

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1975)  
**Heft:** 1710

**Artikel:** Swiss Security policy [to be continued]  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689957>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 13.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# SWISS SECURITY POLICY

*The July edition of the Swiss Observer carried a report of Dr Aebi's talk to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in London. The first part of his text is reproduced here and will be continued in the November issue.*

*Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London*

On Thursday, 19 June, Dr Aldred Aebi of the Federal Military Department in Berne, gave a talk on "Swiss Security Policy — possibilities, limitations and alternatives".

Dr Aebi has a Master's Degree from the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC. He wrote his thesis at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, University of Geneva, on "The contribution of neutral states to international peace and security — the example of Austria and Switzerland". He is, therefore, well qualified to talk on the subject.

He began his talk by referring to the document containing the new Swiss security concept, which the Federal Council sent to Parliament for debate and approval on 27 June 1973.

This document represents the culmination of a long process of evolution in thinking concerning defence matters, which started shortly after the end of World War II, leading to the publication of military defence doctrine in 1966.

"It soon became apparent, however, that military defence alone, although always remaining the strongest pillar of overall Swiss security measures, was no longer sufficient in a world which, as a result of the strategic development since 1945 saw the increasing use of non-military means by nations and groups of nations to gain their objectives. The increasing recourse to terrorism by different groups, of which Switzerland has been a victim several times, add a further dimension to an already complicated picture.

"In order to be able to meet these challenges, the new security concept seeks to integrate and co-ordinate all the military and non-military means at the disposal of the government and to set up a quick reacting organisation at federal, cantonal and communal level. This organisational task is still not complete. The security concept itself is also subject to constant review and will be adapted to any fundamental changes in the international system.

"Given the destructiveness of modern conventional and nuclear weapons, the size and limited resources of the country, the main objective of Swiss security policy is *dissuasion*, trying to convince a potential opponent or opponents of the disproportion existing between the advantages gained from an attack on the country and the risks entailed."

Next Dr Aebi gave a general idea of

the most important aspects of Swiss security policy as well as of some of the difficulties encountered in trying to pursue a credible neutral policy within today's international environment. He went on to make several fundamental points:

"1. The ultimate success story of any security policy depends on the support that it receives from the people and the degree of belief and confidence they have in it. This support can still be taken for granted in Switzerland, although there are some doubts concerning the defence possibilities of a small country in the nuclear age.

"An important aspect in keeping the confidence of the people in the security policy is that its main elements and their implications are generally well understood. This is particularly important in the Swiss system of direct democracy, where the citizens are often called upon to make decisions which have an important bearing on security matters. It should also be mentioned here, that Switzerland has not been immune to the general unrest of the past and present decade, resulting in, among other things, the increased questioning of established institutions, the Army being particularly vulnerable here.

"2. The external security of Switzerland is to a great extent dependent on factors over which it has only limited influence or none at all. The most important of these factors is the balance between the two alliances in Europe and the global balance between the two superpowers, which until now has guaranteed a rather precarious peace.

"Switzerland has also profited from this balance without having had to pay a political price. This situation led Kissinger once, in his professorial days, to exclaim that 'we live in a curious world where neutrals enjoy most of the protection of allies and allies aspire to have the same freedom of action as do neutrals'. Switzerland has, of course, a vital interest in maintaining this balance as a peacekeeping instrument as long as there is no viable alternative in view.

"3. The strategic development of the post-war period has led to a re-establishment of the importance of conventional weapons after a period of time in which, particularly on the US side, too much emphasis had been put on nuclear weapons. This has resulted in a better position of those countries who do not possess nuclear weapons. However, this advantage is being slowly eroded again because of the extremely rapid developments in the conventional

armaments sector and the accompanying explosion of costs.

"Also, Switzerland has to import a great quantity of its armaments from abroad. An effort to reduce this great dependence from non-neutral foreign sources has led to some co-operation in arms development and procurement between Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. However, this co-operation has not been able to develop to a point where it could significantly improve this situation.

"4. Another result of the strategic development since World War II has been the decline of the probability of military conflicts among advanced industrialised countries with a corresponding increase in the importance of political, economical and psychological elements in the international competition.

"This has led to an erosion of the borderline between peace and war. Historically, neutrality has primarily been a military and passive concept but these developments make the ability of the Neutral to respond quickly to a variety of situations and threats in a fast changing international environment an important element of its security policy.

"A new dimension has therefore been added to the concept of neutrality with the Neutrals taking an increasingly active role beyond their military defence obligations in order to demonstrate the impartiality of their policy already in times of peace. No such obligation exists under the law of neutrality, but it is considered as an additional insurance against involvement in a future conflict.

"The need to respond to a variety of military and non-military threats has also had a positive aspect in that the burden of defence no longer lies uniquely on the shoulders of the military; the non-military elements of security policy also have to make their contribution.

"5. The export-oriented economy of Switzerland, its great dependence on foreign sources for raw materials and foodstuffs, the concentration of the biggest part of its population and industry on the plateau, make the country rather vulnerable. Also, based on its democratic system, its historical and cultural heritage, Switzerland is a member of the Western community of nations. Whether or not these factors would be a drawback in a future conflict is a hard question to answer, but they surely represent a further difficult element for the Swiss in their efforts to pursue a credible neutral policy.

"6. Finally, one should never forget that Neutrality is basically a negative concept, owing its existence to the possibility of armed conflicts and international tensions. Should a viable universal security system ever be attained, the Neutrals would surely be the first ones to happily proclaim their policies as being no longer necessary."

Having set the general framework, the speaker then took a closer look at the most important components of Swiss security policy, which are:

- Domestic conditions
- Policy of Neutrality in a general sense
- Military and Civil Defence
- Foreign Policy
- Swiss-European relations in general; relations with neighbouring countries; EEC, Council of Europe; participation in European Conferences (CSCE)
- Relations with the United Nations
- Good Offices
- Development Aid

Dr Aebi said that the first two elements, domestic conditions and Neutrality, could not be discussed separately. They had a bearing on practically all other elements and would be discussed in connection with them. He then went on to the next component.

### Military Defence

"The Federal Council left no doubt in the formulation of the security concept, that he still considers military defence to be the most important pillar of the overall defence system.

"The main mission of the armed forces is, as already pointed out in the introduction, to dissuade, in concert with other elements of the security policy, a potential opponent or opponents from attacking the country. What are the military means at the disposal of Switzerland? Assuming that most of you have a general idea of the strength and composition of the Swiss Army, I shall limit myself here to giving just a few facts and figures.

"The peace-time Army consists of about 2,000 regulars and 36,000 conscripts, the latter being called up twice yearly and distributed over different basic training camps. The reserve units, too, which are on their three-week refresher courses during the year, must be counted here. These numbers do not, of course, represent battle ready units.

"To bring the Army up to its full strength of about 600,000 men, mobilisation is required, which should take no longer than 48 hours.

"The Army is organised into three Field Army Corps and one Mountain Army Corps for a total of 12 Divisions and 17 Brigades. The three Field Army Corps consist each of: one Mechanised Division; one Frontier Division; one Field Division, and Frontier Brigades and territorial units.

"The Air Force has about 290 combat aircraft.

"In case of an attack, the armed forces will defend the country as follows according to the principles laid down in the military defence doctrine valid since 1966: Channelling and wearing down of enemy forces by means of deeply echeloned defence zones; Separation of enemy advance units from their support areas in the rear; Destruction of those

enemy ground or airborne units which have penetrated the defence zones by means of counterattack with mechanised forces supported by the air force.

"The minimum goal of this defence strategy is to hold as big a part of the national territory as possible in order to preserve the sovereignty of the country as well as to provide the basis for eventual aid from third parties. Guerilla warfare is considered as a last resort.

"If this goal seems somewhat modest, it should be remembered that Switzerland has limited human and material resources.

"Also, in the calculus of dissuasion, it is not the absolute number of men, tanks and airplanes that is relevant, but the relative ability to make an opponent or opponents think twice before making a decision to attack.

"Today's concept of area defence, with the brunt of the defence task borne by the Infantry, is the product of a long debate between adherents of a mobile and area defence. The decision in favour of the latter was made not only because it was realised that a mobile defence would require a higher degree of mechanisation and, as a consequence, some fundamental changes in the structure of the Field Army units, a more numerous and technically always up-to-date Air Force, but also because the militia system with its short periods of service would clearly not have been able to guarantee the functioning of a technically highly sophisticated force.

"The militia system is historically and psychologically deeply rooted in Switzerland and it would almost be impossible to make any fundamental changes here."

"One may be wondering how Switzerland is planning to defend itself without nuclear weapons, when both Alliances in Europe possess such weapons and are likely to employ them in a limited as well as in a general conflict. The Swiss military defence concept of 1966 accepts the likelihood of a nuclear

attack, distinguishing between three possibilities: Nuclear blackmail without an actual attack, limited employment of tactical nuclear weapons or general attack with nuclear weapons.

"The first two possibilities are thought to be the most likely, with the third considered to be quite irrational, although not entirely to be excluded.

"Strategy, tactics, training and equipment have gradually been adjusted to ensure that the defence efforts would not be paralysed in case of a nuclear attack. The Civil Defence efforts play here an extremely important role because it will have a considerable psychological impact on the soldier in the field to know that the protection of his family is ensured.

"The official Swiss position concerning possible acquisition of nuclear weapons is that as long as they exist and could be used against the country, the government has an obligation to examine all the advantages and disadvantages of taking such a step.

"This would include a thorough evaluation of protection possibilities and dissuasive effects, a study of how nuclear weapons would increase the fire power of the armed forces, an examination of the basis upon which a decision to acquire nuclear weapons would be possible in the first place and the question as to when further proliferation would force Switzerland to acquire nuclear weapons.

"It is interesting to note in this connection, that the Federal Council had signed the Nonproliferation Treaty in 1969, but has not yet submitted it to Parliament for ratification.

"The arguments against a small nuclear force *vis-à-vis* a superpower are well known. The most important problems are their high vulnerability, continuing obsolescence and of course the most basic one of credibility.

## To be continued

# ZURICH INSURANCE

**ZURICH INSURANCE COMPANY**

A limited company incorporated in Switzerland in 1872.

**THE BEDFORD GENERAL INSURANCE CO. LTD.**

A member of the British Insurance Association.

**THE BEDFORD LIFE ASSURANCE SOCIETY LTD.**

A member of the Life Offices Association.

**United Kingdom Head Office for  
Administration & Service:**

Victory House, Havant Street,  
Portsmouth PO1 3EZ.

Telephone: Portsmouth 22200

**United Kingdom Executive  
Head Office:**

Fairfax House, Fulwood Place,  
London WC1V 6HX.

Telephone: 01-242 8833.

**GROUP RESOURCES EXCEED £500,000,000**





*This Swiss tug-of-war team, who all came from Sins (canton Aargau), took part in a tug-of-war championship at the Hove Dairy Festival on the Western Lawns at Hove, Sussex, recently. They were narrowly beaten in the final of their class by the odd pull of the best of three. The picture shows on the far right the coach Paul Heeb. The other members are: Hans Leibacher; Alois Konrad; Felix Villiger; Alois Huwiler; Albert Oh; Markus Butler; Michael Butler; Alois Huwiler (no relation). The Dairy Queen in the middle is Janet Barnett of Wheatley, County Durham, who presented English cheeses. The Swiss presented a mounted cow-bell to the secretary of the English tug-of-war association. Janet Barnett is the National Dairy Queen of England and Wales and is the winner out of an entry of 7,000.*



# Swiss Life

INSURANCE AND PENSION COMPANY  
(Incorporated with limited liability in Zurich Switzerland)  
Mutual Company—Established 1857

**ASSETS EXCEED  
£1,400 MILLIONS**

9 Cheapside, London EC2V 6AL  
Telephone: 01-236 3841

## RENTENANSTALT

Pension Plans for  
International Companies under the

## MASTER COVER CONTRACT

and all types of  
life assurance and annuities.

30 Exchange Street East, Liverpool L2 3QB  
Telephone: 051-236 6712

Head Office: SCHWEIZERISCHE LEBENSVERSICHERUNGS-UND RENTENANSTALT, ZURICH.