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*Beyond Soldiers and Arms:  
The Swiss Model of Comprehensive  
Security Policy*

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Beyond Soldiers and Arms: The Swiss Model of Comprehensive Security Policy

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1. The tradition behind the concepts of security and neutrality

Security has been a typically Swiss concern for almost 700 years. It was in the year 1291 - expecting a new vacancy of the throne of the Holy Roman Empire of the high middle ages - that our forefathers decided to band together in order to protect themselves against the threat of general lawlessness and against any outside interference. They were determined to maintain law and order in their mountain valleys by themselves. So much at least can we gather from the earliest document we have, which is dated "in the beginning of the month of August 1291" and where the signing parties point to "the malice of the time" (*malicia temporis*) as the main reason for their signing this covenant.

Not always, though, has the purely defensive approach to security been the guiding principle of this confederation of very different city states and rural communities, which were made up of aristocrats, clerics, citizens and peasants with different rights and interests.

Although a very loose political structure, Switzerland was vital enough to pass through an expansionist phase in the 14th and 15th centuries. Nobody seemed to be concerned about a possible loss of independence and security by expansionist

activities. On the contrary. Security needs seemed to request the expansion of the territories, especially of the different city states, in order to survive the fierce rivalries between the emerging national states that replaced the earlier feudal structures of the middle ages. At the height of this expansionist period, Switzerland - for a very few years - in fact held the keys to the duchy of Milan in her hands and in that strategic position was able to play politics with the major European powers who were competing for the control of Italy and the leading role in Europe.

A decisive defeat against French troops in the year 1515, which were equipped with modern, fast firing artillery, marked the end of this period of often impulsive and unconventional Swiss expansionism. Switzerland lost its lever on international politics and gave up competing with France and Austria. This retreat marked the beginning of a policy of neutrality.

At the same time the clash of interests between the cities and the mountain states as well as the Reformation signaled the beginning of a long period of strong inner tensions, which nearly split up the confederation. The first conflict (between cities and country states) was solved in a compromise. But the Reformation split Switzerland so deeply along religious lines, that henceforth a consensus about a common foreign policy beyond abstinence was impossible. So neutrality began not so much as a rational decision flowing from a concept of security policy, but as a state of affairs forced upon Switzerland by the incapacity to develop an active foreign policy. There were other tensions beyond the religious rift, that worked toward neutrality as a means to keep internal peace: namely the loose political structure of the confederation, consisting of small states with extremely strong traditions of local self government, the

separate identities of the various parts that made up the confederation, the cultural differences between the language groups with their various ethnic roots.

The uneasy balance between hostile religious parties strongly influenced Swiss domestic and therefore foreign policies for some three centuries. Luckily, no major power seriously attempted to conquer Switzerland during this period. Only step by step - especially during and after the Thirty Years' War - the Swiss discovered the advantages of neutrality as the most useful tool to stability and security. Although the inner tensions exploded more than once in violence and even civil wars, Switzerland managed to remain on the lee side of the larger turmoils of European history of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and enjoyed relative peace and prosperity. Not without reluctance she came to "cultivate a modest everyday-liberty in small circumstances", as a famous Swiss historian has written <1>.

By the end of the 18th century the various states of the still very loose confederation were unable to unite and rally in time against Napoleon, and the French forces had an easy time to subdue "neutral" Switzerland and force it into the role of a Satellite-state, one among many whose state treasures were ransacked and whose troops were lost in the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812. Neutrality alone, the Swiss learned, was a useful but not sufficient means to maintain independence. The lack of a clear will and the lack of adequate military means to defend it made neutrality worthless. Only credibly armed neutrality could survive "the malice of time".

After the Napoleonic empire had subsided to the united efforts of the traditional European rivals of France and to the traditional British policy of the European balance of power,

Switzerland was restored more or less in her old form. It was in Paris in November 1815, after the Congress of Vienna, that the five major powers of Europe (Austria, France, Great Britain, Russia and Prussia) and Portugal declared, that the neutrality, independence and the territorial integrity of Switzerland was in the best interest of all European powers. Herewith something new was added to Swiss neutrality: an official international promise (no guarantee, though) which was meant to be legally binding, as signified by the heavy seals hung on the oldfashioned "Document of Perpetual Neutrality". This act of international law made Switzerland the first internationally recognized neutral state of Europe, and this recognition was reaffirmed 1919 in Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles.

1847 was the year of Switzerland's last civil war. The liberal states (cantons), who happened to be more or less identical with the protestant states, won a fast victory over the catholic/conservative states. They sought to renew the foundation of the country in the spirit of 19th century liberalism. A modern constitution was written that contained sufficient safeguards (in form of the two-chamber legislature after the American model) to be acceptable to the conservative states as well. The various states finally - and for the first time - succeeded to create a working federal government, while still maintaining most of their traditional rights as sovereign parts. According to the new constitution, the purpose of the Confederation was "the preservation of the country's independence, the maintenance of internal peace and order, the protection of the freedoms and rights of the citizens, and the furtherance of their general welfare" <2>. This declaration of purpose has remained unchanged in the constitution and is still legally valid and emotionally accepted by an overwhelming

majority of the population. Not neutrality, but the "preservation of the country's independence" was mentioned in the constitution. It is interesting to observe that in the process of writing the new constitution the term "neutrality" was left out in the description of state purposes. It only appears in a later paragraph, as a duty of the new legislature to watch over the "maintenance of independence and neutrality" <3>. The authors of the constitution of 1848 avoided to bind Switzerland legally to neutrality forever. They considered neutrality a means to an end and not an end in itself. They wanted more flexibility. They considered it possible that the protection of independence might require the abandonment of neutrality at some future point in time <4>.

This point did not arrive. The course of 19th and 20th century history reconfirmed that armed neutrality was the best means to secure political independence <5>. It also was the best means to prevent irreparable splits, in earlier times along religious lines, in World War I along ethnic lines.

Switzerland's first contribution to the stability of Europe, then, is her age-old will to defend her independence, to maintain the freedom and the diversity of her parts by giving up an active (expansionist) foreign policy, and to "dissuade" potential aggressors by a convincingly armed neutrality. So far the concept worked fairly successfully, as Switzerland within the last five hundred years had to tolerate foreign troops on her soil for five years only.

It was no small thing to stick to this concept of armed neutrality during the two World Wars, especially during World War II, when in 1940 eight European nations who had tried to stay out of the war by remaining neutral, were occupied by either German

or Soviet forces. It seemed questionable whether neutrality could serve much longer as a useful tool to maintain independence. In 1940 the Soviets assessed the chances of neutrality very coldly: "The last developments of this war have repeatedly shown that the neutrality of small powers, not disposing of adequate forces for their defense, is only a fantasy." <6> Yet armed neutrality served Switzerland well during World War II, in spite of the many weaknesses that were discovered in the process. In his report after the war, General Guisan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss armed forces, pointed out the necessity to include economic, technical, administrative and many more precautions in a network of "comprehensive preparations" in order to be able to cope with future contingencies <7>.

## 2. The concept of Swiss security policy of 1973

So far very limited precautions had been taken beyond the maintenance of military readiness. But the preservation of independence was assuming new dimensions. The experience of World War II as a "total war" demonstrated that armed forces no longer operated in a separate environment and that all segments of society were affected by war. In addition, the degree of international interdependence as well as ensuing vulnerabilities had increased rapidly. In order to be able to withstand outside pressures or - if everything else failed - to fight a war, an increasing number of fibres of the complex texture of modern society had to be organized for a possible integrated defense effort.

In January 1947 the Federal Council - the country's 7 member top executive body - for the first time acknowledged that the country's defense could no longer remain the exclusive domain of the armed forces, but that the armed forces hence would only be



"her first and most powerful instrument" <8>. It pointed out the necessity for a new concept. But it took more than ten years before General Annasohn, the former Chief of General Staff, in 1964 was commissioned to submit proposals for the coordination of a general defense <9>. In the early 1960's a number of independent studies analyzed the strategic goals and possibilities of Switzerland, until in 1967 the Federal Council decided to pool the best minds by appointing a "Study Commission for Strategic Problems". It worked intensively under its outstanding leader Prof. Karl Schmid and delivered its comprehensive report in 1969 <10>.

The rise of nuclear weapons, the never-ending tensions of the Cold War and the widening gray area of indirect warfaring had deeply disturbed many faithful adherents to the Swiss tradition of self-defense. Would armed neutrality still have a chance? It seemed at least doubtful whether Switzerland and her armed forces would be able to survive in a nuclear environment without employing or developing nuclear weapons herself. Through a careful and integrative threat analysis the report of the "Study Commission on Strategic Problems" was able to counter the looming resignation. It maintained the traditional goal of "peace in independence" as the guideline of all considerations. It established the principle of a double strategy with the two parts preventive measures to preserve the peace and resistance against pressures and violence. It pointed out the three main tasks of defense: dissuasion (keeping out of war through defense readiness), the conduct of war, and resistance against an occupying power. In addition to the regular armed forces, civil defense was proclaimed the second pillar of general defense. All sectors of civil life, especially the economy, were upgraded in

their importance for general defense. The report emphasized the necessity to integrate all resources in a comprehensive network and Prof. Karl Schmid, the commission's chairman, made it quite clear, that the new concept of "general defense" did not mean trimming the armed forces with elements from various civil sectors. "The supreme principle of strategy is not the army," he wrote, "but the defense of state and nation with all means available. The army is the most important, yet still only one among various means." <11>. A sophisticated policy of preventive measures to preserve the peace was considered as important as the resistance against pressures and violence. This was the adaptation of the traditional concept to the needs of the present: all efforts and means - the armed forces as one among several - should serve the one goal of not having to fight a war.

Building on the comprehensive commission-report, the Federal Council released in June 1973 a fundamental document of great importance under the title of "Report of the Federal Council to the Federal Assembly on the Security Policy of Switzerland (Concept of general defense)" <12>. This document was written by General Däniker, at present Chief of Staff for strategic and operational training of the Swiss armed forces, who had been a member of the earlier study commission. The Concept of 1973 is still in force and contains the legal basis of contemporary Swiss security policy (see following graphic summary):

The Swiss model of comprehensive security policy  
(graphic summary)

A. security policy objectives

"PEACE IN INDEPENDENCE"

- preservation of peace in independence
- preservation of freedom of action
- protection of the population
- defense of the territory

B. main strategic tasks

- keeping out of war through defense readiness (Dissuasion)      general preservation of peace and crisis management
- conduct of war
- damage-limitation and securing of survival
- resistance

C. strategic means

- | track 1  | track 2                       |
|--|-------------------------------|
| * armed forces                                     | * foreign relations           |
| * civil defense                                    | * foreign economic policy     |
| * national supply                                  | * good offices                |
| * information, psychological defense               | * economic preparations       |
| * infrastructure for armed resistance and survival | * aid to developing countries |
|  | * conflict research           |
|  | * state security              |

The security policy objectives (A) are the broadest and most fundamental objectives. They are derived directly from article 2 of the constitution, which defines the purpose and objectives of the confederation as

- "- the preservation of the country's independence
- the maintenance of internal peace and order
- the protection of the freedoms and rights of the citizens,  
and
- the furtherance of their general welfare".

The primary purpose, therefore, of Swiss security policy efforts is to preserve the self-determination of the Swiss people, meaning the freedom to order one's own affairs, including the free development of society, the protection of personal freedom and human dignity as well as a just social order. The preservation of peace is not an end in itself. It can neither be separated from the preservation of self-determination nor can one be played off against the other. The objective is "peace in independence": both aspects are of equal importance.

The preservation of freedom of action aims at maintaining the ability to take at any time freely and according to our own judgement those domestic and foreign policy measures that reflect best Swiss political will and security needs.

The protection of the population from the direct and indirect effects of modern conventional weapons and particularly from the effects of weapons of mass destruction is an extremely difficult task. Extensive precautions have to be planned and taken before they are actually needed. Civil defense is the best example.

Finally the defense of the territory: as no state can exist without a territory, Switzerland has - in case of war - to maintain her territorial integrity to the fullest possible extent. The air-space above the territory will be defended, too.

All these security policy objectives are aimed exclusively at hostile intentions, attempts at coercion, threats of the

employment of force, attacks and indirect impacts of attacks. They do not in any way prevent the evolution of our domestic or foreign relations. <13>

The existing concept of security policy pursues its goal of "peace in independence" on two tracks. Track one of the strategic tasks (B) comprises the elements keeping out of war through defense readiness (Dissuasion) and the capability to conduct a war up to protracted resistance, whereby damage limitation and the securing of survival have the same strategic significance as military operations.

Track two of the strategic tasks comprises the elements for the general preservation of peace and for crisis management. Some of these elements are reaching out and beyond Swiss borders in order to contribute in a larger sense to the lessening of tensions and to the long-term stabilization of political and economic conditions as we shall see later on.

So far this is a theory only. The efficiency of the system depends, of course, on how well developed the strategic means (C) are. In the following two parts of this paper we shall discuss these means.

### 3. The contribution of the armed forces

The Swiss concept of armed neutrality is conceived in strictly defensive terms. There is one overriding concern behind all efforts to train soldiers and to have them equipped with modern arms, and that is: not having to use them in actual warfighting. This is the guiding paradox behind the first of our strategic tasks, for which the term "dissuasion" was used. Dissuasion is related to persuasion, but while the better-known term persuasion means "to convince somebody into doing something", dissuasion

points in the opposite direction: "to convince somebody into not doing something". And the paradox lies in the fact that Switzerland can only "dissuade" a potential enemy from attacking her, if she can either exert a credible threat of retaliation (which, without nuclear arms, is impossible) or if she - with the help of strong, well trained, well equipped and instantly available armed forces - can keep the "price of entry" very high, i.e. if a potential aggressor concludes that his risks or losses from attacking are greater than his possible gains <14>. Dissuasion only works if Swiss armed forces are perceived as able to fight in a war. Although fighting is exactly what Switzerland wants to avoid, she can achieve that goal not by reaffirming her desire for peace, but only by maintaining forces that are perceived as a serious fighting power by a potential aggressor. "Dissuasive communication" therefore is of equal importance as a realistic threat analysis and a modern equipment tailored to it. Except for the most important issues Switzerland should, therefore, keep the level of secrecy as low as possible wherever the dissuasive gains seem greater than the operative losses.

What military means does Switzerland have at her disposal to implement this strategy? A short summary will suffice.

Rooted in her old militia tradition, Switzerland requires all able-bodied men to serve in the armed forces. About 10% of the population are part of the armed forces <15>, which also functions as an important factor of national cohesion. With its 625'000 men the Swiss forces are quantitatively strong. A sophisticated system of quick mobilization should make a surprise attack unsuccessful. An equally sophisticated system of thousands of prepared demolitions and obstacles, tank barriers etc., in combination with a very difficult terrain, should prevent rapid movements of a mechanized attacker. Command posts, shelters for

air planes and troops, logistic installations are built in concrete dugouts or under rock to enable all services to protracted resistance. The armed forces are organized in 3 Field Army Corps (each with 2 Infantry Divisions, a Mechanized Division, several Border Brigades and a Territorial Zone) and a Mountain Army Corps (with 3 Mountain Divisions, several Border Brigades, the Fortress- and Redoubt Brigades, and 3 Territorial Zones). The Air Force together with the Air Defense troops form a special Command (a 5th Corps). The figures of aircrafts, tanks, artillery guns etc. are too well known to be repeated here. The core idea of the Swiss concept of dynamic area-defense consists of avoiding large battles and instead holding the largest possible portion of the country for the longest time possible. Detailed fighting concepts exist and are being tested regularly in staff and troop exercises.

Do these efforts mean anything beyond Switzerland, do they contribute to the stability of Europe?

In a strategic context Swiss neutrality has to be seen together with Austrian neutrality. Together they form a barrier between NATO-Center and NATO-South, controlling important lines of communication between the two sectors. They also open up a potential east-west corridor of some 800 kilometers in length.

The quantity and quality of troops (master tailored to the terrain) as well as the modern and well maintained equipment are the basis for the capability of Swiss armed forces to defend its territory and air space effectively in a conventional war. This capability is confirmed by many contemporary observers. It makes for a "considerable indirect deterrent" against the threat of an advancement from Eastern Central Europe to the West and to the South <16>. It can be considered an important element against

possible bypassing manouvers (in the air or on the ground) aiming at the rear of the NATO forward defense positions in the Federal Republic of Germany. It also backs up Austrian neutrality. It is by no means a strategic vacuum. The military assets of Switzerland, then, as an independent, well organized and well stocked entity in a strategically important position can be considered a substantial element of stability in Central Europe.

There is a Swiss contribution to international stability in a psychological context, too. The Swiss armed forces are strong enough to fight efficiently against an outside aggressor, yet they are not equipped neither trained for a far-reaching offensive, which makes them - in the words of Johan Galtung - a "peace army par excellence" and therefore again - but in another sense - an element of stability in the heart of Europe <17>.

An important part of Swiss security policy is the realistic evaluation of the possible threats Switzerland might be confronted with. The existence of large arsenals of powerful conventional weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction not too far from the Swiss boundaries is a fact. In addition to being drawn into a war between the large powers of today, confronting eachother in Europe, there is the expanding gray area of indirect warfare. In earlier times the classical boundary between peace and war was crossed by a formal declaration of war. Such a clear borderline does not exist anymore. Subversion, terrorism, psychological warfare, disinformation, economic (and political) blackmail and other forms of indirect warfare aim at eroding the basis of the existing order and to overthrow legal governments. The traditional former battlefield may be only the last stage of fighting actions. It appears, therefore, as a logical consequence of the conceptual thinking since World War II that the armed forces nowadays range only as one strategic means among others.



Let us turn to these other strategic means beyond soldiers and arms.

#### 4. Beyond soldiers and arms

The Concept of 1973 opened up a wide field of additional possibilities: it defined and integrated the functions of civil defense, national supply, information, psychological defense and harmonized the civilian and military interests in the fields of communication, medical services, protection against weapons of mass destruction, veterinary services, logistics and transportation. It ordered the national supply organization, civil defense and armed forces, in close collaboration with other civilian authorities, "to

- set up a well-balanced infrastructure for the conduct of military operations and for survival;
- secure in catastrophes of all kinds, in a crisis, during a neutrality-protection case and in case of an attack, the supplying of the needs of the population and of the army;
- organize the optimal employment of the means at our disposal, particularly for the protection, rescue and care of the civilian population as well as for the transportation services and the maintenance of the road system;
- take the necessary measures in order to prevent the enemy from utilizing our industrial facilities and stores." <18>

Civil defense may be the best example to show how far these theoretical requirements have become reality.

Civil defense aims at providing every inhabitant with a place in a shelter near his home. The exterior hulls of shelters are built to withstand an overpressure of 10'000 kilos per square meter (=1 bar) and are usually made of steel-reinforced concrete.

Civil defense is organized and managed entirely by the civil authorities. The federal and cantonal governments supervise its implementation, securing it by financial support if necessary. Main bearers of civil defense are the communities and such private companies that have a staff of more than 100 people. They are responsible for the realization of all regulations issued by the federal and state (cantonal) governments. The 520'000 members of the civil defense organizations have no military mandate and are unarmed. Modern shelters for 5.5 million people (total population of Switzerland: 6.5 millions) are available today and the work is progressing to cover 100% of the population by the year 2000. Minimum space per person is calculated as 1 square meter of floor space and 2.5 cubic meters of volume per person. Emergency food and all sorts of rescue equipments are in place. Over 1000 first aid posts and auxiliary medical stations, 102 emergency hospitals or basic hospitals <19> are part of the coordinated medical services, which - and this is a significant new feature - are to treat civilian and military patients alike, of both sexes, all ages and all nationalities <20>.

A comprehensive system of warning the population has been devised and each telephone directory contains the necessary instructions for understanding the signals, together with basic informations about civil defense.

Civil defense, together with national supply, information, psychological defense and other means is to insure the survival of the population, and to strengthen the capacity to endure as well as to resist attempts of blackmail <21>.

The common denominator of the strategic means of track 1 is their defensive mode. These defensive measures are complemented by the active and preventive elements - especially foreign policy and foreign economic policy - of track 2 of the strategic means,

that reach out and beyond our borders.

But the readiness of Switzerland to look beyond its borders has come into doubt. Only recently, on March 16, 1986, the Swiss population rejected massively to join the United Nations Organization. Yet this should not be interpreted as a general disinterest in international cooperation. Much rather it expressed the voter's deep-rooted fear of eventually losing the traditional independence, as well as disappointment with the UNO as the specific instrument of international cooperation <22>. But Switzerland remains an active member of the many programs and sub-organizations of UNO.

Swiss foreign policy is always meant to support the security policy objectives. It serves this purpose by - among other things - playing an active role in the CSCE and CDE context, offering its good services (as in the Iranian hostage crisis <23>) and providing humanitarian services, i.e. through its disaster relief unit. But foreign policy, apart from not being a popular topic, has become more controversial in the last few years to the same extent as the department of foreign affairs has increased its active role. Many consider it presumptuous to assume that Switzerland could substantially influence or even alter the larger political and social developments of today. Swiss foreign policy still has to reckon with the deepseated distrust against anything that could weaken the proven tradition of neutrality. While the authors of the Concept of 1973 intended to put an increasing emphasis on the strategic means of track 2, tradition still favors the means of track 1.

Switzerland is exposed to a fundamental learning process which has been initiated by the release of the Concept of security policy of 1973. The Concept of 1973 is an attempt to cope with

the profound changes in the political, military and economic environment, that have occurred since World Wars I and II. It acknowledged the increasing complexity of the world and of the inextricably entangled different layers of reality. The document is a bold design to systematize the security policy goals, the threat, the strategic tasks and the strategic means. It separated functionally the track of general policy from the track of strategy by separating the issues of general preservation of peace from the more focussed issues of defense. It avoided the fallacy of including all aspects of life into the large container of security policy and avoided thereby the necessity to evaluate everything under a strategic perspective. This separation made a national consensus on these issues possible. The document of 1973 restored confidence that it was possible to cope with the new world conditions, that it was still possible to organize for the preservation of peace in independence and that Switzerland was still able to maintain its neutrality and to defend it successfully if necessary. In this sense the Concept of 1973 has secured continuity in an era of profound changes and has helped Switzerland to remain a factor of international stability as well.

## Footnotes

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