

Wolf in sheep's clothing

It's hard these days to get a seat on a flight to Moscow — they are filled with Russian spies and their families who have been booted out, at latest count, by twelve different countries.

The most intriguing explosion occurred in Bern where the head of the Soviet Novesti press agency was caught red-handed passing money to the small Swiss peace movement.

The Swiss, having already caught a series of Russian and Eastern bloc "diplomats" spying on their defences over the past few years, and still smarting from the revelation that one of their senior military officers was passing secrets to Moscow, lost no time in kicking out the Novesti "journalist."

Spying on Switzerland? While the idea of Russian agents ferreting out Switzerland's military secrets may appear to some as comical, the implications of these acts of espionage are truly ominous. Most Canadians associate little Switzerland, a nation of 6.7 million, with cuckoo clocks, banks, and chocolate; yet resolutely neutral Switzerland can field one of Western Europe's largest and toughest armies.

In 48 hours, Switzerland can mobilize 625,000 highly trained soldiers who, dug into their Alpine fortifications, would prove an awesome challenge to any potential invader. Every Swiss male from 20 to 55 must serve annual military service and Switzerland is the only nation in the world where its soldiers actually keep their rifles at home. The Swiss, who gained their independence through a long series of bloody wars, are quite aware that their country sits athwart the strategic passages between Germany, France and Austria, thereby offering a tempting target to invaders.

No one can believe that the Russians are losing sleep over the threat of a Swiss invasion. Why then are they spying on the Swiss? Clearly, because Moscow is carefully planning for a general offensive against the West — there is no other possible reason.

Russian armored divisions in southern Czechoslovakia are only 250 miles from the Swiss border. The bulk of NATO forces on the central front are positioned in central and northern Germany and

ERIC MARGOLIS



the low countries, the most obvious potential Russian invasion route. Yet it is quite conceivable that the Russians could strike across Bavaria in south Germany, drive into northern Switzerland along the St. Gallen-Bern-Neuchâtel-Geneva axis and thereby outflank NATO forces to the north.

This great sweeping movement would be a southern version of the German Schlieffen Plan of World War I that sought to envelop Paris by a thrust through Belgium. This time, fast-moving Russian tank armies would cut through the flat, difficult to defend north of Switzerland, debouch into central France, and swing northward to Paris before NATO's main forces, positioned deep in Germany, could respond.

An alternative of this plan would see the Russians launching a simultaneous pincer that would drive across north Germany and seize the vital ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp while the southern pincer raced towards the Channel.

There can be no doubt that the Russians are planning in detail such an invasion of Switzerland; otherwise, their spying would make no sense at all. It is certainly to be wondered how our media liberals and peace activists, who resolutely claim that Russia is arming to the teeth only because it feels threatened by the West, can explain why the Warsaw Pact has spent so much time and effort in spying on Swiss defences.

The Swiss have few illusions. When Swiss farmers come down from the high Alps to vote, they traditionally carry their rifles as a symbol that their precious rights of freedom and democracy were won by force of arms and are maintained by military strength, not fuzzy-headed idealism.

It is no coincidence that the Swiss Guards protect the Pope: Switzerland has a proud and glorious military tradition and her citizen soldiers could be counted on to fight to the death to bar the passage of the Red Army through their land.

And the Swiss do not forget that they established Europe's first and oldest democracy through the power of their mountaineer pikemen who crushed the imperial designs of the feudal knights of Austria, Burgundy and France.

It is ironic that while the Western democracies, exemplified by Canada, are cutting their military forces and quailing in terror before Moscow, the tough, determined and self-reliant Swiss are getting ready to exact a fearsome, and perhaps even prohibitive toll on the potential Russian invaders.

Canada, with less than 6,000 foot soldiers, talks endlessly about maintaining peace through goodwill; the realistic and manly Swiss are certain that their 625,000 soldiers are a better guarantee of their freedom and national pride.

(Eric Margolis, a member of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies writes frequently on international affairs)



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