



Building a Stay-Behind Resistance Organization

The Case of Cold War Switzerland Against the Soviet Union

By Kevin D. Stringer

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Russia's revanchism toward its neighbors and its strong desire to extend power into traditional spheres of influence have major security implications for a number of post-Soviet states. This policy is magnified by Vladimir Putin's "Russian World" ideology, which implies that any former Soviet republic with either an ethnic Russian population or an unresolved territorial or security dispute with Russia faces a potential national security threat ranging from internal subversion to outright territorial invasion by Russian forces. The Russian occupation of Crimea in March 2014 and the Kremlin's intervention in eastern Ukraine between February and September 2014 demonstrate this risk to bordering states and overall European stability.¹ In particular, Russian use of hybrid warfare amplifies the threat.

Hybrid warfare is an effective mix of military and nonmilitary activities with



In spirit of Swiss direct democracy, the 2008 official photograph of Swiss Federal Council depicted them as everymen (Courtesy Swiss Federal Chancellery)

conventional and irregular components ranging from diplomatic and legal campaigns to clandestine transfers of armed personnel and weapons. These activities fall short of actual armed conflict and can destabilize and subvert a target nation's stability and sovereignty but not trigger North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or bilateral treaty commitments.² To mitigate this risk, a targeted state's society must be ready to conduct resistance should all or parts of its territory be occupied or subverted by a foreign invader or its proxies. This requirement implies looking back to the Cold War concept of "Total Defense" for some applicable models to evaluate and implement. The Cold War-era case of Switzerland, a small, neutral state that prepared for resistance against the Soviet Union, provides valuable inputs to the creation of stay-behind resistance organizations in the modern context and informs U.S. interagency and special

operations forces (SOF) considerations in supporting such efforts.

A Review of Total Defense

The goal of the Cold War Total Defense model was whole-of-society involvement in defense matters. The concept was to have the entire country involved in national security—not only the military, but also the private sector, local government, and nongovernmental organizations. During the Cold War, small states prepared a large array of tools such as total mobilization, guerrilla warfare, civil resistance networks, and clandestine organizations to achieve national security objectives and deter Warsaw Pact aggressors.³

Switzerland is an example of a state that practiced this doctrine during the Cold War. Its defense went far beyond the armed forces and included the economic and psychological mobilization of the population. The entire populace was

subject to call-up for both military and nonmilitary functions, and the national infrastructure and industrial production base were co-opted and tooled for possible defense usage. With extensive civil defense frameworks and wide civic integration into security plans, this democratic and neutral state achieved a high level of societal resilience during the Cold War period.⁴

Total Defense and Resistance

Swiss defense preparations during the Cold War are instructive for small countries at the strategic level for Total Defense and at the operational level for unconventional warfare and resistance missions. *Unconventional warfare* is defined as those activities "conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow an occupying power or government."⁵

These arrangements are also politically relevant, since as a neutral country

during the Cold War, Switzerland had to be self-reliant for defense and could not count upon allies or other states for support or intervention. This same situation could arise for neutral states such as Finland or Sweden today, or even Eastern European countries whose fellow alliance members might hesitate to intervene in an action that might be short of war or in the gray space of hybrid warfare.

At the strategic level, the Swiss viewed the military as only one element of national power to achieve their security objectives. In the early 1960s, the Swiss Federal Council postulated a shift from the concept of National Defense to Total Defense, which incorporated the diplomatic, informational, economic, and social elements of national power into a traditionally military domain.⁶ Swiss foreign policy oriented on the strategy of armed neutrality, while maintaining sufficient access to external markets for inbound and outbound trade. Social policy was designed to buttress the physical and psychological resilience of the nation.⁷ For example, to lower vulnerability to foreign propaganda, Switzerland maintained an objective national news service, promoted education among the populace, and engendered national pride in Swiss institutions.⁸ Economic policy was designed on the principle of autarky, with reserve food supplies and materials maintained at national, local, and individual levels. Civil defense became a cornerstone of population protection to ensure the survival of the nation in the event of nuclear, chemical, or biological warfare.⁹ In essence, the strategic objective was to make the society resilient to any form of outside aggression, physical or otherwise, through a holistic Total Defense methodology. This same objective is relevant today for those former Soviet states that find themselves targets of Russian hybrid operations and subversion.

A general principle guiding Swiss defense efforts was dissuasion, a form of psychological deterrence. This concept—when combined with powerful conventional forces, guerrilla resistance, and the self-destruction of Switzerland's industrial, communications, and transportation networks to deny their usage to

an enemy—would signal to an aggressor that the only gain in attacking Switzerland would be the occupation of a hostile area, denuded of economic or transportation value, with continued resistance by a determined and armed population.¹⁰ The objective of Total Defense was to make Switzerland an indigestible and costly to consume “hedgehog” to potential adversaries—in this case, the Soviet Union or its Warsaw Pact allies.

A critical component of Total Defense was the ability to conduct resistance operations in enemy-occupied Swiss territory. Despite its neutral status, Switzerland feared an invasion of the Red Army in the post-World War II period and conducted extensive research and analysis on resistance movements and irregular warfare. One popular misconception about Swiss preparations for resistance is that the Swiss military establishment followed the writings of Major Hans von Dach. In *Total Resistance*, his seven-volume series on unconventional warfare, von Dach propagated a concept of resistance conducted by the entire population, which he termed *partisan warfare*.¹¹ The Swiss General Staff rejected this approach amid concerns over the law of land warfare and the maintenance of governance over a population of partisans, and chose instead a conventional doctrine with an integrated resistance plan.¹² The Swiss military's other major concern was that an overemphasis on von Dach's partisan warfare would neglect other important components of Total Defense.¹³

The government's 1973 *Swiss Security Policy Report* explicitly stressed the need for resistance in occupied regions—hence, the national defense requirement for the classical stay-behind unconventional warfare mission and an organization to carry it out. Section 426 of the report stated, “The occupation of the country must not mean that all resistance has ended. Even in this case, an enemy shall meet not only with the population's antipathy, but also active resistance.”¹⁴ Section 717 of the same publication highlighted, “Guerrilla warfare and non-violent resistance in occupied areas are being prepared within the limits of international law, and will, if

necessary, be carried out.”¹⁵ This official position of the Swiss government to conduct resistance in enemy-occupied Swiss territory remained unchanged until the end of the Cold War.

Yet these resistance operations were to be well integrated with the operations of a robust, conventional force. Under the organizing concept of the so-called Swiss Army 61, the military consisted of three field army corps designed to protect the heartland, and one mountain army corps for the alpine regions. These 4 army corps were organized into 12 divisions—3 field, 3 mechanized, 3 mountain, and 3 border—supplemented by a mix of 14 border, fortress, and redoubt brigades.¹⁶ At its peak, Swiss Army 61, with its recruitment based upon a militia concept of universal conscription, encompassed 625,000 personnel.¹⁷ This number stands in relation to a 1962 population of 5.5 million.¹⁸ The main battle doctrine revolved around a defense-in-depth with static units to channel Soviet forces into destruction zones, and mobile units for counterattacks.¹⁹ An integral part of this plan was resistance in occupied Swiss territory, should regular defense fail. After the operative collapse of regular military units, the remnants of these formations would continue the fight in the occupied regions as guerrillas and partisans. In parallel, the civil population in these areas would practice nonviolent resistance within the parameters of international law. A preestablished resistance cadre organization would support and bring coherence to these efforts. The potential risk of repression and counterviolence was noted, and the government called upon the populace to prepare itself for such eventualities.²⁰

Resistance Organization

Like other threatened Western countries, Switzerland set up covert organizations tasked with the conduct of resistance in the event of a full or partial Soviet occupation. The Swiss Federal Council also established a government-in-exile location in Ireland for such an eventuality.²¹ As a result of its research, the Swiss government at first designated the so-called Special Service to organize popular resis-

tance to the enemy and supply the government-in-exile with intelligence. The Special Service was made up of three hierarchical levels, with the top level consisting of a small group of directing officers, members of the regular military who always dressed in their military uniforms and who were responsible for the administration and training of the secret army. The second level was made up of “trusted persons” who spread across Switzerland and were responsible for the recruitment of resistance fighters and supporters who formed the third level in their respective parts of the country. The persons recruited by the second level could themselves recruit a number of new members to join the resistance organization.

In 1979, the Swiss government transformed and redesignated the initial set-up into the P-26 organization, a designation derived from the 26 Swiss cantons.²² Defense planners conceived of P-26 as a top-down, cadre-led structure rather than a broad, decentralized civilian resistance movement envisioned and advocated by von Dach. Like the Special Service, the P-26 organized into three levels. The P-26 command staff consisted mainly of senior military officials on civilian contracts or secondment. On the second and core level, the cadre organization formed the secretive and well-trained nucleus of the resistance underground. This formation possessed a decentralized organizational model based upon the development of distributed clandestine cells. The third level would only have been recruited by the cadre organization if Switzerland had come under foreign occupation. The government tasked P-26 with recruiting and training core personnel who could continue the fight after an occupation. P-26 executed this by setting up stay-behind arms caches, storing specialized equipment that would be required by the resistance movement, and organizing the necessary infrastructure for the coordinated command of the resistance from unoccupied parts of Swiss territory or from a potential exile base.²³ In essence, P-26 provided the framework for the creation of both an underground and partial auxiliary. The underground

is understood as a “clandestine cellular organization within the resistance movement that has the ability to conduct operations in areas that are inaccessible to guerrillas, such as urban areas under the control of the local security forces,” and a partial auxiliary is “that portion of the population that is providing active support to the guerrilla force or the underground.”²⁴

Operationally, the P-26 concept offers four areas for contemporary consideration on how to set up a clandestine organization for the conduct of resistance in the case of occupation. First, the group prepared for four possible and plausible operational scenarios:

- a foreign military transiting Switzerland and occupying only a portion of territory without the goal of full occupation
- a foreign power attacking Switzerland and occupying a portion of territory with the ultimate goal of full conquest and occupation
- full conquest and occupation by a foreign army
- the overthrow of the Swiss government by external forces resulting in the occupation of Switzerland.²⁵

Second, the Swiss government placed the organization outside of the traditional military and government bureaucracy to protect its members from discovery in the event of occupation and to preclude its surrender as part of an overall capitulation agreement. Its military leader was hired under a private-sector contract, and personnel signed an employment convention via a front company delineating rights and obligations, with members paid and insured discreetly by the federal government. During peacetime, P-26 fell under the direction of the Swiss Chief of the General Staff.²⁶

Third, for recruitment, P-26 sought members who were balanced, independent, stress-resistant, and trustworthy, but with a low profile from both character and societal dimensions. They were to have regular jobs that would provide cover for periodic training absences. Many had no military service records, and there were also a minority of females.

Professions included a school principal, nurse, hospital administrator, medical doctors, engineers, and academics.²⁷ Recruitment occurred slowly, with a careful vetting and selection process. Once enrolled, the members were trained and allocated to one of the approximately 80 resistance regions spread across the country. The manning for P-26 was set at 800 personnel, about half of which had been recruited by the time of its deactivation in 1990. The 6-to-10 person units found in the 80 resistance regions were autonomous, and each had an active and sleeper cell assigned, with the active cell having no knowledge of the existence of the sleeper cell.²⁸ A typical cell had an operational chief, communicator, courier, and demolitions/engineering specialist.²⁹ Finally, the degree of planning, detail, training, secrecy, and operational security conducted by P-26 within the context of a democratic society lends itself to further study and research for the operationalization of resistance plans during peacetime.

Conclusions for Contemporary Planning

Given the specter of Russian irredentism in Eastern Europe, threatened countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Georgia, and even Kazakhstan must reevaluate their national defense strategies for their ability to conduct resistance or unconventional warfare on all or parts of their sovereign territory. Historical analysis can inform this process. Unsurprisingly, the Russian military draws upon its historical experience in the Russian Civil War and Soviet Cold War for the components of its hybrid warfare model. Similarly, at-risk states can review the Cold War period and, through the careful study and analysis of appropriate historical resistance and unconventional warfare cases, can assess previously used concepts for possible adaptation, application, and integration into a national resistance strategy. Although not actually tested by war and Soviet occupation, the Swiss example illustrates a pragmatic approach for a small European state in preparing for resistance in the event of full or partial occupation of its national



Swiss army infantry squad conduct building search demonstration, October 27, 2006, in Thun (Courtesy TheBernFiles)

territory by threat forces. The Swiss case study also provides reflections for U.S. interagency or SOF support to allies considering resistance as an integral element of national defense. Several lessons for evaluation come to the forefront.

First, the Swiss profile as a small country with limited resources has relevance for its equally small European cousins. While a RAND report on Swiss unconventional warfare highlighted the mountainous topography and homogenous nature of Swiss society as major differences with the Baltic countries, this assertion is incorrect.³⁰ On the contrary, the Swiss P-26 resistance organization would have conducted its operations in the rather flat Swiss *Mittelland*, which encompasses most of the population centers as well as the industrial engines of the economy. This pre-alpine region is also not much different than the topography found in the Baltics. Additionally, the Swiss population is highly heterogeneous, having German, French, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romanic regions. The Swiss have successfully meshed these diverse cultural and ethnic groups into a single

Swiss identity that provides an important foundation for societal resilience and resistance to foreign occupiers. This prerequisite is an important lesson for the Baltic nations and the integration of their Russian and Polish minorities.

Second, articulating the Total Defense concept and resistance mission in official national security documents provided clear and essential policy guidance for a whole-of-government approach to these efforts. The 1973 Swiss Security Report is one example of the need for current governments to provide national-level direction to these defensive efforts. All elements of national power must be integrated into a defense concept, and the psychological/information war component takes a leading position for preparation. As shown in the Swiss case, credible media outlets, an educated, critical-thinking population, and a degree of national pride are antidotes to adversarial propaganda campaigns.

Third, while guerrillas may come from parts of the armed forces, a clandestine cadre organization can provide one structural model for unconventional warfare preparation and clandestine

network establishment, with new recruits being brought into the underground and auxiliary forces only after hostilities are initiated. Naturally, other models can and should be evaluated. Of particular interest is the recruitment of nonmilitary personnel conducted by the P-26. In an age of biometrics and electronic databases, this approach could provide a resistance movement a greater degree of security against aggressor pacification operations.

Fourth, resistance planning and operations must be well integrated with an adequate conventional military force deterrent. Resistance operations alone are insufficient in deterrent effect to dissuade an aggressor. The Swiss coupled a resistance concept and organization with a four-corps, 625,000-person conventional military force, which represented almost 12 percent of its population in time of national emergency.

Finally, Switzerland did not possess a true SOF capability during the Cold War. Today, SOF are traditionally responsible for unconventional warfare and resistance missions, and they can be an important catalyst for resistance planning and preparation by facilitating unified action

with their interagency brethren to achieve unity of effort in resistance operations.

The Cold War ended with the dissolution of that “Prison of Nations” called the Soviet Union. Yet an irredentist and revanchist Russia has emerged after almost two decades to replace it. Already casting its shadow on the NATO members of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the Kremlin may look to other post-Soviet states such as Moldova, Kazakhstan, or Georgia for further “Russian World” adventurism.³¹ Considering how to adapt the Cold War concept of Total Defense to current events, especially its critical resistance element, is an important task for national policymakers and their SOF elements to evaluate. The Swiss Cold War experience provides a useful starting point. JFQ

Notes

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¹² *Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung betreffend die Organisation des Heers* (Truppenordnung) (Bern: Bundesrat, June 30, 1960), 329.

¹³ Tribelhorn, 12.

¹⁴ *Bericht des Bundesrates ueber die Sicherheitspolitik der Schweiz. Konzeption der Gesamtverteidigung*, Berne, June 27, 1973, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶ *Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung betreffend die Organisation des Heers*, 367–368; and Heinz Haesler, “Grundsatzliche Ueberlegungen eines ehemaligen Generalstabschefs,” in *Erinnerungen an die Armee 61*, ed. Franz Betschon and Louis Geiger (Frauenfeld, Switzerland: Verlag Huber, 2009), 96.

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²⁴ Mark Grdovic, *A Leader’s Handbook to Unconventional Warfare*, SWCS Publication 09-1 (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, 2009).

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Cross-Functional Teams in Defense Reform: Help or Hindrance?

By Christopher J. Lamb



There is strong bipartisan support for Section 941 of the Senate’s version of the National Defense

Authorization Act for 2017, which requires the Pentagon to use cross-functional teams (CFTs). CFTs are a popular organizational construct with a reputation for delivering better and faster solutions for complex and rapidly evolving problems. The Department of Defense reaction to the bill has been strongly negative. Senior officials argue that Section 941 would “undermine the authority of the Secretary, add bureaucracy, and confuse lines of responsibility.” The Senate’s and Pentagon’s diametrically opposed positions on the value of CFTs can be partially reconciled with a better understanding of what CFTs are, how cross-functional groups have performed to date in the Pentagon, and their prerequisites for success. This paper argues there is strong evidence that CFTs could provide impressive benefits if the teams were conceived and employed correctly.



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