

Honest brokers — or patsies?

The Liberal's Lloyd Axworthy recently announced his party's new foreign policy. Canada should be an "honest broker," between East and West, mediating the misunderstandings that cloud superpower relations. Curiously, this Matterhorn of fuzzy thinking went largely unchallenged by the dozing Tories.

No sooner had Axworthy promulgated his policy than need suddenly arose for honest brokerage. Soviet "diplomats" in Switzerland were caught, for the second time in as many years, spying on Swiss defences. The neutral Swiss, now furious, are obvious candidates for Canadian conciliation.

Soviet spying on Swiss defences seems, at first glance, somewhat comical. It is not. Tiny Switzerland, with only 6.5 million people, controls the mountain passes that link Austria, Italy, France and Germany. Though resolutely neutral, the hardy Swiss can mobilize one million soldiers in 72 hours and three times Canada's holding of tanks and aircraft.

In both 1983 and the recent case, Soviet spies were ferreting out data on Swiss mountain fortifications, underground aircraft hangars, munitions stores and mobilization plans. Nations do not spy on others, with the risk of damaged relations and bad publicity for the fun of it. What, then, were Soviets doing in Switzerland?

The answer is profoundly disturbing, almost too shocking to contemplate. The Soviets had to be spying on Switzerland's defences because they are planning to attack that nation. There can be no other likely reason.

A lightning attack on Switzerland makes excellent military sense to the Soviet Union. NATO's defences are deployed from the Swiss border up to the North



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Sea. Neutral Switzerland is assumed to be a safe bastion guarding NATO's southern flank. But what if the Soviets launch surprise airborne attacks to seize the Swiss passes, duplicating their *coups de main* in Prague and Kabul.

Soviet tank armies, only 250 miles away in Czechoslovakia, could then race across defenceless Austria, and into Switzerland along the St. Galen-Bern-Neuchâtel-Geneva axis, debouching into the soft underbelly of France and West Germany. NATO's defences would be turned and its forces enveloped by a giant Soviet armored pincer sweeping northward to the Channel ports.

Such a scenario is a southern version of the famous German Schlieffen Plan of World War I that aimed at enveloping Paris by a surprise attack through neutral Belgium. Most wars, it should be recalled, begin by nasty surprises and the Soviets, in this case, appear to have been caught planning one. Ironically, while much of the world's attention was transfixed by prospects of a U.S.-USSR summit in Geneva, Soviet spies were busy at work planning a route for the Red Army through the very same city.

So back to the question of honest brokering. The Liberal party's new creed implies that both sides are generally equal on a moral level and separated only by a gulf of doubt and mistrust. The Liberals have thus clearly become morally neutral: Eastern totalitarianism is the same as western democracy. One wonders, then, if the Liberals, back in 1939, would also have served as honest brokers between Nazi Germany and the western democracies?

Taking this Liberal crusade to its logical conclusion, we could easily see Canada, as many Liberals seem to wish, becoming a friendly neutral acting like a well-lubricated ball bearing that prevents friction between the huge superpowers to its north and south. Canada would communicate, dialogue, exchange views and promote understanding, a conduit of peaceful intent.

In fact, Canada could become very much like neutral Switzerland or like Sweden, whose socialist system evokes such envy in our Liberal party. But how to explain those Soviet spies in the Alps and all those Soviet frogmen and submarines in Swedish waters?

Facing awful truths is always difficult. Those who will risk all by relying on Soviet goodwill shall likely ignore the Swiss incident. But the latest spy case in Switzerland should send a chill of fear — and a gust of cold reality — down the necks of complacent Europeans and peace-at-any-price Canadians.

Ask the neutral Swiss. They have hosted almost every peace talk imaginable over recent years. Yet they are buying more tanks and digging in. By contrast, ask our own honest brokers and they would probably assure us that the Soviets were only reacting to the threat of attack from Switzerland.