
Interview: Lt. Gen. Jörg Zumstein

The danger of the 'Switzerland without an Army' initiative

Michael Liebig and Laurent Murawiec conducted this interview on Oct. 18 in Münsingen, Switzerland, with Lieutenant General (Korpskommandant) Dr. Jörg Zumstein, formerly Chief of General Staff of the Swiss Army, now retired. Zumstein emphasized that the views expressed in the interview as his personal views, as a private individual, and that he bears the sole responsibility for them.

EIR: It appears to us that the "Switzerland without an Army" initiative is directed against the fundamental tradition of the Swiss military system, against the tradition that defense of Switzerland's national sovereignty is guaranteed by the people themselves.

Zumstein: The Swiss Confederation developed out of an alliance of three small political units. It was a purely defensive alliance, with the primary goal not to tolerate foreign law in the valleys of Switzerland. If you want to succeed in that, then you need military power and you must work together. Therefore, the Confederation arose as a defensive alliance, as a union for mutual military assistance. Therefore, an initiative, "Switzerland without an Army," is now encroaching upon the essential content of our self-understanding as a confederation.

Further, this initiative is not constitutionally tenable: The purpose of the Confederation is defense of the independence of the fatherland externally—ensuring peace and order internally and guaranteeing the well-being of the citizens. The well-being of the citizens—today that is viewed more socially and economically. But behind that, of course, self-determination and the guarantee of freedom are also found.

The initiative is likewise contrary to international law because we are obligated to neutrality. We must ensure this neutrality with weapons. That has been an international obli-

gation since the Peace of Paris in 1815. And if the Army is dissolved here, then the Swiss will no longer be capable of discharging their international obligation.

Thus I believe that this initiative strikes at the heart of the Confederation. And for that reason we must say to this attack, "They beat the sack, but mean the donkey." They want to abolish the Army, and thereby are jeopardizing the state.

EIR: Where does this initiative come from, who is behind it?

Zumstein: This initiative doubtless has a whole tangle of roots. You will understand where it comes from if I tell you that the target is the "sacred cow"—the Swiss military—as Max Frisch and other writers have put it. In this country, defensive proposals have actually very seldom encountered any resistance. If, for example, you consider the armament policy of the Confederation, then essentially things always or almost always go very well for the major armament companies. I can only recall a very few proposals to which Parliament said no. Often, the parliamentary commission introduces small corrections or requests. But, essentially, the parliamentary military commissions—and, with them, the upper and lower houses of Parliament—have recognized that what is proposed is necessary. In other areas—in economic or social policy—this is not so clear-cut; there are frequently reductions or revisions in proposals. This situation has long been a thorn in the side of certain leftist politicians. Here is the central issue of the "Switzerland without an Army" initiative. They would like to see this "sacred cow" slaughtered, and hence this crusade, this religious campaign against the military. Naturally, there are among the initiators of "Switzerland without an Army" some of the dregs of the "'68ers," who wanted to change the state and society using the motto, "Macht aus dem

Staat Gurkensalat" ("Turn the state into pickled salad"). In 1968, there was no revolution among us—as elsewhere—but the '68 generation is today settled into official positions and pretends to be more or less middle-class.

EIR: Do you have indications that the initiative is not only growing on the national soil, but that there are also foreign connections with respect to ideology, organization, and finances?

Zumstein: Yes, there are. Perhaps the Swiss journalist and filmmaker Brodmann, who has sold his films to West German television. He is making propaganda for a "Switzerland without an Army." Mr. Brodmann is active internationally; he has very good connections in the Federal Republic of Germany. Then, in recent days, it has been noticed in the newspapers here that the German "Greens" are interested in this initiative. That could quickly become counterproductive, however. The Swiss like nothing less than foreign interference. As soon as foreign interference becomes visible, the Swiss's archetypical way of behavior comes into sight. Then we are again in the time of the Battle of Morgarten, then we go at foreigners' throats. Swiss television also had the tastelessness to present a panel discussion with foreign journalists active in Switzerland. The concern there was not primarily the abolition of the Swiss Army, but rather a commemoration of the Swiss mobilization in September 1939. A large number of Swiss were upset that German and Austrians had the presumption to make a judgment on that.

EIR: Are there concrete indications that the Soviets or Communists are taking part in the Switzerland without an Army initiative?

Zumstein: I believe that the leading personalities of the Society for a Switzerland without an Army are well educated, psychologically and sociologically experienced people. I do not think them capable of allowing themselves to be helped openly and visibly. Such things do not happen in such a crude manner. I wouldn't want to exclude entirely a certain indirect assistance. But I have the impression that it is also dangerous for Moscow to do things abroad that wouldn't be desirable at home.

EIR: What is your evaluation of the external threat to Switzerland's security?

Zumstein: We proceed on the assumption that the most dangerous enemy is a totalitarian enemy. We have even gotten to the point where we say that a pluralistic democracy of the Western style today no longer has the strength for a decisive military attack. In my view, today that applies not only to the Federal Republic [of Germany], but also France. These states, considered from the political point of view, no longer have the strength for large-scale offensives. The totalitarian system is the most dangerous because it can carry on subversive, that is, covert war. Democracy cannot carry on covert

war. Covert war is a feature of totalitarian power, where the human being functions a mere object of the state. The "enemy image" must also be seen in an abstract philosophical way. We take the mentality of a state and proceed from that to define how the war will be constituted that can be carried on with such a mentality and on the basis of identifiable material preparations. Thus we arrive at covert war. Today, it is in the foreground. Our Army has fundamentally prepared itself for that.

EIR: For the first time in the 40-year postwar history, the postwar structures are fluid, that is, we see a convulsive process in the Soviet Empire that we, however, wouldn't like to characterize as "reform," but rather a violent reorganization of every level of society. But this reorganization, with its fundamental problems, has created a situation that in many parts of Soviet Union is already taking on forms genuinely similar to civil war. And the questions to you would be, a) how do you evaluate this dynamic, and b) what conclusions in your opinion can be drawn from that concerning the security interests of the Swiss?

Zumstein: I agree that a development is under way in the Soviet Union that is supposedly uncontrollable in certain regions or over wide areas. The interesting thing is that, fundamentally, Gorbachov has developed a method that is very much modeled on what we experienced in 1968. In 1968, the attempt was made to gain leverage with the masses using new psychological methods. In this respect, Gorbachov, and supposedly also his wife, has received an appropriate training. He has changed the fundamental situation with *glasnost*. Right now, since the broad mass of the people is receiving a voice, letters to the editor, interventions, demonstrations, and strikes are possible, a new physics exists in the society.

The tragic thing, now speaking from the point of view of the Soviet Union, is that the concepts as well as the structures for the now-existing situation are lacking. And so, for that reason, they can't move ahead. The market-economy concepts do not exist, and they are not prepared to consistently do anything more here. They are stuck. Or the leadership structures don't permit any change. In the Soviet Union for generations, people have been taught to lie. Everyone lies to everyone else. Statistics in the Soviet Union are a gigantic lie. The shoe factory claims that its waste is production. The next one who receives this statistic knows perfectly well that it is not true, but continues the lie. And the lie continues on up to the central administration. It is difficult to build something on this basis, which touches on a question of education. You cannot change this mentality overnight. They cannot develop their self-initiative if each is afraid of opening himself to criticism.

Russia strikes me as a field for which the farmer has no seed and doesn't know what season it is. Suddenly, connections and relations and sociological networks come into play

that are stronger than the Communism that has been preached and practiced. National feeling, language, the icons, the priests, the familiar connections, and so forth come again and cannot be held back.

EIR: If that is the general direction in which the Soviet Empire is going, then the question is, will this instability in a broad sense move into a disintegration process similar to a civil war, or could the Soviet leadership set off a military "flight forward"?

Zumstein: There is no question to me that Communism is an intellectual system whose only effective side today is still control of the masses. That is the only aspect that still functions to some degree. As such, Communism is an export article. The German Democratic Republic, for example, exports so-called security experts and police specialists for the suppression of the masses. If this communistic mass control collapses, then developments and events are conceivable that could lead to a threat to European security. I would like to emphasize that before *glasnost* and *perestroika*, for example, under Brezhnev's leadership, the Soviet Union behaved like the world's "troublemaker number one," but, simultaneously, could be also a sort of control authority in the international nexus because it had the power to stop interventions and developments that weren't convenient to it. The Soviet Union, with increasing internal pluralization and deregulation, is losing this ability to control development. Logically, that will lead to instability increasing in the world.

EIR: There's an interesting schizophrenia in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the civilian sector that has demonstrably fallen into a catastrophic situation, as Gorbachov himself put it. There aren't supply bottlenecks any more; rather, we stand on the brink of famine. On the other hand, there is the military-industrial complex. There, things seem to be continuing well or unaffected. How do you view this schizophrenia?

Zumstein: The military-industrial complex works there as long as work can be done there without controls through prices and costs. The civilian economy, in the meantime, has had to acknowledge that it cannot produce in a cost-effective way. They had to acknowledge mismanagement. As I see it, that is not really schizophrenia but rather a coexistence of two completely different worlds. The military-technological complex, totally freed from economic considerations, still functions well. Basically, the previous disarmament efforts have only led to making the military-industrial complex more modern, more efficient.

EIR: The question is, do you agree with the evaluation that Gorbachov has succeeded in effectively selling the public that a modernization and restructuring of the Soviet military forces, which is considered by the Soviet military leadership as necessary, is a policy of disarmament and arms control?

That is, antiquated matériel, unqualified personnel are thrown out with great publicity, while that which remains is qualitatively improved in every respect.

Zumstein: Wouldn't that be the purest Machiavelli? I see it that way, de facto. Whether that was the intention from the beginning, I still have my doubts. But it was exploited for that. And in exploiting the situations that offered themselves, Gorbachov's mastery and that of his team have been demonstrated again and again. And in this, I would like to say, he is thoroughly in line with the '68ers, who taught us that everything has two sides and that it can be turned arbitrarily. That is the way of thinking that leads to letting one's own weakness become a strength.

I believe that, presently, there is still no genuine disarmament in the sense of a reduction of power visible in the crucial parts of the Soviet military apparatus.

EIR: The question is, given this fundamental evaluation, how do you view the question of the presence of U.S. forces in Europe for maintenance of a balance and a deterrent effect between East and West?

Zumstein: This question touches on the development of a European domestic market 1992. It is my personal conviction that the next step, after the realization of freedom of movement of individuals, goods, and services, will be a common foreign policy of this new Europe. And foreign policy means security policy. And the day will come when the United States will say, you are strong enough, since you are economic competitors of America, to pay for your own defense and security. Then America can be gradually disengaged from Europe.

Thus to the question of European security: I believe that it is currently right and necessary that American troops are in Europe—at least, as long as the nuclear deterrence guarantee of the United States for Western Europe remains in effect. In that connection, it should be borne in mind that the global system of nuclear deterrence together with its threats of escalation is naturally closely connected with the presence of U.S. troops in Western Europe. So when there are no more troops here, the deterrence will also be generally questionable.

EIR: You mentioned your opinion of the paramount importance of covert war. If you could elaborate on that.

Zumstein: My conception is this: First, a nuclear war is no longer feasible. With that, I am not saying anything against the necessity of nuclear deterrence. Second, even a major war carried on with conventional weapons is no longer feasible because escalation to the nuclear is always threatened.

Now, as before, it is a matter of being effective in power politics, in exerting power. And here covert war presents itself. Covert war is the possibility that distinguishes every totalitarian regime. And because this possibility exists with potential totalitarian aggressors, the defender, organized dif-

ferently politically, must pay attention to these things. Otherwise, he is liable to blackmail. And his classical military methods no longer come into play. For that reason, threshold thinking today stands in the foreground. You have to be able to assert your political power claims within a certain risk threshold. The military method is covert war. And if you go one step higher, then it is limited conventional war. And still another step, conventional war carried out with chemical weapons. Those leave behind hardly a trace. One hardly knows it happened, and only sees the victims. And only then does nuclear war become improbable and a last resort, but still not entirely to be excluded.

EIR: Recently, there has been much talk about tanks that are already 20 or 30 years old in the disarmament diplomacy and propaganda that is done by Gorbachov with such cleverness. But there is little mention of elite units that are still being built up in a grand style—parachute forces and special service groups, *spetsnaz*.

Zumstein: We have taken measures. Our army in recent years has been modernized in this sense and made capable of flexible deployment. We have already stationed units in critical areas that can be activated very quickly. Their matériel is present in place, and all necessary preparations have been made. That applies, for example, to our airports. Thus we don't have to go looking for troops. They are there, and can always be ready for deployment in a short time. And then there is the "sleeping" army, distributed throughout the country, which can be activated within hours. With that, effective action can be taken against *spetsnaz* and parachute troops landed behind the lines. So we are also in the position to block paratroops, in that we, for example, can detonate all the exits from a landing area, and thus they will be stuck.

We believe, therefore, that we are very well prepared in this regard—precisely because we recognize this danger. We have also considerably tightened up guard patrols. For some years, even in peacetime, we have equipped the guards with battle ammunition. The unit is trained in that way. We could anytime—of course, with reduced units but they are there, during the entire year—attack wherever a danger emerges. We thus believe that we are in this regard very well prepared. That has happened because we regard the danger of these *spetsnaz* units as considerable.

EIR: Again, a question to you as a military expert with an objective judgment: You have described how the threat from enemy paratroops and *spetsnaz* has been tackled in Switzerland. How do you view this situation for NATO in Central Europe? Does that strike you as good?

Zumstein: That is a very thorny question. Personally, I think that people in NATO are being laid low by a danger. It is this constantly pursued planning and preparations for a war that can be really conceived only theoretically. That leads to ways of behaving and regulations that reflect a sort

of bureaucratic reality. I see a certain danger of immobility, of lack of imagination, of inflexibility. But I have to guard against—and I say that emphatically—making any sort of judgment.

The fight against *spetsnaz* demands a very strong mental activity, individual ways of acting, and a great readiness to take the initiative. You can't guard against *spetsnaz* if you take out a military textbook and say, this is how you have to do it. That is different every day and in every case. It is necessary that one's own units are steeped in almost the same training.

EIR: Do you have such units here?

Zumstein: We have the beginnings of such. We have trained special infantry units in individual divisions—people that we train for absolute independence in battle, for aggressiveness, initiative, for an outstanding combativeness, and for decidedly good fire power. In this sense we have that.

EIR: A revolutionary military-technological development is emerging, in the East and the West. For example, the SDI complex, beam weapons, directed energy weapons. What significance do you see in that sort of development? And let me add especially the subject of radio frequency weapons, that is, innovative weapons employed, not primarily strategically, but tactically, against electronics as well as biological cells, based on controlled electromagnetic radiation.

Zumstein: These military measures stem partly from a series of intellectual developments in which deployment of system A induces system B and then a further system C, and thus a definite technical escalation is effected. It is the old joke of the navy minister who was just saying goodbye to the sales representative of a new type of steel, and says incidentally, as he stands in the door, "Mr. Minister, I also have a new shell that is stronger than that armor." This is a sort of thinking that is not always successful because it is based on a manner of action that is possibly not at all relevant in war. I have never allowed myself to be much influenced by such extreme technological things. But one must also look on the other side, that wherever physics is not respected, then military success is not ensured. Physics has got to be right. But we have to guard against leaving the conduct of war to engineers.

I have been much concerned with a new infantry weapon. There are perhaps 800,000 guns of the most modern construction that we now manufacture and that we then have in our houses along with ammunition. I believe that these weapons, regardless of the technological possibilities that are in store for us, would have great importance in case of war. Because behind that stands a man. And if you shoot the men who stand behind the great technology just mentioned, then the great technology isn't worth anything anymore. And for that reason we attempt here in my country to achieve a sort of combined effect. What does combined effect mean?

We attempt to combine old, primitive weapons, such as a gun, with modern, high-capability weapons. We have in service today the most modern tanks in the world. We attempt to optimally exploit terrain. Terrain is a given. Whether you move with laser weapons or other beam weapons or chemical weapons, you won't change the terrain so quickly. We go further. We enhance the terrain so that the terrain can almost independently carry on the war. Today, we have 2,000 mined structures [e.g. bridges, roads, and so forth—ed.] in Switzerland, and they are already equipped with explosives. You travel every day over mines without knowing it. They can be detonated very quickly. The destruction caused by the detonation is phenomenal. You can't conjure that away, it's there. So we are seeking a combined effect in all areas. For us, it's a matter of dissuasion, and thus of a deterrent effect. We want to say to a potential enemy, you will lose much time and will have to accept huge losses. This dissuasion we seek to carry out following the principle of the haystack. I once watched as some school boys were jumping in a farmer's hay. They were having fun, and the farmer was irritated. Imagine putting splinters of glass in this haystack. No one can take that. We are using this glass splinters theory. Switzerland cannot participate in this mutual buildup of technology and superweapons, only in a very limited way.

EIR: We were not thinking so much of SDI-type weapon systems. If Ogarkov repeatedly speaks of new generations of conventional or post-nuclear weapons that are already or soon will be available, that in their effect come close to the weapons of mass destruction but without collateral damages, then that is also a critical question for Switzerland.

Zumstein: We keep track of these things. That's obvious. Every self-respecting defense system must keep up with these developments. Personally, I would simply like to somewhat relativize the threat from such weapons. At the beginning, I said that I hardly believe anymore in a completely major war. Because today, there are other means and methods of struggle to push through power goals. I don't believe that a military-technological breakthrough will come that will make a defense, such as we have, fully illusory. And there we are, back at the beginning of our conversation. The Army is a component of the people; it is the people at arms in a definite threatening situation, and you cannot simply wipe out a people. That doesn't work.

Coming back briefly to the Soviet Union, the military-industrial-technological complex of the Soviet Union doubtless still functions very well. But it may now also have its problems. But along with this military-industrial-technological complex, we mustn't overlook that there must also be armed forces. Troops who employ the devices. And here it seems to me that *glasnost* has already shown its effect. We hear of discipline problems in Soviet units. We hear of drug and alcohol addiction, of waste of matériel. It is thought-provoking to hear that soldiers sell their weapons to buy

drugs. Those are things that are reality and that the Soviet system also must reckon with. It takes something, after Afghanistan, to say to Soviet soldiers, you must always be ready to die somewhere in the world for Communism. And I don't think that this motivation is so easy.

EIR: We hear of and see in the Soviet Union the development of a mass movement that is supported, not directly by the party, but by the KGB and the Army leadership. The best example is the Pamyat Society, which is spreading primitive Russian themes, hostility to foreigners, anti-Semitism, fanatical thoughts of Mother Russia. The Soviet Union is in an existential crisis; the Russian winter is coming. Many observers see analogies to 1904, 1905. Could a new aggressive, ideological motivation come into existence?

Zumstein: I certainly believe that "Little Mother Russia," the Russian universal feeling, as Schubarth defined it long before the war, is important—this being embedded in the enormity of the land and the continent, this spiritual landscape. I certainly believe that this is a force. But will this force be successfully activated? And, a second question, will it be possible to deploy this force again in an offensive sense? On that, I have some doubts. I believe that first we will experience internal struggles that reach all the way to conditions similar to fratricidal war. But perhaps in 50 years Russia could again be an intact nation.

EIR: If we may be allowed to ask one other question in conclusion: What do you wish from the United States for Switzerland and Europe?

Zumstein: I believe that America must keep track of the development in Europe both in regard to the coming Europe 1992, on the one hand, and the crisis in the Soviet Union on the other. And that the exchange as we have it today between Europe and the United States and this solidarity for the maintenance of peace must continue to be effective. We must under no circumstances separate the greatest democracy in the world from Europe. That we must not do. I believe that Europeans must not only receive but also give, and mutual understanding between Europe and the United States must be maintained.

Americans still belong to us. We have presently in or local schools a young lady from the United States who belongs to a family that emigrated out of the Simmental more than 100 years ago. She's even related to me. We have seen that a part of our essence is today in the United States. And that, conversely, many Americans have their roots here. Every year, Americans visit us whom I do not know personally. I take them to the old farmers' houses, and tell them, here was your great-great-grandfather, and here he kept his horses. That's a part of it. The Atlantic must not be a barrier but rather a connection.

Additionally, I believe that peace is feasible—but not on the basis of weakness.