

As World Economic Forum in Davos opens, a major shift in Swiss security policy underway

Marianne Arens
19 January 2026

At lunchtime on Friday, January 9, bells rang throughout Switzerland in remembrance of the victims of the Crans-Montana inferno. Flags were lowered to half-staff, and the entire country commemorated the 40 people killed and more than 110 injured, some of them seriously, who fell victim on New Year's Eve to the horrific "flashover" fire in the Le Constellation bar.

Two weeks later, at the opening of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, the sombre tones surrounding Crans-Montana have faded. Swiss Federal President Guy Parmelin (Swiss People's Party, SVP), together with four other members of the Federal Council (Swiss government), turned their attention in Davos to the business of world politics.

Those expected in Davos include US President Donald Trump with four cabinet members and his son-in-law, as well as Israeli President Isaac Herzog, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and hundreds of heads of government, including Friedrich Merz from Germany, Emmanuel Macron from France, Giorgia Meloni from Italy, as well as Javier Milei from Argentina and Volodymyr Zelensky from Ukraine. Not invited is Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia.

For the annual WEF meeting, which runs January 19 to 23, the Graubünden municipality of Davos is transformed into a high-security zone. The entire Swiss police force is mobilised and reinforced by 5,000 soldiers to protect the esteemed WEF guests and suppress protests in Davos, Zurich, Bern and elsewhere. The government has allocated 9 million Swiss francs (\$11.2 million) for WEF security alone. "We are living in stormy times," Walter Schlegel, the commander of the Graubünden cantonal police and WEF security chief, told the press. This year, the police are using "the most modern systems for drone detection and defence," he said.

In fact, Switzerland is currently implementing a major shift in defence and security policy. Alongside a new "Security Policy Strategy 2026," the government has adopted a series of far-reaching decisions. The population, which ultimately bears the costs, is also to be prepared and conditioned for war. Here are just some of the planned or already decided measures:

- An increase in military spending to at least 1 percent of GDP, around 8 billion Swiss francs (US\$7.5 billion), equivalent to roughly 10 percent of the federal budget: In 2024 this figure was around 5 billion francs (\$4.6 billion) or 0.72 percent of GDP; in 2025 it was already raised to around 7 billion francs. These figures do not include the true total costs of defence, which are already estimated at almost 9 billion francs, considering the specific features of the Swiss militia system.

- Relaxation of the War Materiel Act: Swiss ammunition and other war materiel are to be exported more easily in future. The previously mandatory declaration by recipient countries that Swiss arms would not be passed on to third countries is to be abolished. Exports to 25 countries, including the US and all EU states, will be permitted even if those countries are involved in armed conflicts. This relaxation could lead to war materiel delivered, for example, to Germany or the US being passed

on to Israel or Saudi Arabia (Ukraine is still excluded), or used in attacks on Iran, Venezuela or Russia.

- The new "Security Policy Strategy 2026" contains no fewer than 45 individual measures across a wide range of areas of internal and external security and warfare, including military aggression. It envisages closer "security and defence partnerships" with the EU, as well as with American and European NATO partners, with whom joint military exercises already take place. Points 42 to 44 state, among other things, that an "international exchange of air situation data" is to take place, and that the Swiss army is to participate in urban warfare exercises. "Switzerland will increasingly participate in multinational exercises and conduct joint training with partners abroad, particularly to train combat in built-up areas and the combined arms battle." Point 18 states: "Switzerland implements all sanctions of the UN Security Council and, whenever appropriate, aligns itself with the sanctions of its most important trade and value partners."

- The new strategy envisages the close involvement of civil society, the federal government, cantons and municipalities, as well as big business, "science" (universities) and the entire population. The latter is to be conditioned for a war situation. Military service is to move more strongly into the centre of society; domestic military deployments, for example against drones, are to be normalised; and civilian service is to be merged with civil defence and disaster protection. The government also wants to exert influence and censorship in schools and universities. It aims to support "security-policy education programmes and the handling of security-policy challenges" and "sensitisation measures." The "federal government will review existing curricula for content and initiatives" (Points 1–4).

- Switzerland's much-vaunted "neutrality" is increasingly being eroded. The strategy states: "An increasing number of NATO exercises are defence exercises, so-called Article 5 exercises. Participation in such exercises is compatible with neutrality, since Switzerland does not simulate alliance membership, but exercises its real role as a partner that depending on the scenario, is directly or indirectly challenged in defence-policy terms." And in Point 16, on so-called "military peace support": "Through deployments for military peace support, Switzerland contributes to international stability and security. The army gains operational experience in the process."

- Under the "security policy strategy," domestic repression is being intensified and the intelligence services expanded. Measures include the "consistent application of entry bans and expulsions, the confiscation of propaganda material and the blocking of websites with radical content." The Intelligence Service Act is to be "revised" and the "prevention of radicalism and extremism" strengthened. This includes the expansion of a national police query platform (POLAP).

- There appear to be no limits on external military aggression. According to Point 37, the army is to provide "a far-reaching offensive component to deter an adversary from attacking, or to keep it at a distance

and to be able to engage its key systems beyond national borders. Capability development of the air force, ground troops, special forces and cyber domain will also enable offensive actions within the framework of defence ...”

- This dovetails with the particularly controversial Air2030 project, which envisages the purchase of 36 F-35A fighter jets from the US. A referendum in 2020 approved this by a very narrow margin (50.1 percent), but since then the US arms manufacturer Lockheed has massively increased the price of these aircraft. Nevertheless, the government wants to stick with the purchase.

This is only a selection of the planned measures, which taken together speak in very clear language. In particular, the purchase of three dozen F-35A fighter jets, a stealth bomber and explicitly offensive aircraft, raises serious questions. “If Switzerland wants the capability to attack Russia and drop bombs on Russia or perhaps Belarus, then it should buy it,” military journalist Francis Tusa told the Republik.ch website.

The dangers inherent in this political course are already evident in the “security policy strategy” itself, which states: “Today, the risk of nuclear escalation is as acute as it has been for decades. The use of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction would have catastrophic consequences for the world.” Yet no one asks the obvious question of what happens once the first nuclear bomb is airborne over Europe. In comparison, a hellish scenario like Crans-Montana is only a tiny foretaste.

This shift is justified by the absurd claim that Russia and China pose a military threat to Switzerland. “The absolute game-changer was Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,” explains Andrea Gmür, president of the Security Policy Committee and a member of the Council of States (The Centre, formerly CVP). She naturally omits the fact that NATO deliberately provoked the reactionary invasion through its anti-Russian encirclement policy in order to advance its own war and rearmament offensive.

In reality, the shift in Swiss security policy is part of a continental and global arms buildup that massively intensifies existing crises. Every increase in military spending accelerates cuts in the social sphere, where funds are lacking for healthcare, education, housing, public services, care for the population, and climate and disaster protection. This makes society more vulnerable to catastrophes such as Crans-Montana or natural disasters like the devastating landslide in Valais that buried the entire community of Blatten.

These defence policy measures do not serve to defend the population, but to secure profits on global markets, whether through the arms industry or Swiss big business and banks. How strongly the interests of the banks dominate the Swiss government was recently demonstrated by the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS, which the government in Bern financially underwrote, thereby tying the fate of the entire country to that of its largest bank.

How strongly the arms industry is exerting pressure on political decision-makers was particularly evident in the debate over relaxing the War Materiel Act. “We have to be able to supply our friends in Europe,” demanded SVP National Councillor Michael Götte, for example, during the television debate on the “Arena” talk show. Otherwise, “we lose our arms policy entirely, and if we do not have our own arms policy, that is a security risk par excellence and a weakening of the Swiss economy.” Several arms manufacturers complain that their sales have stagnated, while European arms producers are reporting one sales record after another.

“Who still buys weapons from us?” asked Thomas Lattmann, sales director of the armoured vehicle manufacturer Mowag in Thurgau, which belongs to US arms corporation General Dynamics. “Some states tell us bluntly: No Chinese, no Swiss. We are now being put on the same level.”

All the establishment Swiss parties support the security-policy shift, even if there are differences on individual issues. Since Trump’s

assumption of office, the Social Democrats and the Greens, for example, have tended to favour withdrawing from the Lockheed contract. They criticise Switzerland’s growing dependence on the US and instead propose the Swedish Gripen model or an Italian fighter jet. However, there was already a referendum on the Gripen in 2014, in which an unusually large number of people participated to reject the purchase of a fighter jet.

With its “Security Policy Strategy 2026,” Switzerland is attempting to bind itself more closely to NATO at precisely the moment when the alliance threatens to break apart. Just one day after the Crans-Montana catastrophe came news of the US attack on Venezuela. Since then, the Trump administration has massively threatened Iran and announced plans for the annexation of Greenland. European governments, and Germany in particular, which is rearming on a scale not seen since World War II, have responded with undisguised threats. Imperialism is heading toward a third world war, and the US government, Switzerland’s declared “value partner,” has explicitly stated that only the law of the strongest now applies.

That the Swiss government and all the establishment parties, including the Social Democrats in government, the opposition Greens and the trade unions, support this military turning point and regard it as “without alternative” is not an expression of strength, but on the contrary their fear of a resurgence of the class struggle, to which an absurd social polarisation between rich and poor is giving new momentum. This is already made clear by the new domestic measures aimed at repression, surveillance and control of the working class.

In this respect, Switzerland differs little from the US and other countries that are in the process of discarding democratic norms. The Trump administration has explicitly endorsed the killing of US citizen René Nicole Good by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. The *World Socialist Web Site* commented that such measures mean that “In the actions of the Trump regime, the American oligarchy is crossing a Rubicon, from which there is no turning back. The issue confronting millions of workers and young people is the most fundamental: socialism or barbarism.” This assessment now also applies equally to Switzerland.

To escape barbarism, it is necessary to mobilise the Swiss working class as part of the international class struggle against war and capitalism. This requires the building of independent rank-and-file action committees in all workplaces and industries, and the construction of a Swiss section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact