

The Death of Swiss Neutrality? Foreign Policy in the Service of Imperialism

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Switzerland, a country traditionally reputed as a model for democracy and order, is nonetheless politically rife with contradictions. On one side many tend to praise the country's high living standards, its system of direct democracy and its remarkable range of high quality products popular around the world. On the other hand the practice of bank secrecy has made Switzerland a popular destination for money launderers of all kinds throughout the decades.

Although offshore safe havens such as the British Channel Islands, the Cayman Islands, Bermuda and others nowadays enjoy notably higher popularity for large-scale financial criminal activities, Switzerland remains the primary destination in many people's minds when it comes to dictators, speculators or mafia bosses hiding their dirty money from the not quite long enough arm of the law.

Another key concept many associate with Switzerland is its strict policy of political neutrality. Indeed Switzerland is the second oldest neutral country in the world; it has not fought a foreign war since its neutrality was established by the Treaty of Paris in 1815.

Though Switzerland's ambivalent position during World War II was justifiably criticised by many, the state's neutral stance has generally been appreciated all over Europe and the rest of the world. Even British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was certainly no fan of neutrals, said:

"Of all the neutrals, Switzerland has the greatest right to distinction. . . What does it matter whether she has been able to give us the commercial advantages we desire or has given too many to the Germans. . .? She has been a democratic state, standing for freedom in self-defence. . . and largely on our side." [1]

Swiss neutrality makes the country a good meeting ground for negotiations between conflicting global parties. Even the United States, who do not maintain official diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, rely on Swiss support in order to have a diplomatic channel:

"In the absence of diplomatic or consular relations of the United States of America with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Swiss government, acting through its Embassy in Tehran, serves as the Protecting Power of the USA in Iran since 21 May 1980. The Swiss Embassy's Foreign Interests Section provides consular services to U.S. citizens living in or travelling to Iran." [2]

As a diplomatic contact point between the U.S. and Iran, it is logical that Switzerland would have no valid reason for refusing to meet with Iranian officials. But even a short encounter between the former Swiss federal president Hans Rudolf Merz and the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the United Nations Durban II anti-racism conference in Geneva 2009 was going too far, according to officials from Israel, America's closest Middle East ally:

“Netanyahu's office later said that he and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman decided to recall Ambassador Ilan Elgar from Berne ‘for consultations and in protest at the conference in Geneva.’”[3]

Further testing Switzerland's neutrality, U.S. and Israeli officials criticised Switzerland for not taking part in the oil embargo against Iran in July 2012.[4]

Relationship with the European Union

Although it does not belong to the European Union, Switzerland collaborates closely with its member states and the majority of Swiss exports are reserved for the EU market. Nevertheless, according to Jean-Claude Juncker[5], Prime Minister of Luxembourg and one of the key architects of EU integration, Switzerland's independence remains “a geostrategic absurdity” because its position is an anomaly among other European states[6].

Indeed, there is no doubt that Swiss neutrality could not effectively continue if the country was to join the European Union, as EU member states are currently being forced to give up more and more of their fiscal sovereignty.

However, in Switzerland itself, where all major political parties have guaranteed representation in government, many forces are trying to push the country in a direction that would be more in line with the geostrategic roadmap of Brussels' key players. In particular, Switzerland's mainstream leftist party would like to see its country join the EU sooner rather than later. The fact that dominating EU-member states have participated in numerous U.S.-led military aggressions (e.g. Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya just this past year) apparently does not seem to faze the pro-EU stance of many Swiss leftists.

In June 2012, the Social Democratic Party's faction of the Swiss General Assembly confirmed once again that they do not see a future in bilateral cooperation with the EU, specifying that joining the EU would be the “better institutional way.”[7]

Swiss Social Democrats also support Swiss participation in NATO programs such as the Partnership for Peace, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and NATO Parliamentary Assembly.[8]

Ironically, Switzerland's mainstream “leftists” are the most unscrupulous proponents of militarism and imperialism, operating through the rhetoric of shamelessly demagogic “humanitarian” and “internationalist” phrases. For example, when the so called “Republic of Kosovo” declared unilateral independence in February 2008, “neutral” Switzerland was among the first countries to recognise the U.S./NATO protectorate disguised as a state. This happened mostly thanks to the efforts made by the former Federal Councillor for Foreign Affairs, Micheline Calmy Rey (a Social Democrat), who had already lobbied for recognition of Kosovo for months.

In May 2012, the Federal Councillor for Foreign Affairs, Didier Burkhalter, attended the NATO conference in Chicago and promised closer collaboration between NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) when Switzerland takes over OSCE presidency in 2014.[9] Furthermore he argued in favour of Swiss participation in NATO's so called "Cyber Defence" program.[10]

The latest disturbing news on Switzerland's role in the international community concerns the conflict in Syria, when it was revealed that Syrian anti-government insurgents have Swiss weapons in their arsenal, as the Swiss *Sonntags-Zeitung*[11] reported:

"The records, photographs, were made on Thursday in the Syrian village of Marea (Aleppo) and show hand grenades of the type shown OHG92 and SM 6-03-1, which were produced by the [Swiss] government-owned arms manufacturer Ruag."[12]

Allegedly the weapons had been originally sold to the United Arab Emirates, who reportedly delivered them to Syrian insurgents. Other reports indicate the possibility that the arms had been used previously by anti-Gaddafi fighters from Libya, who got them from Qatar, which would mean that one of the most aggressive Gulf regimes received Swiss arms.[13]

In December 2011, a temporary ban on sending arms to Qatar was implemented by Switzerland, but was lifted quickly thereafter.[14] On the other hand, Swiss export of weapons to Syria has been banned since 1998. It is revealing that when it comes to arming pro-Western regimes, Switzerland exercises much less constraint.

As reported recently, about 40 senior representatives of various Syrian opposition groups have been meeting "quietly in Germany under the tutelage of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) to plan for how to set up a post-Assad Syrian government."[15]

Furthermore the project "has been funded by the State Department, but also has received funding from the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs." [16] According to the Swiss daily *Tages-Anzeiger*, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed its participation and the donation of approximately 50 000 euros for covering "logistic costs".[17]

The main problem concerning the decision-making process of Swiss foreign policy is that in no other field of Swiss politics can so many decisions be made without asking for the people's approval in a referendum. This practice runs completely counter to Switzerland's system of direct democracy, where referendums normally are meant to be a component of the country's political culture. Therefore it is easy for factions who follow a transatlantic agenda to hijack Switzerland's foreign policy and undermine the country's centuries-old sovereignty.

However, defending a nation state's democratic and social institutions against global imperialist rule would be a progressive act and has nothing to do with outmoded notions of "nationalism", as Western mainstream leftists would have us believe. It would, rather, be the first step in the struggle for freedom from supranational corporate interests.

It is no surprise, then, that pro-EU pundits like Juncker label Switzerland's reticence to jump aboard the EU bandwagon (and abandon its neutrality) as "absurd". Apparently, his definition of the ideal "democratic process" - as dictated by Brussels and applied broadly - is much less questionable:

“We decide on something, leave it lying around and wait and see what happens. If no one kicks up a fuss, because most people don’t understand what has been decided, we continue step by step until there is no turning back.”[18]

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Notes

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/02/opinion/l-churchill-s-switzerland-460141.html>.

[2] <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/reps/asia/virn/fosteh.html>.

[3]

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/israel-recalls-swiss-envoy-over-ahmadinejad-presence-at-summit-1.274420>.

[4] <http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=274099>.

[5] Jean-Claude Juncker is President of the Eurogroup (a meeting of the finance ministers of the eurozone)

[6] <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/12/15/eu-switzerland-idUKLDE6BE0VT20101215>.

[7] <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/schweiz/die-sp-waelzt-das-europadossier-1.17258476>.

[8] http://www.sp-ps.ch/.../SIPOL_B_Stellungnahme_SP.pdf.

[9] <http://www.currentconcerns.ch/index.php?id=1813>.

[10] It goes without saying that U.S./NATO’s cyber activities have more to do with attack than defence. See for example RT on U.S.-Cyberwar against Iran: <http://www.rt.com/news/iran-us-israel-cyberwar-virus-weapon-770>.

[11] <http://www.sonntagszeitung.ch/fokus/artikel-detailseite/?newsid=223610>.

[12] <http://www.syrianews.cc/syria-syrian-terrorists-weapons-switzerland>.

[13] <http://www.sonntagszeitung.ch/fokus/artikel-detailseite/?newsid=223610>.

[14]

http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/War_materiel_exports_return_to_the_spotlight_.html?cid=32277794.

[15]

http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/07/20/inside_the_secret_effort_to_plan_for_a_post_assad_syria

[16] *Ibid.*

[17]

<http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ausland/naher-osten-und-afrika/Schweiz-finanzierte-Syriens-Op>

[position/story/25230130](#).

[18] <http://www.economist.com/node/1325309>.

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