

On the Switzerland–Israel military alliance

by Jacques Pilet,* Montreux VD



Jacques Pilet.
(Picture Wikipedia)

Urs Loher, Head of Defence, travelled to Israel on 13 and 14 July to further strengthen relations between the defence industries of both countries. In Europe, only Germany and Romania maintain similarly close cooperation with the Jewish state.

Swiss neutrality is being deliberately violated. Quietly

and discreetly. Even the SVP, which is so fond of invoking it, is keeping silent on the matter.

What makes the scandal even worse is the subject of the talks. For Switzerland, the primary concern is to sort out old contracts that have stalled. The famous border surveillance drones costing 300 million, which are unusable in winter and must be escorted during flight. Last May, the Financial Control Office had found the project management to be “unsatisfactory” and criticised overly ambitious targets as well as patchy planning and oversight. This sad story is far from over.

Less well known are the delivery delays and technical problems associated with another contract: In October 2019, *Armasuisse* awarded the Israeli company *Elbit Systems* a procurement contract worth 377 million Swiss francs for radio equipment, on-board intercom systems and headsets with microphones to equip around 1,800 military vehicles.

Elbit was preferred over the other bidder, the German company *Roschi Rohde & Schwarz AG*, which has a strong presence in Switzerland. Here, too, there has been a major setback. Deliveries are being delayed and the technology is

failing to keep pace. The *Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport's* (VBS) blindness towards Israel has been glaringly obvious for years. Our “experts” even went so far as to test the drones they had ordered in the Golan Heights, an occupied Syrian territory ... without knowing where they were.

A shameless bias in favour of Israel

Federal Councillor *Martin Pfister* has not the slightest intention of extricating himself from this mess. He is evidently prepared to continue military cooperation with Israel and, if necessary, even to intensify it. In doing so, he is betraying all our principles: neutrality and the ethics of international relations.

In February, 25 Swiss lawyers filed a complaint against *Ignazio Cassis* with the Office of the Prosecutor of the *International Criminal Court* for aiding and abetting the crimes committed by Israel in Gaza. They are calling for an investigation to be launched against the Federal Councillor, as they believe that Switzerland is violating the *Geneva Conventions* and disregarding international humanitarian law.

Should the names of Messrs Pfister and Loher not be added to this complaint? The supply of so-called Swiss dual-use material (for both civilian and military purposes) to Israel constitutes a breach of our current law.

Are we aware of the implications of these military ties with a state that occupies and tyrannises territories that do not belong to it, that is expanding its presence in Lebanon, that is intervening in Syria and gaining a foothold there, and that dreams only of escalating the war against Iran? Regarding the Middle East, the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* (FDFA) timidly calls for calm and negotiations, yet the DDPS openly shows its partisanship towards the main belligerent. Switzerland is blithely sacrificing its credibility. It imposes a host of sanctions against the Russian aggressor in Ukraine, yet at the same time does business with a state that is at war with several of its neighbours.

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Biased media and a blind public

In Parliament, the Left is protesting only half-heartedly. Its motion against the export of military goods was defeated. It was outvoted by the FDP, the Centre Party and the SVP, with the latter failing even to recognise its own contradictions. As for the German-speaking Swiss public, which is influenced by the mainstream media – foremost among them the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” – it turns a blind eye to the machinations of a criminal state, thereby succumbing to Germany’s soft power, which unconditionally supports Israel.

Even the editor-in-chief of the *Weltwoche*, who is otherwise highly critical of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and the prevailing Russophobia, does not hold back on the issue of Israel – quite the contrary. Last May, he even went so far as to defend the concept of “Greater Israel”: “Not

a bad idea”, as he put it, because it would mean ... “more peace, more prosperity and more democracy in the Middle East”.

The people of French-speaking Switzerland, on the other hand, many of whom speak out against Israel’s conduct of the war and are barely informed about our military-commercial tangle, simply let these Bernese issues pass them by. Not a single line, not a single word in the media about Urs Loher’s trip and his shady contracts.

When you think about it, the most astonishing thing is that the Swiss seem indifferent to these machinations, even though their fundamental political principles are being thrown out the window.

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