

On Swiss neutrality

Dangerous entanglement of the Swiss Armed Forces with NATO

by Jean-Paul Vuilleumier, editor of "Swiss Standpunkt"



Jean-Paul Vuilleumier.
(Photo ma)

Perpetual armed neutrality is one of the most important principles of Swiss foreign policy. The idea of neutrality is well anchored in our country, its people, and its history. To abolish it directly and openly is therefore not feasible. For several decades, however, efforts have been

made to weaken and disintegrate the original concept of neutrality.

This article first lists events currently discussed in terms of neutrality law and neutrality policy.

It then deals with the steps taken – unnoticed by many people – over the past 30 years or so towards Switzerland's integration into NATO. For several of these steps, there was a clear opposition both in parliament and among the population, which was, however, either ignored by the Federal Council and the media or fought with massive propaganda. This anti-democratic and neutrality-dissolving aberration must be urgently stopped and corrected.

Current situation

The debate on Swiss neutrality policy has been in full swing since the beginning of 2022. The reasons for this are – among others – the following:

- Switzerland has adopted US and EU sanctions against Russia practically without any restriction.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs has opted for "cooperative neutrality" instead of "integral neutrality".
- Switzerland has taken a seat on the UN Security Council.
- For the work of the ICRC, being the most important humanitarian organisation worldwide, the unrestricted neutrality is essential.
- Signatures are being collected for a "Federal popular initiative on the preservation of the perpetual armed neutrality".

- Federal Councillor *Viola Amherd* decides practically single-handedly – undemocratically and under the spell of NATO – on the purchase of American F-35 fighter-bombers.
- The media and part of the members of parliament are campaigning with great vigour for the direct and/or indirect supply of Swiss ammunition, weapons, and tanks to Ukraine.
- In February 2023, Lieutenant General *Thomas Süssli*, head of the Swiss Armed Forces, receives the NATO Supreme Commander in Europe, General *Christopher Cavoli*, for talks on "intensifying cooperation with NATO".
- Since General Cavoli is also the commander of the American forces in Europe (USEUCOM) in addition to his NATO function, the possibilities for "strengthening bilateral cooperation" with the armed forces of the USA will also be discussed.
- Federal Councillor *Viola Amherd* claims that Switzerland can only protect itself from the current threats with the support of NATO. Therefore, she says, it must join the NATO-led "Sky Shields Initiative" for ground-based air defence.

Review

1996: "Partnership for Peace" (PfP)

In 1994, NATO founded its sub-organisation *Partnership for Peace* (PfP). As early as 1996, the Swiss Federal Council is determined to join it. At that time, the PfP consisted of 29 NATO countries and 22 partner states.

Federal parliamentarians from seven parties are demanding that the Federal Council submit the PfP membership to parliament and subject it to an optional referendum.

The Federal Council does not comply, and on 11 December 1996 Federal Councillor *Flavio Cotti*, head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), signs the framework document on the "Partnership for Peace" at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Among other things, it lists the following goals:

- “Developing military cooperative relations with NATO.”
- “Building forces that can better operate jointly with NATO forces.”

Truly peculiar goals for a “peace partnership”!

1997:

“Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council” (EAPC)

One year later, just as arbitrarily as the PfP accession, the Federal Council joins the *Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council* (EAPC). On 30 May 1997 it joins this NATO body without debate or consultation of the appropriate parliamentary committees.

Again, there is strong protest from parliamentarians from left to right against this undemocratic procedure.

The Federal Council agreed to the following three conditions when signing the EAPC:

- Commitment to participate in four annual NATO meetings at ministerial level.
- Commitment to meet under the presidency of the NATO Secretary General.
- Commitment to cooperate with NATO in the “International fight against terrorism”.

1999: Revision of the Federal Constitution

In 1999, a vote on the *Revision of the Federal Constitution* was held. This was misleadingly advertised to the population as an insignificant “amendment”. The explanatory notes to the vote did not reveal that the following decisive changes and omissions were planned in the armed forces:

- The new Constitution weakens the “militia principle”,¹ introduces a new category of “Durchdiener”,² curtails the competences of the cantons, deprives parliament of some of its powers by transferring military decision-making competence to the Federal Council, and thus removes important obstacles that stood in the way of rapprochement with NATO.

The people’s referendum on the *Revision of the Federal Constitution* took place on 18 April 1999.

The bill was accepted.

1999: NATO transforms itself into an “Offensive Alliance”

Less than a month earlier, on 24 March 1999, NATO forces launched the first war of aggression on European soil since the Second World

War – without a UN mandate and thus in violation of International Law. It was planned in Washington and conducted from there. For 78 days, civilian infrastructures in Serbia were bombed daily by NATO planes.

One month after the beginning of the war, on 24 April 1999, the government representatives of the NATO states jointly adopted a new “Strategic Concept” in Washington, with which they transformed the so-called “Defence Alliance”, which has existed since 1949, into an “Offensive Alliance”.

2001: Revision of the military law

Despite this aggression of the NATO war alliance against a European country, which is contrary to International Law, the Federal Council submits a revision of the military law to parliament in 2001 to allow arming Swiss troops abroad and military cooperation with NATO states.

As part of the propaganda of the *Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport* (DDPS), it is claimed, among other things, that armed foreign missions are “part of our lived, solidarity-based and liberal-minded neutrality” and that they are “unobjectionable under neutrality law”.

The referendum against this revision of the military law was narrowly rejected. In all of Switzerland only 20,000 votes were missing to reject the bill.

2003: “Army XXI”

In 2003, the draft bill “Army XXI” was put to the vote. Its main aim was to reduce the armed forces even further and to reorganise it according to NATO standards.

The main points were:

- Massive reduction and rejuvenation of the troops.
- Reduction and dissolution of entire troop branches.
- Abolition of the previous corps, divisions and regiments and replacement by the NATO categories “battalions” and “brigades”.
- Abolition of the people’s right to have a say in fundamental army matters.

Both chambers of parliament approve Army XXI, whereupon the opposition initiated a referendum. During the referendum campaign, among many other manipulative arguments, the DDPS bluntly stated:

- “It no longer makes sense to be neutral today” or

- “an autonomous national defence neither makes sense nor can it be financed” or
- one must “let neutrality, for which there is no longer any need, gradually fall asleep” in order not to provoke resistance among the population.

The draft bill on Army XXI was accepted in the referendum on 18 May 2003.

2010: “Further development of the armed forces” (WEA)

After “Army 95” and Army XXI, the *Further Development of the Armed Forces* (WEA) was another reorganisation of the Swiss Armed Forces, which was initiated with the *Security Policy Report* of 23 June 2010 and the *Armed Forces Report* of 1 October 2010.

The implementation of the WEA began in 2018 and ended on 31 December 2022, with the aim of “aligning the Armed Forces in a modern and flexible way for the future”. To this end, “readiness is to be increased, cadre training and equipment improved, and the regional anchoring of the armed forces strengthened”.

On 2 June 2023, the Federal Council announced in a media release that it was taking positive stock of the final report on the *Further Development of the Armed Forces* (WEA).

On 6 June 2023, the *Swiss Federation of Military Societies* (VMG) soberly stated that the WEA had fallen far short of its goals in its central core areas of total equipment and personnel supply. The final report is therefore described as deficient and disappointing.

2022: “NATO-Partnerships 360 Symposium”

From 11 to 13 July 2022, the third “NATO Partnerships Symposium” took place on Swiss soil at the “Maison de la Paix” (sic) in Geneva. It was the first time that such a meeting was held in a *partner country* and not in a *member country*. The event was attended by more than 250 participants from 54 allied and partner countries as well as international organisations and non-governmental organisations, centres of excellence and the NATO military commands.

On 12 July, State Secretary *Livia Leu* opened the symposium together with NATO Deputy Secretary General *Mircea Geoană* and the Deputy Supreme Commander of the Allied Command “Transformation”, General *Christian Badia*. Ambassador *Päivi Pulli*, Head of Security Policy of the DDPS, as well as Lieutenant General *Thomas*



Development of the Army between 1968 and 2020: targeted and effective numbers (blue and red). In the last 30 years, the size of the Army has been reduced by 75 percent, from 400,000 to 100,000 troops.

Süssli, Head of the Swiss Armed Forces, also took part in the symposium.

The motto of the event was “One NATO”: undoubtedly a further step towards Switzerland’s integration into this military alliance.

2022: “Supplementary Report to the Security Policy Report 2021”

On 7 September 2022, the Federal Council published an “Additional Report to the Security Policy Report 2021 on the Consequences of the War in Ukraine”. This 37-page document repeatedly talks about “cooperation” and “collaboration” – albeit only with NATO and the EU.

By cooperating with multilateral forums and non-Western third countries from all parts of the world, we can prove our lived neutrality and reduce possible threats from outside – but by no means by binding ourselves to a belligerent alliance!

2023: “Sky Shields Initiative” is a NATO project

On 6–7 July 2023, at the invitation of Federal Councillor *Viola Amherd*, a CH-A-G meeting of the defence ministers of Switzerland, Austria and Germany took place in Bern. There, Federal Councillor Amherd signed a declaration of intent to participate in the *European Sky Shields Initiative*, with which NATO intends to develop an integral air and missile defence throughout Europe.

Why did the public only officially learn of this declaration at the press conference on 7 July 2023, although it had been drafted since 13 October 2022?

Conclusion

The actions of the Federal Council, the associated administration and the Armed Forces lead-

ership described above have led to a distinct weakening of Swiss sovereignty and neutrality over the past decades. Our country has thus become an easy victim for political and economic blackmail – also from the USA. The entanglement of the Swiss Armed Forces with NATO – bypassing parliament and citizens – is a 180° turn in the previous neutrality and peace policy, which has contributed a great deal to the security and stability of our country even in stormy times.

By weakening and disintegrating the original concept of neutrality, Switzerland is jeopardising its reputation as a reliable partner in supporting conflicting parties in their search for a negotiated solution. Its “good offices”, which have played a key role in Swiss peace policy up to now, are already less in demand. The neutrality which is indispensable for the ICRC’s work is thus also endangered. The assurances of the Department of Foreign Affairs that Switzerland is still neutral despite everything seem less credible.

It is crucial to return to a credible and reliable policy of neutrality and to use our own resources for the independence of our country and instead of “foreign dealings”.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

¹ “Militia principle”: Public duties in Switzerland are usually performed on a part-time basis.

² A “Durchdiener” completes the entire period of military service at a stretch, from the first day of recruit school [basic military training], until discharge from the army.

This contrasts with the previous model of recruit school with subsequent annual refresher courses.

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