

SWISS PEACE POLICY

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Nepal

Switzerland's contribution

Adapt facilitation to changing contexts

Role of the external actors

Lessons learnt and outlook



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ROLE OF SWITZERLAND FROM AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

Hannes Siebert reflects critically on the role of Switzerland as an informal facilitator during the peace process. He is the head of the Nepal Transition Peace Initiative, an international NGO supporting the peace process, and he brings with him his experience of the South African reconciliation process. The organisation has a mandate from the Nepalese Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction.

How did Switzerland interact with the different actors – external and internal – of the armed conflict in Nepal?

Switzerland's role was significantly different from any other international player. It acted at track one and track one-and-half levels based on the needs and requests of the parties in the process. The tireless efforts of the Swiss Envoy, Dr Guenther Bächler, to reach out to each party and stakeholder in the peace process helped to create bridges between the parties and a better understanding between the players in the process. His praise and criticisms were always even-handed. Although Switzerland often had to focus more on capacity-building and advising certain stakeholders in the process, this was needed to ensure all stakeholders received adequate information, skills and knowledge about the key issues being negotiated. Switzerland's strong relationship with all stakeholders helped to build the credibility and acceptance of Dr Bächler as an informal facilitator and peace process adviser. It is my opinion

that his contribution played a major role in the transformation process of the non-state actors.

In addition to its relationships with the political parties, Switzerland also maintained and built up strong relationships with major civil society organisations. The capacity of these organisations was essential at key turning points in the process.

Another significant contribution by Switzerland in the process was its bridge-building role between members of the international community. Dr Bächler's close involvement with the national parties and his understanding of the political issues was a great asset to both other European countries and the United Nations. Together with me, we held regular briefings with the UN, where our work complemented their role.

Dr Bächler and I have worked closely with the national facilitators in the negotiations on most of the key political agreements over the past two years. Our association with the national facilitators, as esteemed members of Nepalese society, contributed to an environment where the peace process was ultimately "Nepal-driven".

Among the external actors, how would you describe the specific role that Switzerland assumed?

Switzerland acted as a catalyst between external actors and it supported the United Nations. Together with the like-minded European group, it initiated key interventions and relationship-building processes. Together with me (contracted as Facilitator and Senior Technical Adviser by the United States Government to support the Nepal peace and negotiations process) we

co-facilitated the beginning of the military integration negotiations, the 5-point agreement that formed the basis for the role and mandate of the United Nations in Nepal, and the initial and final stages of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We jointly and separately worked on resolving the on-going conflict in the Terai region by creating opportunities for dialogue and negotiations. His direct support for and interaction with the parties and groups in the region contributed to a more productive negotiating process at the national level – which eventually led to the agreement between the Government of Nepal and the Madhesi groups.

What have been the tangible results of Switzerland's efforts in the last few years?

Switzerland co-facilitated the first dialogue between the NA and PLA; contributed to drafting the CPA; co-facilitated the drafting of the 5-point agreement between the SPA and the Maoists on the UN mandate for monitoring of arms and armies; advised on drafting the Interim Constitution; informed the federalism debate; and was instrumental in the transformation of the non-state actors.

What is your assessment of Switzerland's role in the process before the signing of the peace accord?

During the period running-up to the signing of the CPA, Switzerland both contributed to the writing of the more than 11 drafts – its envoy facilitated the dialogue between the negotiating parties on specific issues – and it helped raise the parties' understanding of the process needs.

Woman, living in the district
Lalitpur, near Basisaha,
March 2007.

How do you see Switzerland's role in the process since the signing of the peace accord?

Since the signing of the CPA, Switzerland has contributed to the national and regional debates on state restructuring, including the framing of the debate on appropriate federal models for Nepal. The Swiss contributed to several thematic areas in the drafting of the Interim Constitution and the formation of the Interim Government structures. Switzerland also supported key joint "exposure" visits and study tours by the negotiating parties and leadership to South Africa, the United Nations, Peru and Switzerland. The visit of the top-level leadership to Switzerland in 2007 helped to unlock several key issues and opened up the possibilities for closer future collaboration between the three main parties.

What contribution was most typically Swiss?

Informal facilitation; process design and mapping; thematic expertise on state restructuring, military integration, and federalism.

What is your assessment of the instruments (or the combination of instruments) used by Switzerland?

Each of these instruments made a significant contribution individually and collectively. But the visit to Switzerland by the top-level leadership with the Swiss Envoy and his ongoing individual and joint facilitation work stand out for me as the most significant.

How did Switzerland manage the task of being visible, including in the media, on some occasions, and behind the scenes on others?

I think there was a good balance between its public and confidential faces and interventions. What was meant to be confidential stayed confidential – apart from information sharing with other international partners and the UN. I think we should have documented the process and our efforts more, but we succeeded in keeping most of this work out of the view of the media until after the process had been finalised. Keeping it a Nepali-driven process is worth much more than acknowledgement as "outside" or international support.

What should Switzerland do to help the process in the future?

It should continue to act as an informal facilitator in close collaboration with the national facilitators. It can play key roles in the state restructuring and SSR debates and negotiations, provide resources and training for different groups on peace processes and constitutional issues and options, provide support to the Peace Ministry and Peace Commission, continue as a partner in NTTP, and provide advice to UNMIN.

What should it avoid doing?

No Comment.