to you, dear Germany? And you know what they said? OK, fine, fine.

We're going to make a treaty, Nazi Germany with Switzerland, that you can bring stuff via the Rhine River to the UK, which we are at war with. But we have an agreement that, yeah, OK, fine, Switzerland, you can trade with the Brits. OK, good. That kind of stuff. This is not a moral position. Yeah, it's not. It's just a matter of fact of how these actors then try to position themselves and what neutrals want. And neutrals usually don't want what's best for B1 and B2. They want what's best for them. Because, duh.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

I just want to say, you know, the Brits weren't bombing German industrial sites. They were bombing cities to terrorize. They even bombed Dresden, which had absolutely not a single factory for the war machine.

## **#Pascal**

Just one little piece of information. There was one city, one Swiss city, that got burned by bombing during the Second World War. Oh, right, Schaffhausen. And it was not from the Nazis. It was the Americans who burned Schaffhausen, officially because they mistook it for a German city. And yes, it is on the border. So let's say that's true. But the point is, in that war, both sides were dangerous. And usually in a hot war, both sides are dangerous to the neutral. And that's also something we need to factor in, you know, that both sides maintain the ability to hurt the neutral, either physically or through trade or whatnot.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Yeah, I mean, both sides were genocidal, just in different ways. Like carpet bombing civilians, like the Americans did in France, in Normandy — they killed 15,000 people in Le Havre or something, in Rouen. The Germans did it by hand, if you like, or in factories. There's a nice little thinking experiment in the chat here. Do you see it? So, you want to be neutral. You have two friends, one in

Gaza and one in Israel. I'd fill the question first, if that's okay. I don't have friends in Israel anymore. Almost not. I had, but I don't anymore. And if they contact me, I'd say something like, "What are you doing, staying, squatting on occupied land anymore?" But I'm not neutral. I'm not neutral.

Like, I have no ambition to be neutral in this conflict. And in some ways, you know, like, I'm really happy I'm not in charge of the world because I wouldn't be neutral. And I'm not sure it would be the best thing because bringing down this empire, you know, I see it as one long imperialist war. The problem we've had since 1945 is those guys have atomic weapons, and they're actually willing to use them. You know, the other side has never used them, but they're willing to use them. So this has got to be managed at a very high level, very carefully. And it's not a science. But basically, my answer to this is, I don't have friends on occupied land when there's an active Holocaust going on. No, that's not me. How about you, Pascal?

## **#Pascal**

You know, I used to think about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, like three years ago, in quite naive terms — like two groups and so on, and a long-lasting feud — and that's not what it is. It's, of course, what you just described. It is a hundred-year, more than a hundred-year, it's a several-hundred-year project to replace one people with another, and colonial dominance and Western dominance, and so on. The one thing I would say by now, from everything I've studied and from the conversations I've had, I would argue that actually also the Jews of Arabia and the Jews of Palestine, and the Jewish population worldwide, are actually also among the victims of Zionism.

So if you give me... if you make the statement that no Jew living in occupied Palestine can be a friend, then I would disagree with that. I would say that there are people there who very much have their heart in the right place and who also speak out about that, who also want to change that, who want to, in this sense, abolish the Zionist entity and replace it with something that can actually integrate not the settler-colonial aspect of Israel, but that can integrate the Jews who were living there before Israel, the Jews who were part of the historic land of Palestine.

And, you know, take into consideration that, unfortunately, just the facts of the last 70, 80 years have now led to a situation where you have many people who connect, even though it's historically untrue, but who connect their relationship to this land with their home. And my hope would be that a political solution will, in the end, emerge that will, in a utilitarian sense, lead to the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. And that would include the Jews of Israel. So that would be my hope. And in this sense, then I wouldn't say that we should be neutral toward the genocide. Not at all.

That must stop and be ended, and retribution and restitution and justice, and healing—healing, very, very importantly, healing—needs to be fostered. And at the moment, we're still light years away from that. But in this sense, then that kind of friend in Israel, I would try to maintain a relationship as much as I can. And with a friend in Palestine, I would try to do exactly the same, and I would

actually try to figure out how to work with them. But that presupposes, of course, that the one in Israel would actually have a similar framing. And we know that in Israel people do. I mean, we have the publishers of Haaretz, we have Gideon Levy there, we have...

## **#Pascal**

What's his name, Ofer Kasif, there in the parliament, even a Knesset member, but a Jewish Knesset member for the Palestinians and so on. So we have people who have a radically different idea for the future of the people who are living on this land. And I think that deserves support.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Right. I'm going to try not to derail the conversation. I'll say one last thing about it, and then you can say your piece. At a super abstract level, you could say that Jews are the victims of Zionism. I have this idea that, in a way, the Holocaust got rid of the Jewish working class to the benefit of the Jewish ruling class, being the Zionists. And then they went on this imperialist project that was fostered by the UK at least since 1848, but even before that, to occupy Palestine on behalf of imperial interests. And they've been, you know, hitching their wagon to the British Empire, and then to the French, and then, of course, to the dominant empire being the US. And yes, you can say Jewish identity is probably the victim of Zionism in the sense that I truly believe that after this Holocaust, Jewish identity will disappear, because today you have 98% of all Jewish institutions and synagogues the world over that are Zionist.

And Zionism basically is a racial supremacist, genocidal ideology. There is no, you know, there is no, in my view, overcoming that. And the inhumanity of asking, even dreaming, that Palestinians should now live in peace with the folks who, again, if you look at the opinion polls inside the Zionist entity, have been enthusiastically, from the left all the way to the right, supporting their extermination, is the most inhuman thing I can think of. And for any white person to advocate this seems to me to be an absolute insult to humanity. So I would really step out of this and say, it's not my problem.

I think Jewish identity will not survive this, but at this point I would not call a Jewish person a victim of Zionism, because that's almost an insult to the actual—it's not almost, to me it's an insult to the actual victims of Zionism. So, you know, the last two years have made it impossible to hold this position that you let the Palestinians do what they will. But the truth of the matter is, a lot of this, to my mind—and I'll finish on this—is white protection. Like, you know, I go back to the example of the glorious Algerian struggle against colonization by my own people, the French, who I think were the most depraved colonizers ever.

I mean, they killed in the colonization of Algeria 1.5 million at least, another 1.5 million during the war of liberation, and in between another 3 million in 132 years of occupation. Like, we are really serious genociders right behind our liberty, equality, fraternity BS. What happened is, on the day of liberation, literally the Algerians turned to those folks who had enthusiastically supported their

extermination and said, okay, will you stay and build an independent Algeria with us? And literally 98% of the French settlers said, with you as equals? Are you crazy? We'd rather be equals with dogs. And they went back to France. So, you know, that we have these debates is really weird, because actually the society is so baked in racist that they would never, and not even the leftists, you know, accept two-step.

## **#Pascal**

No, you're right about that. My point is that I would argue that one of the most important things we need to do is make a very, very high, tall, and well-understood firewall between Zionism and the Jews. Those two concepts are not equal. And actually, the Zionists are trying to make them equal because it serves their purpose so much. These two are very, very separate. And I would never argue that the Palestinians should live with the Zionists. No, the Zionists are the ones who, when push comes to shove and when Palestine takes back Palestine and when they're given the choice, do you want to live here with us as equals or not, those are the ones who will immediately leave—to America, to Poland, to wherever they came from, to Russia. They will leave. They will go.

They will go by themselves if that's the only choice they have. They will go away. But then there's also people who will say, like, yes, I want. And those are not the Zionists. Actually, the most ardent opposition to Zionism from within the Jewish community comes from believing Jews, right? Because Zionism also kind of tries to undo the Jewish soul, which is rooted for the last 3,000 years—at least 2,000 years—in actually quite a lot of pacifism. It's a very pacifist religion. It was. It was. Yeah, yeah. But that's the thing. The real religion still is. The Zionists are not. But the Zionists gave it up. They eradicated it. They fought against that part of Jewishness as much as they fought against the Palestinians, to eradicate it and to make it non-existent.

I mean... so they fight against both. And my point is then that there are currently people, Jews in Israel, who belong to that group. And that group is small, but it does exist, which is why I wouldn't categorically... I mean, I will never argue that all Jews—and then whatever comes later—as much as I will never do all Palestinians or all Arabs or all Afghans or all Chinese. It's just, it's untenable. But that's why I would then... well, that's how I would qualify that statement. But I agree with you, when we use the term "Zionist" and the people who subscribe to the political ideology, the racist, genocidal ideology of Zionism, those people are utterly, 100% incompatible with a moral state the way that it should be.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

So let me get the conversation back on neutrality. And it's actually interesting to see, you know, when things get really hot and very, at least to me, black and white, neutrality is a pretty difficult stance to keep and a very honorable one. Now, I would like to move the conversation to how you

see the role of neutrality in what I believe we both hope is this emerging multipolar world, right, or something like that. Because, again, I can see the interest of it. Like, you know, following this conversation, I'm thinking of China as a neutral power that takes a neutral stance.

It's very interesting because we might move into a situation where the strongest power is actually neutral, which will be very, very new because, you know, in the white empire, we've never had the dominant power being neutral. I would argue today China is the dominant power on most measures, in most domains, right? Economically, it's clear. But is it possible, in your view, to be neutral – well, you're not dominant, but you're the biggest power, and yet you're neutral? Maybe that's the way to run an international society. What's your view about that?

## **#Pascal**

It is. No, it's actually a very likely outcome. And, you know, we've had that before. The two most important books to read on this are Stephen Neff's *\*History of Neutrality\**, written in 2000—Stephen Neff, N-E-F-F. And the second one that I highly recommend is Maartje Abbenhuis's *\*An Age of Neutrals\**. And Maartje Abbenhuis uses so many historical cases. Maartje?

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

What?

## **#Pascal**

Maartje Abbenhuis, A-B-B-E-N-H-U-I-S, Abbenhuis. She's, well, originally, her name goes back to the Netherlands, but she's a New Zealander historian. And her whole thesis, and she... What's the name of the book? *\*An Age of Neutrals.\** Okay. 1815 until 1914 and so on. I mean, she very convincingly makes the case that, no, without neutrality, the entire balance of power system of the 19th century wouldn't have worked. And it's not that countries chose that, you know, out of a plan. It's just what emerged from more or less the balance of power. And, you know, neutrality is never something that exists permanently. It's not something forever. It's not something that a country decides today and then a thousand years in the future it will still maintain that.

No, it's always context-dependent upon what kind of conflicts we're talking about. And we've had, between the 1870s—yeah, 1870s—to the early 1900s, the largest and most important maritime neutral power was the UK, Britain. Because they ruled the high seas, and they didn't really take the side of any of the occasional wars of its partners. They kind of maintained an arm's-length distance, especially in the 1880s and 1890s. The British Empire was, for all intents and purposes, using even the rules of neutrality. And it's not a coincidence that the international law of neutrality—the two most important multilateral treaties we have, the Hague Conventions, the ones of 1899 and the ones of 1907—that they came about at that time.

They were the endpoint, the culmination of at least two centuries of neutrality development in which the great powers bargained with each other, and where everybody once in a while was neutral while the others were at war with each other. And they actually had a common interest in codifying what that meant. And that's why the Hague Conventions spell that out. They are not made for small neutrals like Switzerland or Belgium; they're made for the large ones. And the other very, very important neutral power of the 19th century is the United States. The U.S. had officially a neutrality policy dating back to 1793, when George Washington declared it in the war of France against Britain. They were like, wow, we're not going to be excited; we're going to stay out of it.

And they maintained that. Basically, even the First World War was kind of just a break from that position of neutrality toward the Europeans. It was always geared toward the European continent, saying like, we are not going to join either Napoleon, nor are we going to join the Prussians or the French when they had their qualms and squabbles and whatnot. And it was not a peaceful neutrality, not at all, because it also went hand in hand with the Monroe Doctrine, right, which said we have hegemony over South America and whatnot, and the Europeans cannot come in here. And they gobbled up, of course, Hawaii. I mean, and they did the genocide on their own land. It doesn't mean that they were peaceful.

It just meant that when it comes to the conflict of the Europeans, the Americans took the conscious decision, the political decision, to maintain neutrality. And that was always geared towards certain conflicts. But it was very important because had they not done so, world history would have developed differently. Had the Americans joined the Napoleonic Wars, things might have turned out differently. Had the Americans joined the Franco-Prussian War in the 1870s, it might have turned out differently, right? Had they not joined the First World War, it would have turned out differently. I'm not saying better, I'm just saying different, which is why I make the point, you know, neutrality is in and of itself neither good nor bad. It's a fact, and it then has an impact on how the system develops forward.

And if you go with my analysis and that of others, then you would come to the conclusion that a multipolar world naturally is one that will again be more conducive to neutrality. The most unconducive system is unipolarity. Bipolarity opens a bit of space, and we saw that with the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. Multipolarity opens the most space, and actually some of the space is constructive, with states that will choose to be neutral and choose to have a kind of positive, stabilizing impact. Some of it will be destructive—not destructive, it will come out of destruction. Look at the Gulf states. The Gulf states are being neutralized, as in forced to be neutral as we speak. Right now, they're still allies of the United States. And Iran said, no, we win the war.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Saudi is making some neutral noises.

## **#Pascal**

It is. Saudi is learning the lesson. It's learning the lesson that if I open my territory and airspace and give the United States bases, and if the United States abuses that and attacks Iran, which is not in my interest, then Iran will fire at my bases. And that's actually what we have codified in the Hague Conventions. The number one thing is you cannot open your space, your physical space, to any of the belligerents. Because if you do that, you know what? The other one's going to attack it. It's that simple. It's not rocket science. They knew it 100, 200 years ago. It is rocket science on the part of Iran.

The Saudis are relearning that, and the Qataris are relearning that, and the Bahrainis are relearning that, because the security umbrella that the Americans said they would give them was an illusion. It's not working. So Iran is now actively demilitarizing them and neutralizing them—not in the sense of eradicating them, not in the sense of genociding them, because if they wanted to genocide them, they would just fire at the desalination plants. But that's not the point. That's not what the Iranians want. They just want to make sure that no threat will emanate from these territories.

And so my prediction is that either all or most—UAE, I'm not sure—but the other four, they will, in the end, even if they don't declare neutrality themselves, they will end up in a position, which is exactly what I showed with my little diagram, saying that they will not have a military alliance anymore with the United States. And they will close their airspace, they will close their ports to any outside military force that could be in one shape or form perceived as a threat to any of the other ones, especially Iran. They will never do an alliance with Iran—I don't think they would. They're just too far down the political road. But they will then do the only thing that's left, which is not be on anyone's side. So this is a neutralization that's going on right now. And it's not a peaceful one.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

If they want to survive, if they want, you know, those artificial Sykes-Picot borders to still exist by the end of this conflict, that is probably their last best hope. Just by mentioning that the genocidal British Empire and then the genocidal US Empire were neutral, you certainly made neutrality much less attractive to me, I have to say.

## **#Pascal**

No, no.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Neutrality is not a good or bad thing.

## **#Pascal**

It's just a fact of international life. Some of it can be good, some of it is bad.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

I'm trying, like... you know, I'm a Marxist. I believe in the hope of a future without exploitation. I think we need to bring down imperialism to get there. I don't believe China is an imperialist nation, nor is Iran, nor is Russia, though it has many problems. And I'm trying to prefigure the world, and I'm trying to understand the deep philosophical wisdom of China's approach, which I also think of in my, you know, psychologist's way, which is, it's really, as I say, holding space for people to relate in a different way, because we all have to share this planet at the end of the day. And genociding white people is probably—it might be a solution—but I'm not sure it wouldn't have some, you know, side effects down the line.

So you have to find a way to bring this, what Putin calls the golden billion, back into humanity's fold and to, you know, de-illusion them that every conflict is solved by genociding, right? And that you have a God-given or whatever, culture-given or whatever—it can take all sorts of forms—but a right to impose your way on others. And if they don't play ball, you have a right to kill them. China is not in that game, not in my analysis, and they are the biggest power, and they are not going to come out of this much weakened, right? And so, if the empire is brought to its senses, or even better, to its knees, then will emerge, I believe, a multipolar world. I don't see China going, "Oh, now the empire is gone, we are the boss here." But they'll still be the strongest. They won't be genocidal.

They will not, you know, be an extractive imperialist power. They have not shown any sign of this. They will not be at war with their neighbors or others. So they will be neutral, in my understanding of the definition, right? I'm very new at this, so I defer to your better judgment. But it will be a new form of neutrality in which they might be in a position to play a positive role in conflicts that are inevitable between individuals, between groups, between whatever—nations, even civilizations at times. So do you see a way forward, like, in this multipolar world coming? I hope it won't be a multipolarity of genociders, but it might be a multipolarity of, what do they call it, a common future for humanity, common prosperity for all? And if so, how do you see it? And we can finish on this maybe.

## **#Pascal**

That's what we want, right? And that's the hope, that we will live in a multipolar world that is overall peaceful, overall conducive to the development of our aspirations and dreams, and that it is a humanistic multipolarity, right? One that puts the human in the center and then allows for human flourishing, right? That's what we want. Neutrality within that is, and I encourage you to think of it as that, it's a tool. It's a possible tool in the toolbox, but it is a tool among others. I mean, and in this sense, genocide is a tool. War is a tool. And these tools are being used, unfortunately, by countries, some of them for good, some of them for bad. I mean, there's no way of using genocide for good. I mean, sorry about that.

But it is a tool. You know, genocide is not the end in and of itself. Genocide is what the United States used in order to get rid of the people it didn't want on the North American continent. It used it as a tool, right? An implementation. So the problem is empire and the imperial drive of these states, and that they then also use tools like neutrality or diplomacy or negotiations in order to get to that. That's not the problem of the tool, right? We wouldn't want to get rid of knives from society just because somebody uses a knife to murder somebody else. I mean, we use knives for a lot, a lot of very, very important things, including, of course, operations and so on, and saving people's lives, right?

So we wouldn't want to get rid of the tool. What we want to get rid of is the underlying motivation to abuse these tools to do bad things that hurt people. So my plea at the end is to look at neutrality as a fact of social life that emerges and that we can analyze and study. And it helps us to shed light on third-party politics towards conflict. And on the other hand, as a tool that, if we use it correctly and if we use it wisely, will help us to get to a humanistic future in which we all can have the good life and not just the golden billion that has been doing that with violence and very, very dark motivations for the last 500 years.

## **#Benji Schoendorff**

Wow, what a beautiful conclusion. And you got to just 9:30. That's beautiful. And in the future, someone in the chat said earlier that they were hoping for more collaborations between us two. And I certainly, I for one, second that sentiment from the chat. Thank you very much, Pascal. As you said, you know, you started this to have conversations with people that broaden your horizons. And this conversation with you today was fantastic, just such a conversation for myself. So thank you. I express my full gratitude to you for this. I hope also our audience got a chance to get a much more precise view of what neutrality means. Things got a little bit hot under the collar when I did the stupid thought experiment about a friend in Palestine and a friend in the Zionist entity.

So it's all my fault. Sorry, guys, if I started a fistfight in the chat. But thankfully, we managed to keep it civilized up here. Thank you very much, Pascal Lottaz. So, I think many of our viewers already know Neutrality Studies, but please go to Neutrality Studies, subscribe to Pascal's Substack and ours as well, because Pascal was banned from YouTube. We were banned from YouTube, and we only managed to get back through Indica's channel. But actually, Reef is still banned from YouTube. But we, you know, we didn't have, was it Jeff Sachs writing to YouTube to get us unbanned.

Also, we're much more forthright in our denunciations of, you know, what I call the Zionist Inquisition, which is this imperial imposition of Zionism on everybody—not for the benefit of Zionism, by the way, but just as a disciplining tool that can unite people in the West in elevating this, at the end of the day, white-on-white racism, you know, two white supremacists against Jews, as a way to shield the empire from their real genocidal racism, which is not, of course, directed at Jews—not at this point in history, and probably never again—but at people in, well, pretty much all over the

world, but at this moment very much in West Asia and also in Eastern Europe, where to the empire, they don't care if two million Ukrainians die because, you know, they are those Unterweis people, the Slavs we know are not really white.

You know, you can get rid of them. It doesn't really matter. So they don't care. So you see, I'm not neutral, and neither are you, Pascal, which is very nice to hear. But neutrality has a very important role to play in human affairs, be they affairs between friends and communities and societies, and of course, between nations. And I'm very happy that I got to learn more about neutrality from you, Pascal.

**#Pascal**

Thank you very much for the invitation, and I'm happy to talk again in the near future.

**#Benji Schoendorff**

Oh yeah, we'll certainly arrange that. Take care.

**#Pascal**

Thank you.