12. SSF Security Talk “a turning point for (Swiss) defence policy?!”

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Russia’s war of aggression on Ukraine has not only taken the West by surprise but made clear at a stroke that war has returned to Europe. In addition to the serious economic consequences for Europe and the whole world, the war in Ukraine also reveals major deficiencies in the defence capabilities of Europe and Switzerland. So, what are the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for European security and defence policy? What consequences does the invasion have for NATO and what for non-NATO countries in Europe like neutral Switzerland?

These and other questions were discussed at the 12th SSF Security Talk in Bern by renowned experts such as Jörg Vollmer (General (ret.), Bundeswehr), Claude-France Arnould (consultant at IFRI, former ambassador and managing director of the European Defence Agency), Lieutenant General Thomas Süssli (head of the Swiss Armed Forces), Councillor of States Werner Salzmann (president of the SPC-S), Hans-Peter Kellerhals (major general (ret.), deputy editor-in-chief of ASMZ) and Prof. Dr. Holger Mey (Vice President Advanced Concepts, Airbus Defence and Space). The presentations and the subsequent lively panel discussion showed that the defence capabilities of Europe and Switzerland are currently in a poor state and that it will take years to bring them back to a satisfactory level.

«European NATO countries must once again have deployable armed forces - something they have neglected for the last 20 years»

General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer opened the round of presentations. As former commander of the NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum in the Netherlands and former Chief of Staff of the German Army, he is one of the best experts on the current challenges facing Germany and the European NATO countries.

General (ret.) Vollmer opened his speech by saying that he had experienced three paradigm shifts during his 44 years of service: The first paradigm shift was the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, which took place against the backdrop of a fully operational NATO of 16 member states. This was followed by German reunification in 1990, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and an increase in foreign deployments by NATO countries, starting with the former Yugoslavia.

The second paradigm shift occurred after the attacks of September 11th 2001 with the beginning of the "War on Terror". For twenty years after that, the focus was on out-of-area missions by NATO forces, especially in Afghanistan, and no longer on Alliance defence. Armed forces were reduced in all European states and there was talk of a peace dividend that could now be enjoyed. At the NATO summit in Prague in 2002, the new doctrine of "out of area" operations with fewer and fewer troops at home was approved. This was accompanied by the dissolution of the two European NATO headquarters in Naples (Italy) and Brunssum (Netherlands) and their renaming. The consequence: only limited operational forces of the European NATO countries for the defence of their own country and the Allies in Europe.

The Eastern European states, including Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland, which complained about this new policy and pointed out its dangers, were not listened to, criticised General (ret.) Vollmer. After all, at the NATO summits in Wales in 2014 and Warsaw in 2016, the decision was made that individual NATO countries, including the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany, assumed a certain

alliance responsibility for the defence of the Baltic states and Poland, e.g. Germany for Lithuania. In the view of General (ret.) Vollmer, it was remarkable that after a long time Canada was again committed to NATO concerns in Europe.



The last "turning point" finally came on 24 February 2022 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to General (ret.) Vollmer, this made NATO realise that "out-of-area" missions were no longer the main focus and that an end had to be put to the situation in which the forces in the individual European NATO countries and in the Alliance as a whole were only deployable to a limited extent. At the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022, far-reaching decisions were made in this regard, which must now be implemented. On the one hand, there will again be three regional NATO headquarters, each with clear regional responsibilities: in Naples ("South"), Brunssum ("Northeast") and Norfolk in the US state of Virginia. The individual NATO countries would also have to provide precisely defined contingents of troops for the defence of their country and the Alliance, and this on a binding basis, no longer just on a voluntary basis, as was the case with the "out of area" missions. The "New Force Model", which was adopted in Madrid, provides for a fully operational NATO force in Europe within 10, 30 or 180 days. This force would then have 40,000 (within 10 days) or up to 300,000 (graduated in 10, 30 and 180 days) troops from the various NATO countries at its disposal. Every square metre of NATO soil should be defended jointly by all NATO countries, General Vollmer stressed: "No adversary should be able to invade a NATO country without encountering decisive resistance".

General (ret.) Vollmer went on to say that Germany had already informed its NATO partners in Madrid that it would provide the armed forces that would be allocated to it in this new model. The other European NATO countries must now follow suit. They, too, needed fully operational armed forces to defend their territory and that of their allies, General Vollmer emphasised. He recalled that the German Bundestag had approved a special fund of 100 billion euros to modernise the Bundeswehr, as well as an increase in the annual share of defence spending to 2% of the gross domestic product.

Special attention must also be paid to the protection of critical infrastructures. There have already been acts of sabotage at Deutsche Bahn and attacks in cyberspace. Likewise, great attention must be paid to the protection of port infrastructures, which are increasingly falling into foreign, including Chinese, hands. These would be needed if, in the event of war, troops were to be moved quickly by sea to the place where an attack was threatened or was already taking place. General Vollmer (ret.) demanded that all European member states must do more within the framework of NATO to protect themselves and their allies. The support of the Americans was indispensable, but there was a need for "burden sharing", he made clear. After all, the protection of one's own homeland should be close to every country's heart.

Putin has not yet achieved his goals in Ukraine, General (ret.) Vollmer concluded. On the contrary, Europe and NATO have so far been very united in their approach to the war. One of the consequences of the war is that Sweden and Finland will now join NATO, two countries with modern armed forces. The Baltic Sea will thus become NATO's "Mare nostrum".

The conclusion: the European NATO states must in future again have fully operational armed forces, even at very short notice, for the protection of themselves and their allies. However, this will require a lot of time, money and commitment from everyone, as twenty years of reduction in troops, defence spending and combat readiness cannot be reversed overnight. The right decisions were made at the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022; now action must follow.

“Defence efforts at national, European and NATO level are strongly complementary”

The second speaker was Madame Claude-France Arnould, consultant at IFRI and former Executive Director of the European Defence Agency. She spoke in French and made it clear that she would take a decidedly French view in her presentation. However, she would not necessarily take the official position of the French government, but rather express her personal opinion.

Mme Arnould began by reminding the audience that defence readiness ("l'adhésion à la défense") has traditionally been a high priority in France, both in public opinion and in politics. However, this positive attitude towards defence has increased everywhere in Europe since the start of the Ukraine war on 24 February 2022, she stressed. The speaker then looked back: the two world wars in the 20th century had taught France that in defence matters it was important to be strong itself, to have coherent planning with its allies and to stand on its own two feet. This is why France, under President Charles de Gaulle, built up its own nuclear force, the "force de frappe", and has kept it at the centre of its own defence policy to this day. For the same reason, it was so important for France, even as a NATO member, to have decision-making autonomy ("autonomie d' action"). France strives to be a reliable ally. But one must also be prepared for cases in which the Atlantic Alliance does not intervene, be it in Africa, especially in connection with the fight against terrorism, or in connection with the interests of French territories in the Pacific, Asia and America, as well as for the protection of one's own fellow citizens in acute crises in which military means are required or also in cases in which no consensus can be reached in NATO to trigger Article 5. In such situations, one must be able to act within the European framework, in a coalition or, if necessary, alone.

Mme Arnould stressed that French civil society supports France's commitment to defence issues at national level and within the framework of the European Union and NATO. It is a question of European countries increasing their capacity and freedom to act within the framework of a European defence policy, regardless of whether it concerns operations, armaments or strategic culture. Unfortunately,

she had repeatedly encountered reservations with such demands in the past, especially on the grounds that such projects would lead to a weakening of NATO. When she was at the European Defence Agency, the United Kingdom in particular had taken this position, whereas the Pentagon had shown a willingness to support European efforts, for example on the issue of air-to-air refuelling. But even today, there are still reservations about European cooperation in the field of defence, especially with regard to military programmes. The complicating factors include, for example, bureaucratic protection reflexes, old habits of buying off the peg, the American power of persuasion and, above all, divergent industrial interests in the short term. Nevertheless, there have also been some successes and decisive progress, which were further accelerated by the Ukraine war. Examples of this are the arms deliveries to Ukraine (€ 2.5 billion) or the joint financing and procurement of armament programmes.



Mme Arnould went on to explain that, in her view, cooperation between NATO and the EU was also necessary: it was less a matter of negotiating declarations with political implications - there were many of these, but they were laborious to work out because of Turkish reservations - and more about the concrete implementation of cooperation, both in operations and in capabilities. In this respect, according to her experience, one can rely on the NATO commands SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) and SACT (Supreme Allied Command Transformation). It was SHAPE, for example, that solved for the EU the initially politically unsolved problem of securing the teams and vehicles of the European police forces deployed in Afghanistan. The recurring cooperation between SACT and the EDA (European Defence Agency) had also been fruitful. Echoing General (ret.) Vollmer's remarks on the new rapid reaction force, she noted that the decision taken at the NATO summit in Madrid indeed entailed considerable and sustained implementation efforts.

Finally, Mme Arnould spoke about Franco-German cooperation. This was not in the best of shape at the moment, as the latest news had shown. Chancellor Scholz's speech in Prague had caused concern in France and other southern EU countries, as it had given the impression that it was addressed only

to Germany's northern and eastern neighbours. In addition, there were differences of opinion on energy issues and a lack of coordination on other important issues, such as relations with China. The fact that Germany, under the shock of the war in the Ukraine, now wants to play its full part in the defence effort, on the other hand, is a very good thing. The investment announcements, be it the special package of 100 billion euros or the intention to increase the defence budget to 2% of GDP, are appropriate means to provide Europe as a whole with a very strong defence capability. What could give cause for concern in France and elsewhere, however, are the modalities of this capacity-building of Germany into the largest conventional military power in Europe. The question is whether it will go "it alone", i.e. buy armaments on a massive scale outside Europe, or whether European cooperation will be strengthened, enabling the development of a strong European defence industry and the - largely dual - technologies of tomorrow.

“The transition has already begun!”

The third speaker was Lieutenant general Thomas Süssli, Head of the Swiss Armed Forces. Before going into detail about the current Swiss defence policy, Lt. Gen. Süssli referred to the term "changing times". In the view of the Chief of the Armed Forces, we have been living in a "World 4.0" since the outbreak of the Ukraine war: World 1.0" was the world of the colonial powers and ended with the Second World War. This was followed by "World 2.0", the time of the Cold War and the conflict between the communist and western systems. After the fall of the Berlin Wall came "World 3.0", a time of peace in Europe when it was thought that the Western liberal system would encompass the entire globe. With Russia's attack on Ukraine, however, the "World 4.0" has now begun, according to the head of the army. This is again characterised by the conflict of two blocs and two value systems: the bloc of countries that reject the Western rule-based security order against the bloc of countries that embody this order. At the recent summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Uzbekistan, which was attended by China, Russia, Pakistan, India and the Central Asian countries, a clear message was conveyed: "The rule-based order of the West is not accepted and the autocratic states are also looking for a place in the world".

Then Lt. Gen. Süssli addressed the question of what all this means for the Swiss Armed Forces: On the one hand, the Swiss Armed Forces are facing a new type of hybrid conflict management. The term "hybrid" does not only cover non-military operations in cyber and information space, the Chief of the Armed Forces explained. Hybrid conflicts begin diffusely and asymmetrically with political, economic and terrorist measures and extend into armed conflict. The threat posed by such armed conflicts is understood by the Swiss Armed Forces as military potential multiplied by the intention of the adversary. The military potential can be observed very well by the army, but the intention can change very quickly. The armed forces must align themselves with the military potential, explained Lt. Gen. Süssli.

The Chief of the Armed Forces went on to say that the Armed Forces had outlined four characteristics of conflicts in the 2030s in the report on the renewal of the ground forces: Firstly, the adversary will try as long as possible to act at a distance and to remain undetected or at least deniable by means of operations in cyber and information space. Secondly, the adversary will not primarily fight against Switzerland's strengths, the army, but against its weaknesses: the critical infrastructure, but also its open, democratic society. Thirdly, an adversary will act simultaneously in all fields of operation: in space, cyber, information and air space, whereby conflicts will ultimately continue to be fought on the

ground if necessary. And fourthly, if conflicts were to take place on the ground, then in urban, built-up space.

Based on this threat situation, Lt. Gen. Süssli then explained how the armed forces should be further developed. He reminded the audience that the army of today was still the product of Army 21, which was intended to reduce it to the mere maintenance of competencies. In the process, the army was reduced from 400,000 to 200,000 members (plus 80,000 in the reserves). The Chief of the Armed Forces stated that the Swiss militia army had succeeded in maintaining its "savoir faire". Today, however, the "pouvoir faire" is lacking. There were four reasons for the army's low sustainability, which he had already mentioned several times: The first is Army 21 and the associated savings rounds, in which the army budget was repeatedly cut. The second reason is the business-oriented logistics that went hand in hand with Army 21. Today, army material is stored centrally in five supply centres. At the same time, the Swiss army has forgotten the logistics of war, i.e. how the material is brought from the supply centres to the fighting troops. The third reason is stockpiling: today, we only have ammunition for training and a little more. Finally, the fourth reason lies in the air force: with 40 combat aircraft, the army only has a holding capacity of one month during heightened tensions and a "sufficient initial capability" during armed conflicts.



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From the point of view of the Chief of the Armed Forces, the message is therefore clear: the task now is to rebuild the defence capability of the Swiss Armed Forces over time. In the message on Army 21, it was said that it would take ten years of growth if the security situation in Europe changed. However, the build-up is only beginning today and will therefore take some time, admitted Lt. Gen. Süssli. In the short term, the Armed Forces had launched the AURORA programme to increase defence capabilities. Among other things, this programme is concerned with war logistics and stockpiling, but also with protection against sabotage. The long-term development, on the other hand, can be read in the three concepts "Air Defence of the Future", "Future of Ground Forces" and "Overall Cyber Concept". The

Armed Forces have a very clear picture of what the Armed Forces will look like in 2030, emphasised Lt. Gen. Süssli: Firstly, the procurement of the F-35 fighter aircraft and the Patriot air defence system will require the development of an "Integrated Air Defence". Secondly, the army knows that the days of large mechanised units on the ground in Swiss terrain are over. The future will be mobile, modular units, probably in battalion size plus and based on wheeled vehicles. But the battle tank will still play a role. Thirdly, it is a matter of creating a uniform platform to simplify logistics and keep costs low.

A particular challenge, however, according to the head of the armed forces, is that 24 main systems will have to be replaced over the next 18 years due to their age, which will cost a total of 40 to 50 billion francs. With the increase of the army budget to 1% of GDP, the army could go this way faster and have a consistent system again sooner. Lt. Gen. Süssli added that the Armed Forces were considering no longer procuring new systems system by system, but rather redesigning one third of the Armed Forces at a time in the future and doing so completely: from equipment to armament to logistics. In this way, the defence capability could be regained sooner and the militia would have a system in which they could train their defence capability. Lt. Gen. Süssli dismissed the audience with the message: "The Swiss Armed Forces have a clear goal and the growth has already begun!

After the strong applause of the audience, the moderator Fredy Müller, Managing Director of FORUM SECURITY SWITZERLAND, asked the Chief of the Armed Forces whether the growth of the Swiss Armed Forces would not also lead to the Armed Forces becoming more interesting for the younger generation. Lt. Gen. Süssli stressed that the army was already interesting and attractive. In fact, there are already more applicants than places in the combat forces. However, the problem regarding the alimentation is that too many members of the armed forces are lost after recruit school. Of course, modern equipment plays a role in making the army (even) more attractive.

First learnings from the Ukraine war

The three speeches were followed by a high-level panel discussion moderated by Fredy Müller, Managing Director of the SWISS SECURITY FORUM. In addition to General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer and Claude-France Arnould, Werner Salzmann (SVP, BE) (President of the Security Policy Committee of the Council of States), Prof. Dr. Holger Mey (Vice President Advanced Concepts, Airbus Defence and Space) and Hans-Peter Kellerhals (major general (ret.) and deputy editor-in-chief of the military magazine ASMZ) took part in the panel discussion.

Introductory, Fredy Müller asked Prof. Dr. Mey whether he had expected the united European reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prof. Dr. Mey replied that he was not extremely surprised by the Ukraine war itself, because it had been clear in 2014 at the latest what made Vladimir Putin tick. He therefore found it astonishing how it had been said again and again, especially in politics, that people were disappointed in Putin and Russia. One could only be "disappointed" by Russia if one had first been deceived. The question was actually how one could be deceived about Russia: In September 2001, Putin received a standing ovation for his speech in the German Bundestag, although he had previously shown how he waged war in Grozny. Only Europe's reaction in the Ukrainian war was surprising, said Prof. Dr. Mey. Europe had actually come together relatively quickly - even if it was only because it quickly became clear how precarious the situation was and that it could only be brought under control with rapid action and in cooperation with the USA. In this respect, the question of how to proceed remains open, of course.

However, Prof. Dr. Mey emphasised: "It is clear that military power as a significant factor in international relations has never really gone away and is now recognisably even more present again for everyone". It would be a big mistake to ever underestimate this role again in the future. After all, it is not only about threats, i.e. military capabilities multiplied by intent, but also about risk perception, whereby the risk results from the probability of occurrence multiplied by the size of the damage. Accordingly, it is also a matter of considering the more improbable scenarios if they can be dangerous in their effects.

Asked about his assessment of NATO's rapid intervention, Hans-Peter Kellerhals said that the term "turning point" should be moved forward a few years. What is now being called a turn of the times was much more of a wake-up call. Because the agreements that were negotiated in the past between Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France were never honoured. For example, the 13 points for peace in eastern Ukraine, which were negotiated at the Minsk Summit in 2015, were never implemented. Russia was also never specifically described as the aggressor, but only as a warring party, which left a lot of room for interpretation. It was therefore known early on that things were not going right. In the current situation, one must be grateful that Europe found quick ways to react to the war and that the USA shared its information publicly. This led the population to realise that they were not in the security situation they had thought they were in, and that they had to think about how to proceed. This is also a very exciting question for Switzerland, Hans-Peter Kellerhals stressed. Switzerland is lucky to be surrounded by friends and therefore does not have the same problems as the Baltic states. Nevertheless, Switzerland also has to move forward and review and rethink its own defence concepts.

Claude-France Arnould also emphasised the unity and strength of the European response. It was a reaction with all available means. The sanctions were important and many steps had been taken very quickly on the subject of the development of military armament, which had previously been considered almost taboo. It is true that this European reaction came as a surprise to many, probably also to Russia. Mme Arnould even speculates that if European strength had been more predictable, self-confident and visible, it could well have played a deterrent role in the run-up to the Russian attack.

Asked what he saw as the immediate lessons for Switzerland from the war in Ukraine, Werner Salzmann, member of the Council of States, stressed that the Swiss army had been broken for a long time because of political will. Any reforms had always been accompanied by various austerity measures, which had ultimately led to the fact that it had not even been possible to implement Army 21. In the last payment framework, too, the budget was cut by another billion francs. The lesson to be learned from the war in Ukraine is that priorities must now be set differently. Parliament had recently decided that the military budget should amount to 1% of GDP by 2030. Now it is up to the Federal Council and the financial specialists, emphasised Councillor Salzmann: "Now we must stop complaining that the budget is tied up by various other tasks. We have to set priorities differently, that is the main mandate that the leadership of our country has."

Fredy Müller took up this ball and addressed General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer on the special assets of the Bundeswehr amounting to 100 billion euros and Germany's decision to invest 2% of GDP per year in its own armed forces in future. General (ret.) Vollmer first took up the bon mot that Germany is surrounded by friends. This is true, but he emphasised: "These friends are in danger. And these are more than just friends, they are allies for whom we have entered into obligations within the framework of NATO, but also of the European Union. So it is also in our interest to help these friends". The question now is how to invest this money. Germany must once again provide armed forces that are ready for

action. It is not simply a question of the number of tanks, ships, aircraft and other assets, but of their ability to work together. In other words, it is not about counting the individual components, but rather about ensuring that the formations are well-developed from the bottom up and ready for deployment, which is not the case at the moment. NATO's nine corps staSSF currently have no more associated troops. But if you want to build up a defence, you have to carry out appropriate planning and back up these plans with troops and all the associated logistics. All of this would then have to be certified and practised.



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In this respect, Germany does indeed have a major role to play due to its proximity to the eastern allies, General (ret.) Vollmer emphasised. However, it should not be a singular task for Germany to rebuild the troops, but one for the entire defence alliance. It is now a matter of rebuilding forces and capabilities and implementing them in plans in such a way that in the end three messages can be sent: on the one hand to Russia, which must see the readiness for defence, on the other hand to the population on the eastern flank, which feels threatened, and finally also to the own population at home, which is financing this departure with tax money. When asked by Fredy Müller whether there was a certain scepticism in France about Germany becoming the strongest conventional military power in Europe, Claude-France Arnould stressed that there was no scepticism; it was not up to France to doubt Germany's sustained will to implement its commitments. Rather, Germany's project was an opportunity for the whole of Europe. What is important for the other nations, however, is that all this is done in cooperation and that the common industrial and technological capabilities and freedom of action are strengthened as a result.

“Do one thing, but don't leave the other”

After this discussion on the recent past, Fredy Müller steered the debate back to NATO's focus on 20 years of operations in Afghanistan and asked Prof. Dr. Holger Mey how he felt about the fact that one's own defence capability had been neglected to such an extent. Prof. Dr. Mey emphasised that, in his view, it was less important whether a concrete threat could be identified, but rather that one had a basic understanding of the role of military power in international relations; because the military was an instrument of politics. Agreements and the so-called rule-based international order have the same problem as promises in election campaigns: they do not bind the one who gives them, but the one who believes in them. If you have rules, you have to ask yourself how you deal with rule violations. In addition to other factors, this also requires military power. For this reason, Prof. Dr. Mey said, he very much regretted NATO's focus on Afghanistan. The measures that have now been adopted could not make up for the consequences of this any time soon. Prof. Dr. Mey emphasised accordingly: "In the last 30 years, we have not spent billions, but trillions too little on our own defence capabilities, and it will be difficult to make up for that now. Especially since industry has also cut back on capacities, he added. In this context, too, it would be important for Europe to act jointly.

Fredy Müller then turned the discussion to Switzerland and asked Werner Salzmann, member of the Council of States, whether it could be the task of a modern army to be deployed for disaster control, ski races or a pandemic. Werner Salzmann took up this point with thanks: "We had the motto: help, protect, defend. But we have to be prepared for the worst case scenario, and that is defence. But this had been neglected for a long time, so the army had been looking for new tasks and even its purpose had been questioned. One could not even imagine that unpredictable rulers could have the intention to attack other states. When one considers the military potential that states like Russia, but also China and Turkey have built up and how Europe has been asleep during this time, it is very worrying. Werner Salzmann reminded the audience that Switzerland has a militia army with a defence mission. It is important that the militia army is anchored in the people. For this, of course, it must also take on the tasks mentioned. In his view, the decisive factor is: "Do one thing, but don't leave the other and concentrate on the defence mission".

In a small digression, the moderator then addressed Russia, which had failed to achieve its goals in Ukraine and was obviously weakened. Nevertheless, General (ret.) Vollmer stressed that one could not sit back and relax. After the war, there would certainly be a weakened Russia. The sanctions had also had an effect, even better than is often perceived in the media. Besides the initial invasion of Ukraine, Putin had made another mistake, Vollmer continued: the partial mobilisation. In doing so, he had brought the war into the families. Until then, the war in Russia had been viewed with a certain distance, but the fact that brothers, fathers and uncles were now being drafted had begun to open the eyes of the population. Russia will have economic difficulties for a long time after the end of the war and will have problems rebuilding the destroyed capabilities and technologies because they are cut off from the market, but it will nevertheless rearm, says General (ret.) Vollmer. In his view, however, the crucial issue is the time window: "We have to use this time window on our side and also implement the decisions that have been taken. This requires political will and must be supported by the population even after the end of the war". In essence, however, Russia remains a danger as an autocratic system, warned General (ret.) Vollmer. One should therefore by no means be tempted to sit back, because Russia will do it again. The corresponding defence capability must therefore be established in Europe.

Claude-France Arnould also agreed that Russia could remain a threat in the long run, both on the conventional and nuclear level. However, she warned: "One must not make the same mistake as with Afghanistan and limit oneself to only one threat. The threat from Russia must still be taken into account, but in the next ten, twenty and thirty years, there will be many more threats coming our way, not to mention those expected from allies like the US in other, more distant theatres." Defence capabilities must therefore be increased in all areas and planning must form the basis for this, she added.

What skills are needed for the wars of tomorrow?

The moderator, Fredy Müller, then moved on to the next point of discussion: the new dimensions of wars and the corresponding demands on defence capabilities. General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer explained that with all the tanks, ships and aircraft, of which NATO has far more than Russia, a huge wall could be built around Europe. The problem, however, is interoperability, i.e. secure communication with each other. Behind the term "multi-domain operations" there is really nothing more than what has always been done, namely ensuring the interaction of capabilities on land, in the air and at sea, and now also in cyber and space; and this not only nationally, but above all also multinationally. Creating this interoperability is the greatest challenge, especially at the international level, emphasised General (ret.) Vollmer. However, in this respect, we are clearly better than the Russians. We know what we need, also on the procurement side: we need science that implements the things that are needed, and industry that implements everything quickly. In this regard, General (ret.) Vollmer explicitly praised Switzerland's idea of always renewing one third of the stock step by step.

In response to a question from the moderator, Hans-Peter Kellerhals confirmed that the interoperability between ground-to-air defence and the new combat aircraft would be decisive for Switzerland. There are currently several other projects aimed at expanding interoperability. Regarding the idea of a staggered renewal of the inventory by one third at a time, Hans-Peter Kellerhals remarked that this was probably born out of necessity, because larger steps would not be possible in a hurry. Nevertheless, it makes perfect sense. The renewal rhythm would also roughly correspond to the normal service time of a soldier, which would mean that new training courses would not always be necessary. Hans-Peter Kellerhals then returned to the question of the orientation of the armed forces. In this respect, the focus was no longer on the most dangerous variant, but on the most probable. As commander of an armoured brigade, he had repeatedly been told that there was no need for them. And when he had to deploy troops for a national flood disaster, there were also armoured soldiers with rubber boots. The army could also be used for these activities, but the focus was too much on these operational areas and the main mission of the armed forces was forgotten. But Hans-Peter Kellerhals said he was confident that we were now on the right track. However, he said, one must also be aware that Switzerland is also home to important European infrastructures, e.g. for the electricity and gas networks and interbank traffic. Mr Kellerhals therefore demanded that Switzerland always keep the defence of these critical infrastructures in mind.

When asked whether the message of the Armed Forces from the basic reports on air defence, ground forces and the overall cyber concept had also reached politicians, Werner Salzmann, member of the Council of States, replied with a laugh that this was the case at least for him. However, one must bear in mind that the variant chosen for the report on ground troops, for example, was the affordable variant and not the one that would guarantee the best sustainability. It was the same with the fighter planes, criticised Councilor Salzmann: Actually, 72 fighter planes had been considered the best variant,

but one had always been guided only by money and the army had simply accepted that. Instead, the question should always be how the army's constitutional mandate can be guaranteed. Accordingly, Werner Salzmann demanded that the army should clearly state what it needs to implement this mission. Politicians must then take responsibility and make cuts in other areas. However, this often happened differently. For this reason, he emphasised, he was now grateful that the process of capability-based armament procurement with third-quarter renewal was being introduced. Accordingly, the parliament and the security policy commissions are then called upon to talk about the capabilities that the armed forces must have, and not about the equipment. When making decisions, one must begin to consider the variants that guarantee maximum sustainability, and not always just the cheapest.

When asked about the equipment of the French army, Claude-France Arnould replied that the current situation shows that the resources must be further increased. In this context, there is a lot of talk about weapons and ammunition stocks. However, the resources available could also be improved by cooperating not only in the production but also in the certification and testing of new ammunition. This would reduce costs, but also speed up availability and improve interoperability. As a result, she summarised, France may already be further ahead in some areas, but this is not enough. There is a realisation that we need to move to an "economy of war". In France, deterrence plays an essential role, but in terms of conventional capabilities, they have also invested a lot in operational capabilities for foreign missions in recent decades. Now, however, they have to plan for all scenarios, including a war with higher requirements.

Rearmament as a challenge for the European arms industry

The moderator, Fredy Müller, used Claude-France Arnould's speech to talk about the challenges for the defence industry. He raised the question of whether the planned rearmament was feasible for the European defence industry, considering that the production time for a French Caesar howitzer, for example, is 12 to 18 months. General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer shared the moderator's assessment: "Even in ammunition production, we are talking about very long periods of time. However, he said, there is a need for countersigned orders so that the economy can begin to rebuild the arms industry. Without secured orders, no one will start ordering steel and hiring personnel. He stressed that it may seem that the orders are there. The problem, however, is that these basic orders have to be translated into concrete orders to companies in the political process. What would also help, General Vollmer explained further, would be standardisation in Europe. There are thirty to forty different versions of infantry fighting vehicles in Europe alone. But one must agree on a certain version and then implement it, he demanded. Of course, national interests could be taken into account in the development of projects, but at a certain point there had to be a design freeze and then what had been agreed upon had to be implemented.

Prof. Dr. Holger Mey confirmed the opinion of General (ret.)Jörg Vollmer: "There are three good ways of exerting political influence on industry: first, award contracts; second, award contracts; third, award contracts". Unfortunately, this has not been the case for a long time and the industry has adapted accordingly. Of course, a new change of course would not happen so quickly, especially since the industry also had to fight strong American competition. Prof. Mey explained that the American side would spend three to four times more on research and development than the whole of NATO Europe put together. The U.S. armed forces would then buy the products from it in huge numbers and in a slimmed-down version the products would be pushed into export, partly in connection with security

guarantees. "The European arms industry cannot compete with that - unless you want it to! It takes political will!" The example of Airbus in the civil aircraft market shows that it is possible: In the 1960s, no one believed that Airbus would ever be able to compete with Boeing in the civil aircraft market, and now they are on an equal footing.

Hans-Peter Kellerhals emphasised that one must also ensure that the potential in research and development remains available in Switzerland, because otherwise one will always lag behind. At present, he said, we have to make sure that RUAG remains strong enough to ensure the maintenance of the Swiss Armed Forces' systems. That is why it is so important to make investments and ensure that the industry can survive. At the same time, it is important to ensure that there are always sufficient stocks in Switzerland. We are in the privileged position of being able to procure large systems on the European and world markets that are widely established, but we can no longer develop such systems ourselves. On the ground, however, there were still things for which the manufacturing capabilities had to be available in Switzerland.

Fredy Müller then returned to the topic of European armament cooperation and confronted General (ret.)Jörg Vollmer with the statement that political disagreements were delaying ambitious European armament projects such as the new FCAS fighter aircraft, the MGCS battle tank or the European Sky Shield. General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer remarked that one should never forget that there are always national interests behind such projects; both with regard to implementation and production as well as with regard to the rights to projects. This leads to discussions between the nations involved and to difficult questions such as the distribution of jobs. Export can also be an obstacle, as all countries have different rules. It could be that certain components are subject to different export regulations.



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When asked by the moderator, Claude-France Arnould was nevertheless convinced that these problems could be solved. Of course, such projects are made difficult by national interests, but political ways must be found to overcome these differences. For this reason, for example, the European Defence Agency was created as an intergovernmental agency within the European Union and under the supervision of the defence ministers. It enables the implementation of projects at all stages: Definition of needs and specifications, implementation of the programme, cooperation on related aspects such as certification, training, maintenance, etc. Two countries would be enough to implement a programme. Cooperation is always difficult, said Claude-France Arnould, but concrete incentives are needed, especially financial ones, and Brussels is currently working on this.

Cooperation of the Swiss Armed Forces with NATO

Finally, Fredy Müller returned to the operational capability of the Swiss Armed Forces. One issue here, he said, was the Swiss army's lack of operational experience because it is not involved in NATO exercises. However, when asked whether Switzerland could participate in NATO exercises like Austria, Werner Salzmann, member of the Council of States, remarked that he did not want to compare Switzerland with Austria, either politically or militarily. He said it was clear that Switzerland was defending its territory and therefore would not allow flank attacks on NATO countries. However, the neutrality that Switzerland has had for over 200 years is primarily based not only on the law of neutrality, but also on the credibility of its policies. He asked rhetorically what non-NATO members would think if Switzerland sent troops to a NATO exercise. Council of States member Salzmann stressed that he had no problem with Swiss actions within the framework of NATO's "Partnership for Peace", but that all further steps had to be carefully considered, because: "You only have to destroy neutrality once and then it's gone". He noted that he felt that now, during the Ukraine war, was the wrong moment to break open the question of neutrality. First of all, we have to take a step back, then we can make a good assessment of the situation and talk about it. But before that, Switzerland must do its homework and establish the defence capability of the armed forces. Then we could discuss whether we would be able to participate in joint exercises with our own resources.

Hans-Peter Kellerhals agreed that it was important to take a pragmatic approach in this context. He had been to Germany and Austria several times on bilateral exercises and training projects that contribute to technical interoperability and mutual understanding. Even if participation in NATO exercises is not an issue for Switzerland at the moment, one should nevertheless exercise abroad with individual partners for the benefit of one's own troops. In Switzerland, for example, there are not enough large training areas to train certain tasks from the defence spectrum in a reasonable manner.

The moderator then turned the tables and asked General (ret.) Vollmer and Prof. Dr. Mey about their security policy expectations of Switzerland. Prof. Dr. Mey again took up the phrase that Switzerland is surrounded by friends. Switzerland was already cooperating with these friends in many other areas, so it was necessary to seek cooperation as a whole. He was convinced that the more Switzerland was involved, the more it would benefit, even if this involvement did not apply to all areas: "No one expects Switzerland to have mechanical large-scale associations, but in general it would be good for Switzerland to be involved," he said. General Vollmer (ret.) noted that a pragmatic exchange of knowledge was already taking place, e.g. in training and the exchange of officers as well as in NATO staSSF. However, there are open questions, e.g. with regard to transit. In the area of integrated defence, Switzerland could not be left out of the equation, nor could it be left out of the equation with regard to cyber defence.

Keyword “Resilience”

At the end of the discussion, Fredy Müller addressed the panelists on the issue of resilience: "How can you explain to the population that new times are now dawning?", he asked. Hans-Peter Kellerhals remarked that, in his opinion, this was not so badly done in Switzerland because the state had not been prepared to compensate the citizen for every loss of prosperity so far either. It is necessary to point out to the citizen that losses of prosperity are part of life. This is a difficult task, he admitted, but it will probably be a task of politics and the media. Werner Salzmann, member of the Council of States, demanded that we concentrate on the really important things: security policy, independence in the energy sector, food security, the supply of medicines and the compulsory stockpiling of fuel, seeds, etc. He said that this independence should be maintained for a certain period of time. Maintaining this independence for a certain period of time costs a lot of money, he said. He therefore demanded that citizens be taught that investments are necessary now if they do not want to slide into a crisis that will really hit them.

Prof. Dr. Holger Mey noted that there is no magic formula for resilience, but it is crucial. He emphasised that it is important to act on the basis of insight and knowledge and not always react to events, as was the case with Corona, for example. General (ret.) Jörg Vollmer was optimistic about the resilience of the population, but stressed that it really had to be rebuilt. It is important to rebuild this resilience as a country and to reduce dependencies on foreign countries. He was convinced that if things were openly discussed and explained, people would follow suit.

Claude-France Arnould concluded by saying that the young generation is confronted with threats from many disasters. They need physical and moral armament, but also the autonomy mentioned above, which will be expensive and not easy to achieve. So the whole system has to adapt. However, she stressed that the young generation has the resilience to do so: "They are ready to fight for a better world and are aware of the challenges the world is facing and are willing to tackle them. But we also need to talk to the younger generation, because they are the future soldiers and drivers of the economy and your transition. With these closing words, Fredy Müller concluded the discussion and invited the audience to join him for an aperitif.



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