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A strategy that builds bunkers instead of bridges

Switzerland's new security policy strategy aims to make a grand gesture – whilst overlooking the lived realities of half the world's population

I have worked in war zones and experienced checkpoints, armed groups, sirens, gunfire and explosions. My moments of greatest insecurity, however, had little to do with the actual warfare, but rather with the ever-present potential for violence inherent in our patriarchal system. As a woman alone on the street, late at night, in a poorly lit underpass – there, too, the fear is physical, the need for safety real.

What does security mean to you? Is it when a strong army makes you feel protected? When you can walk home alone at night without fear? When you don't have to worry about losing your job? When you can stand in the queue at the immigration office without fear?

Whether you feel safe depends on who you are, where you live – the gender stated on your ID and the colour of your skin. Anyone who ignores this reality ends up writing security strategies that fail to take into account the lived experiences of half the population. It is precisely this lack of insight that is evident in the draft of the federal government's new security policy strategy, for which the consultation period ends 31 March 2026.

Building resilience, boosting protection and defence capabilities, and enhancing defensive capacity: these are the three key priorities with which the State Secretariat for Security Policy will steer Switzerland into an uncertain future. Yes, the global situation is serious. Russia's attack on Ukraine has shaken the European security architecture to its core. But a strategy that responds to this solely with more weapons and military might fails to grasp the problem – it only exacerbates it.

"How do we defend ourselves against war?" is not the crucial question. The question that security policy should answer is: "How can we prevent a war?" Prevention, dialogue, early warning, peacebuilding – these instruments are mentioned only in passing, if at all, in the strategy. Switzerland, which sees itself

internationally as a bridge-builder and mediator, is not building bridges in its own strategic document. It is building bunkers.

There is another fundamental flaw: women are absent. The strategy speaks of “the population”, “society” and “stakeholders” – without explicitly mentioning women. If we are honest, we know that this means, for the most part, men. Men in uniform. Men at the negotiating table. Men who decide what security means. This is remarkable for Switzerland, a country that publicly committed itself to the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda in the UN Security Council and has been implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 through national action plans since 2007.

The research is clear: peace agreements are more sustainable when women are actively involved. Social resilience – a concept that the strategy explicitly emphasises – is not built on military capabilities, but on social cohesion, trust and inclusive institutions. A gender-sensitive security policy is not only fairer, it is also more effective.

The third structural shortcoming: civil society was not involved in the drafting of the strategy. Organisations such as PeaceWomen Across the Globe and Frieda, which have years of expertise in peace and security, were not at the table when the parameters were set. This is no coincidence. It is a symptom of a culture of security that measures expertise by rank.

I would like to see the militarised logic underpinning this strategy being challenged and complemented by prevention, dialogue and peacebuilding as equally valid approaches, taking gender-sensitive perspectives into account. A security policy that aims to be relevant to everyone living in Switzerland must begin with a simple question: "What does security mean to you?" For the woman waiting for the bus at night. For the young person who doesn't know whether their family will be allowed to stay in Switzerland. For the elderly man who fears loneliness – not the invasion of an army.

Security policy needs to ask different questions. And it needs more voices.

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March 2026