

Neutrality of Switzerland and Austria and their Applicability to Lebanon?

The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland and the Embassy of Austria held a conference about neutrality and Lebanon's foreign policy on 20 November 2013 in Beirut.

The main themes that were discussed in the conference included:

1. Neutrality is no longer seen as a taboo but as a policy that could be adopted to preserve peace in Lebanon.
2. In order to successfully implement neutrality, internal consensus needs to be reached among all parties in Lebanon. In this regard, Switzerland could figure as a valuable case because the country has a diverse society.
3. External balance is also essential in order to implement a policy of neutrality. The geopolitical situation needs to be favorable. Namely, other countries with influence on Lebanon and in the international arena must sanction Lebanese neutrality.
4. Neutrality is a long-term historical process as exemplified by the Swiss and Austrian experiences. Fulfilling certain prerequisites for neutrality, such as a strong democratic state, takes time. Neutrality itself is a dynamic concept and entails a continuous building process.
5. Neutrality does not mean detachment. There are different versions of practicing neutrality, and it does not mean that Lebanon would withdraw from external affairs; on the contrary, an active foreign policy can be an integral part of neutrality as the Austrian experience demonstrates.

After an introduction by Mr. Sami Atallah, Executive Director of LCPS, H.E. Ruth Flint, Ambassador of Switzerland and H.E. Ursula Fahringer, Ambassador of Austria, the invited experts and political representatives, Dr. Fadia Kiwan, Dr. Lorenz Langer, Dr. Franz Cede, Mr. Rami Rayes, Mr. Sejaan Azzi, H.E. Mohammed Chatah, H.E. Ghassan Moukheiber, and Mr. Pierre Bou Assi presented their positions.

Keynote Speech

Dr. Fadia Kiwan, Director of the Institute of Political Science at the Saint Joseph University, identified five obstacles in Lebanon's history that so far have prevented it from preserving neutrality after independence:

1. The revolution of 1958, triggered by the conflict between Cairo and Bagdad led to a divide between Lebanese;
2. After the 1967 war, Lebanon was put under pressure to allow Palestinian military presence on its territory resulting in exposure to Israeli military operations, conflicts with and within Palestinian camps and Lebanese–Palestinian alliances against other Lebanese factions;
3. Cooperation with Israel and the Israeli occupation of Lebanon until 2000 (except for certain land pockets);
4. The alliance with Syria, leading to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon;
5. Lebanon's exposure to regional conflicts, which currently plays out as a conflict of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Lebanon has not succeeded in building a civil state. If Lebanon does not achieve peaceful confessional co-existence, a negative message will be sent to the Islamic Arab world. In light of the fifth fall, it is the responsibility of the political parties to enter a productive dialogue and search for mechanisms available to neutralize Lebanon. Moreover, Dr. Kiwan asserted that there is no doubt that the Lebanese are committed to regional issues and therefore neutrality in Lebanon can never take the form of Western neutrality. But how can Lebanon be neutralized, while at the same time be committed to these issues? There are three types of mechanisms needed to implement neutrality: political ones, constitutional, and international mechanisms, to refer to in order to guarantee neutrality. [\(Watch Video\)](#)

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