

Swiss neutrality

The remaining challenges after the referendum

by Jean-Daniel Ruch,* former ambassador



Jean-Daniel Ruch.
(Picture ma)

Strictly speaking, the result of the referendum on 27 September is not particularly significant. The roots of the problem that is eroding the credibility of our foreign and security policy run deep. They have a name: foreign influence. These are well documented, particularly in the brand-new exposé by the

German-Swiss journalist *Rafaël Lutz*.¹ For at least ten years, they have formed the basis for the federal government's key decisions in the areas of security and sanctions. An overview:

The defence procurement decisions.

There are suspicions of undue influence or even corruption surrounding four arms purchases: the *American F-35s and Patriot systems*,² as well as the *Israeli drones and radio equipment*.³

Around 3 billion has already been spent on these systems, which either do not work or are *so severely delayed in delivery*⁴ that Switzerland's security is thereby jeopardised. For example, the Patriots were intended to close a gap in our air defence. It is unlikely that these missiles, should they ever be delivered, will be operational for another ten years.

The increase in the military budget,

which is set to reach one per cent of *gross domestic product* (GDP) by 2030, equivalent to around 10 billion Swiss francs. This represents a doubling in less than ten years. Which other budget item has seen 100 per cent growth in such a short time? None. And how is this to be financed?



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On the one hand, through an *increase in VAT*,⁵ which further erodes the purchasing power of citizens, already undermined by the sanctions against Russia and the Israeli-American adventures in Iran. On the other hand, by taking on debt, which has hitherto been taboo for the Swiss Confederation.

Goodness me, is the Russian threat so imminent? One must take a closer look at the sophisticated strategy behind this portrayal of the threat: *Think tanks* funded by the arms industry and the Swiss Confederation, such as the *Centre for Security Studies at ETH Zurich*,⁶ are circulating alarming reports modelled on those of other institutions also subsidised by the arms industry – such as the highly regarded *IISS in London*⁷ – in order to influence the government and parliamentarians.

The latter have hardly any other sources from which to assess the threat situation, as dissenting voices are, at best, ignored and, at worst, vilified. Furthermore, parliamentarians – some of

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to the prosecutor of the *Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal* (ICTY) from 2003 to 2007. From 2008, he led Swiss policy in the Middle East as the Confederation became involved in the search for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jean-Daniel Ruch was Switzerland's ambassador to Serbia and to Montenegro (2012–2016), to Israel (2016–2021) and to Turkey (2021–2023).

whom are directly influenced by the arms lobbies – blindly vote in favour of increasing funding. Q.E.D. [“to be proven”].

The rapprochement with NATO.

The *Security Strategy*,⁸ published by the *Department of Defence* (DDPS) on 18 September this year, outlines the range of areas in which Switzerland cooperates with NATO within the framework of interoperability: the development of the armed forces; standards in the areas of training, equipment, systems and processes; and cooperation in the context of exercises and operations, in command and control, in the exchange of information, and in joint actions within the same operational domain, such as airspace protection, cyber defence and logistics.

The DDPS also intends to take part in more joint exercises with NATO, including those that test the organisation’s capabilities in the event of an external attack in accordance with Article 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty*, and to second personnel to the Alliance’s command centres. The transit of NATO soldiers would also be authorised. One wonders where cooperation could be even closer to become a member of the Alliance.

Of course, Switzerland will not become a full member. Yet the line between functional integration and full-fledged accession is blurred – a skilfully maintained ambiguity concealed behind elastic terms such as “interoperability”, which leave all options open, including that of unofficial accession.

The sanctions.

The adoption of the EU sanctions against Russia, which took place following a *spectacular U-turn by the Federal Council between 23 and 28 February 2022*,⁹ was never explained to the Swiss people. Our authorities have cited serious violations of international law to justify their actions. Yet no one who is even slightly informed believes this explanation. For if international law were the yardstick for sanctions, the same measures would have to be taken against every aggressor as against Russia. The most recent act of aggression – namely that of the US and Israel against Iran – *has elicited only tentative reactions in Bern*.¹⁰ Not even a condemnation of this flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations was issued.

The latest report from the DDPS also addresses this issue and announces that Switzer-

land “will adopt the sanctions imposed by its key trading and values-based partners whenever this is appropriate”. It therefore apparently did not prove sensible to adopt the EU’s sanctions *against violent Israeli settlers*,¹¹ nor those adopted by *eleven European countries and Canada*¹² to ban trade with the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Are France, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway perhaps not close enough to us in terms of values? Whilst Israel ... The fact is that Israeli influence within the DDPS, at the top of the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* (FDFA) and in Parliament is stronger than the voices – and not just those on the left – calling for sanctions against Israel. Switzerland’s policy of double standards is no longer the exception: it is the norm.

An opposition programme

These abuses, caused by foreign influence, come at a price: on the one hand, billions of francs wasted to benefit the American and Israeli arms industries; on the other, a loss of Switzerland’s credibility on the international stage. If there were a genuine opposition in Switzerland, it could take the following steps:

A full investigation into the arms purchases.

The proven *lies told by the Federal Administration regarding the price of the F-35*¹³ have prompted the *Social Democratic Party*¹⁴ to call for the establishment of a parliamentary committee of inquiry. However, the F-35 scandal, which has been well documented by former *National Councillor Pierre-Alain Fridez since 2022*,¹⁵ is merely the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, a parliamentary commission would consist mainly of representatives from parties which, for political, ideological or financial reasons, have no interest whatsoever in identifying and punishing those responsible for this disaster.

What is needed is an independent special prosecutor authorised to investigate all dubious contracts highlighted by the *Federal Audit Office*. In addition to the F-35s, these include the Patriot missiles, Israeli drones and telecommunications systems from the same country.

Setting limits on cooperation with NATO.

The DDPS presents us with an endless list of all the areas of cooperation it intends to pursue with the Atlantic Alliance. What must be a cause

for concern for citizens is that no limits have been set, apart from full membership. Yet even unofficial integration could oblige Switzerland to take part in a conflict between Russia and NATO.

This is no longer a remote possibility, as the bellicose rhetoric from Germany demonstrates. Furthermore, NATO or its member states are just as guilty of aggression as Russia: Iraq, Libya, Iran. And to further reinforce any doubts one might harbour about the Atlantic Alliance: it, or its member states, tend to lose all their wars. There is no need to go as far back as Vietnam: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the Sahel and Iran illustrate the Alliance's strategic weakness despite its technological superiority.

Carry out an audit of the FDFA.

Swiss citizens have the right to know why a decision is taken to impose sanctions on one state but not on another. The official justification is not valid: Israel violates international law at least as severely as Russia. Over the past three years, Israel has attacked Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, Yemen and Iran. Furthermore, Israel is suspected of committing genocide in Gaza, and *its Prime Minister is facing charges of war crimes before the International Criminal Court*,¹⁶ the sole international criminal court.

Back to a consistent sanctions policy.

It would be absurd to seek to impose sanctions on every country that violates international law in the same way that we are sanctioning Russia. We will neither freeze US assets in Switzerland nor restrict trade with our second-most important trading partner! Yet over the last 25 years, the US has carried out acts of aggression against Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Venezuela and, most recently, Iran.

The only way to uphold the principle of justice in the face of legal violations is to refrain from imposing any sanctions not adopted by the UN Security Council, to take measures to prevent the circumvention of sanctions imposed by our key partners, and, above all, to comply with our national law and our international obligations.

For example, the continued sale of dual-use goods to Israel contravenes both our national law and our international obligations. *Courageous lawyers*¹⁷ from the Jura and the canton of Vaud have lodged a complaint with the Federal Council alleging complicity in war crimes,

and even genocide. Will members of Parliament demonstrate such ethical resolve?

For it takes courage to tackle the roots of the evil that is gnawing away at our institutions. Moreover, in its report of 18 September, the DDPS does not shy away from issuing a warning to all those who might wish to question the legitimacy of our policies. The document provides for the establishment of an "inter-departmental working group on influence operations and disinformation", which will "continuously develop preventive and reactive measures".

The exchange of information is also to be intensified, and the powers of our *intelligence service* (FIS) are to be strengthened so that it can "identify and prevent threats arising from influence operations at an early stage". Translation: The CIA and MI6 will draw up lists of "dissident" Swiss citizens. In Soviet times, this offence was called "anti-Soviet propaganda". Here, the accusations today are "pro-Russian propaganda" or "conspiracy theories".

Will anyone still dare to say that the greatest threats to our security come from NATO? It is not Russia that endangers our economic security, but the sanctions against Russia and the Israeli-American aggression against Iran. It is not Russia that is crippling our defence: it is the armaments decisions of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS), designed to serve American and Israeli interests.

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(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ Das Nato-Netzwerk in der Schweiz, Zeitpunkt Verlag, August 2026. A French translation will be published this autumn by Editions Zarka.

² <https://www.letemps.ch/suisse/f-35-systeme-patriot-radar-les-feux-sont-au-rouge-pour-les-grands-projets-de-l-armee>

³ <https://latele.ch/articles/le-national-maintient-l-achat-des-drones-ads-15>

⁴ <https://www.admin.ch/fr/newnsb/Wx5mhQfLSAEzzUoi02ejF>

⁵ <https://www.letemps.ch/suisse/le-conseil-des-etats-approuve-une-hausse-de-0-2-point-de-la-tva-pour-financer-l-armee>

⁶ <https://www.vbs.admin.ch/de/newnsb/YOj8z3xJzfT5>

⁷ <https://www.iiss.org/governance/funding---membership-and-royalties/>

⁸ <https://www.sepos.admin.ch/dam/fr/sd-web/bc4PAN7CoEsS/Sicherheitspolitische%20Strategie%20der%20>

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tes%20FR.pdf

⁹ <https://www.admin.ch/fr/nsb?id=87386>

¹⁰ <https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/2026/article/frappes-contre-l-iran-la-suisse-profondement-alarmee-et-suspend-ses-vols-29166755.html>

¹¹ <https://www.watson.ch/fr/international/conseil-des-etats/448514680-la-suisse-ne-sanctionnera-pas-les-colons-israeliens-violents>

¹² <https://www.france24.com/fr/moyen-orient/20260908-cisjordanie-occup%C3%A9-12-pays-france-veulent-sanctionner-commerce-colonies-isra%C3%ABl>

¹³ <https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/2026/article/f-35-aucun-prix-fixe-n-a-ete-negocie-par-la-suisse-29351126.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/2026/article/f-35-le-ps-reclame-une-commission-d-enquete-parlementaire-29355553.html>

¹⁵ Pierre-Alain Fridez, *Die Wahl der F-35. Grober Fehler oder Staatsskandal?* Ed. Favre, 2022.

¹⁶ <https://www.limpertinentmedia.com/chroniques/magazine-analyse-diplomatique>

¹⁷ <https://www.rts.ch/info/regions/jura/2025/article/denonciation-penale-contre-4-conseillers-federaux-pour-complicite-a-gaza-28890670.html>