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SWISS SECURITY IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

The London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique recently had the great privilege of hearing the most interesting talk on the problems of Swiss Security in the Nuclear Age which was given by an authoritative specialist in this field, Dr. Curt Gasteyger, Director of Programmes, Institute for Strategic Studies, and formerly Lecturer to the United Nations, Geneva. The following is a summary of the talk which was listened to with intense attention and provoked a lively discussion.

The lecturer introduced the subject with a survey of the present overall balance of nuclear arms between the Atlantic Alliance (i.e. U.S.A. and U.K.) and the Soviet Union, amounting to a virtual stalemate. While the Americans have a superiority in long-range missiles, the Soviets enjoy the superiority in medium-range missiles directed against Western Europe.

Dr. Gasteyger then gave the following details of Switzerland's Manpower: 41,000 officers, 106,000 non-commissioned officers and 561,000 men = some 710,000 men and 190,000 auxiliary reservists. In terms of manpower ours is one of the strongest armies in Europe, if not in the world. By comparison the U.K. has 425,000 men under arms, France 620,000.

Armament

Switzerland is of course consistently trying to adapt her defences to advances in military science and technical development. At the moment she is primarily concerned with increasing the firepower and mobility of ground troops and also the efficiency of her Air Force. In the near future 150 medium tanks of Swiss design and 800 armoured troop-carriers of American type M-113 are to be added to the existing 500 AMX and Centurion tanks. The Swiss Air Force numbers some 400 fighter aircraft (5 Hunter interceptor squadrons, 11 Venom close-support squadrons, 5 Vampire close-support squadrons) and will be reinforced within the next years by 57 Mirage IIIs. Most of the aircraft are stationed in bomb-proof underground caverns.

A considerable effort is being made to reinforce the Anti-Aircraft defences: 35 batteries of fully radar controlled, medium calibre, twin cannon are being established and there are 68 launchers for the British made Bloodhound II guided missiles with a range of 185 km.

Some years ago the Swiss army was completely reorganised on the basis of four army corps (one of which being for the defence of the Alps) each consisting of 1 mechanized division, 1 frontier division and 1 infantry division.

Despite these efforts to modernise the Swiss Army the crucial question remains wide open: How to defend our country against nuclear attack? Some measures are obviously indicated, such as greater mobility and less centralisation of our forces, intensive development of civil defence, etc. But so far there is no really effective defence against nuclear attack.

Swiss Nuclear Arms?

In theory Switzerland could probably make her own nuclear arms as a deterrent of would-be aggressors. This would however require an initial expense of roughly up to 400 to 500 million francs, several thousand skilled technicians and some 500 scientists, etc. Beyond that testing sites for the new weapons as well as the means of delivery would be required at further great cost. The deterrent effect of a small nuclear force of our own as against any big nuclear power appears doubtful and it seems unlikely that Switzerland could acquire or make and test nuclear weapons without sacrificing or at least considerably weakening her status of neutrality.

The lecturer concluded his talk with the following final observation. The joining of an alliance would not give Switzerland an equivalent in terms of security and protection for giving up military independence and neutrality, as no country is fully protected against nuclear attack and alliances are difficult to maintain effective. Contrary to some original fears the value of maintaining conventional forces for the defence of our country and neutrality has not diminished. Lastly it would seem advisable above all to pursue a policy which tries to avoid any kind of involvement in a conflict on one side and aims at slowing down the arms race, especially avoiding the spread of nuclear weapons (e.g. by a pledge of the neutral countries not to acquire these weapons in return for a guarantee from the nuclear powers that they will not use them).

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