

## **Swiss Security Officials, Defense Industry Finance and Swiss Neutrality - The Case of Nicoletta della Valle**

The appointment of **Nicoletta della Valle**, jurist and former Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Police (Fedpol), to an advisory role at **Champel Capital (CC)** has triggered significant public and institutional concern. Della Valle, who served as Fedpol Director from 1 August 2014 until early 2025 and received a severance package of 340,000 CHF accepted an advisory position with Champel Capital (CC), an investment firm headquartered in al-Quds, occupied Palestine. This appointment provoked widespread controversy. Beyond critical media coverage, the University of Bern cancelled a planned public appearance by della Valle, while senior federal officials, including her former superior, Federal Councillor Beat Jans, publicly warned of risks associated with her access to highly sensitive federal information during her tenure as Director of Fedpol, including classified operational intelligence, international cooperation protocols, and procurement-related knowledge.

### **Advisory Role and Conflicts of Interest**

These concerns are further underscored by Champel Capital's current business orientation. Originally founded as a venture capital firm investing in Deep Tech, Health, Agri, and Mobility sectors, CC has recently announced on its official website the imminent launch of "Fund III Defense & Security," which explicitly targets investments in Israeli defense, dual-use, and security start-ups. The Fund intends to market these technologies to European police and military services, with profit participation for CC. Nicoletta della Valle sits on the Advisory Board for this Fund.

The Fund's General Partner is **Giora Eiland**, who, according to multiple media sources, seeks to raise approximately 100 million USD. Eiland is a retired Major-General of the Israel Occupation Forces (IOF) and a former head of the Israeli National Security Council. He openly endorsed attacks on Gaza's civilian population, declaring in November 2023: "*We have no choice but to make Gaza a place where it will be temporarily, or even permanently, uninhabitable*" and elsewhere urging Israel "*to create a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.*" Eiland also authored the so-called General's Plan, envisioning the forced evacuation of northern Gaza within one week under threat of death, the cessation of all food, fuel, water, and medical supplies, and the indefinite military occupation of northern Gaza by the IOF.

Other Advisory Board members include **Yoav Har-Even** (34-year IOF veteran and former CEO of Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd, a state-owned Israeli arms manufacturer), **John Spencer** (U.S. Army urban warfare expert), and **Ya'akov Shabtai** (former commander of Israeli Border Police and Israeli Police Commissioner). CC's leadership further includes individuals with IOF-background

such as **Hillel Fuld**, whose Australian visa was revoked in June 2025 due to Islamophobic rhetoric, and **Amir Weitmann**, co-founder and managing partner.

Weitmann, an Israeli-Swiss dual national and active Likud party member, grew up in Zurich and Geneva but has resided for more than two decades in an illegal settlement near al-Quds. He regularly posts radical statements on Facebook, including a September 2025 message celebrating the destruction of Gaza's infrastructure: "*Excellent! But we must flatten 100% of the Strip*", as well as calls for a "Greater Israel" without Palestinian presence: "*Palestinians should not be allowed to enter the territories of the country. Not at all. Not even the settlements in Judea and Samaria. They should be completely dried out and their emigration encouraged.*"

When it comes to Palestinians and Islam, he states: "*Ultimately, they are Muslim-Arab terrorists who act in the name of jihad according to the rules of these barbarians. As long as they live in Israel, it will not stop. There was never anything intelligent to say about this population group, at least as long as they continue to practice Islam, and there will never be anything. That is harsh, but it is the truth.*".

But his ties to Switzerland are not just merely childhood memories. In May 2025, Weitmann hosted a pitching event at Zurich's Baur au Lac Hotel for the Fund, emphasizing that Israeli founders possess unique battlefield experience that translates into military-relevant innovations—a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" that Swiss investors should not miss. Another CC event followed in September 2025 at Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse.

#### Nicoletta della Valle - Not an isolated incident

Recently, it became known that another Swiss national with privileged access to sensitive defense information, **David Shapira**, joined CC as an advisor. Shapira is an ETH Zurich-trained engineer and Chief Technology Officer of Swiss Innovation Force AG, a subsidiary of the fully state-owned RUAG MRO Holding AG, mandated by the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (VBS) to develop innovation projects for the Swiss Army. Although the Federal Council stated that Shapira holds the CC mandate in a personal capacity, this overlooks the potential conflict of interest in procurement processes and the likelihood that he possesses classified knowledge relevant to Swiss defense. Shortly after this became public, Shapira's name was removed from CC's website.

The aggregation of Swiss officials and individuals with privileged access to classified information joining advisory roles at a pro-defense venture capital firm whose leadership includes figures espousing Islamophobic and genocidal rhetoric not only reveals significant regulatory gaps particularly when insiders participate in firms actively benefiting from, and potentially complicit in, genocide, it also prompts a closer examination of the role of the Swiss government in the broader context of the Genocide in Gaza and Palestine.

### Swiss Neutrality and Middle East Policy

Switzerland's engagement in the Israel-Palestine context has long been framed through **neutrality** and **humanitarian principles**. Officially, Switzerland supports a two-state solution, emphasizes respect for international law, and provides aid to humanitarian actors. However, concrete measures often target Palestinian actors, including the 2025 Hamas ban and suspension of support to NGOs alleged to have links with Palestinian groups.

Under media pressure, an internal 2025 **FDFA legal opinion** (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) was released after initial secrecy which concluded that a bilateral recognition of Palestine is legally possible, while the Federal Council maintains its stance that such recognition should occur only as part of a comprehensive peace settlement that is currently unrealistic. The legal analysis notes that while effective governance is only partially exercised due to Israeli control and Hamas' de facto rule in Gaza, this does not preclude recognition. International consensus favors Palestinian statehood, and several European countries (Spain, Ireland, Norway) have already advanced recognition initiatives, increasing pressure on Switzerland to explain its traditionally humanitarian but ostensibly neutral Middle East policy. Especially since the FDFA itself clarified in December 2023 that **neutrality law is not applicable** in this case, as it only governs conflicts between recognized states: *“Switzerland, like Israel and numerous other states, does not recognise Palestine as a state at the bilateral level. The law of neutrality is therefore not applicable to the current conflict.”*

Experts and media commentators suggest that Switzerland's restraint is motivated not by neutrality - that is officially irrelevant in this context but still used repeatedly - but rather by **fear of diplomatic repercussions** from Israel and its allies, including potential damage to bilateral relations.

In June 2025, 65 former Swiss diplomats issued a letter to Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis criticizing the government's **“silence and passivity”** in the face of what they described as genocide in Gaza, and explicitly demanded an immediate cessation of Swiss investments in the Israeli military and security sector.

### Switzerland's Involvement in the Israeli Defense Industry

This is because despite official claims of neutrality, Switzerland is **deeply embedded** in Israel's arms sector, particularly through large-scale procurements from **Elbit Systems**, one of the most important suppliers for the Israeli military. Following a 2010 state visit by then Defense Minister Ueli Maurer, Switzerland and Israel signed a 2013 memorandum of understanding on security cooperation. In 2014, the Swiss Army procured six Hermes 900 drones for 250 million CHF. Hermes 900 drones were used in the 2014 Gaza war and criticized by human rights organizations for civilian casualties. This cooperation expanded in 2019 with a 300 million CHF contract to modernize army communications, including 210 million CHF in industrial offsets involving around sixty Swiss companies. Elbit subsequently established a subsidiary in Bern and opened a testing center near Thun, embedding itself into Switzerland's defense innovation landscape. On 1 August 2023, **Andreas Cantoni** assumed overall operational responsibility at Elbit Systems Switzerland. He previously served for 30 years in the Swiss Army, most recently as a reserve staff officer. The Chairman of the Board of Directors of Elbit Switzerland is **Jakob Baumann**, former Chief of Planning of the Swiss Army, former Head of Armaments, and former Director of the armasuisse division within the Federal Department of Defence.

In 2018, **RUAG MRO** and **Elbit Systems** signed an MoU for further joint activities. Critics argue that Switzerland, through its partnerships with Elbit, is not merely economically embedded in Israel's military-industrial complex but also indirectly legitimizes war crimes, given Elbit's central role in the Gaza conflict.

**Arms export statistics** further highlight this entanglement. Between 2015 and 2024, Switzerland approved 3.6 million CHF in military exports to Israel - officially "temporary deliveries" - while exports of dual-use goods totaled 85.8 million CHF. Notably, 2024, amid the Gaza war, marked a record year with 16.7 million CHF in approved exports.

In early 2024, the **Swiss National Bank** (SNB) sold a quarter of its Elbit shares, which it had acquired a year earlier for 17.5 million US dollars. Orders from the Israeli army during the Gaza genocide had temporarily driven the stock price up significantly. Experts estimate that the SNB realized a profit of approximately 1 million US dollars from the sale.

All this raises profound questions about Swiss understanding of "neutrality" and "humanitarian tradition".

For while Switzerland not only allows (high-ranking) officials and employees with access to sensitive information and connections to decision-makers to be engaged by firms directly linked to the Israeli defense industry, the IOF and thus to the genocide in Gaza it also facilitates islamophobic genocide advocates to pitch for investments in Switzerland.

Furthermore, Switzerland's financial and industrial links to Israel's defense sector through procurement, dual-use exports, and industrial partnerships **contradicts public assertions of neutrality and its stated humanitarian commitments**, while indirectly or even openly legitimizing technologies and systems used in conflict zones. The ongoing Gaza war magnifies these risks, particularly given Elbit's prominent role in offensive operations.

## **Muslim events cancelled, freedom of speech under pressure**

After various allegations were published in the media suggesting that speakers with extremist - not unlawful - positions were scheduled to appear at the annual conference of the **League of Muslims in Switzerland (LMS)**, titled "Muslim Youth in Switzerland - Opportunities and Challenges" and set to take place in Hägendorf, Solothurn, the organizers have now canceled the event. This decision was made in consultation with the local municipality, which had originally approved the conference.

Although the LMS complied with the municipality's request to disinvite the guests implicated in the allegations, the authorities continued to cite "security concerns." It could not be ruled out that counter-demonstrations might arise in the vicinity of the conference as a result of media reporting.

This is not the first instance in which Muslim events in Switzerland have been canceled under public pressure. Earlier this year, two events - a fundraising event and a Ramadan preparatory gathering - were likewise called off. In the latter case, authorities pressured the private venue owner to terminate the contract with the organizers, again citing vague security concerns. Similar unspecified security considerations had already led, in 2016, to the prohibition of a large-scale demonstration in Bern organized by Muslims against the so-called Islamic State. The following year, Zurich authorities successfully pressured the private owner of the Zurich World Trade Center to prevent the event "Islam Salam – Longing for Peace" by terminating the venue rental agreement.

These incidents have led Muslim organizations to increasingly refrain from hosting large events, to advertise smaller gatherings only within limited circles, or to disclose the venue location only shortly before the event begins.

But they also have a more far-reaching impact: For years, Muslims in Switzerland have increasingly been careful not to attract public attention through associations with individuals or organizations deemed controversial from a non-Muslim perspective and through public statements on ostensibly sensitive Islamic issues, the

Gaza conflict, or other political topics, for fear of restrictions in their private or professional lives.

## **The hijab remains a barrier for Muslim women in the educational and professional sphere**

Two recent cases have reignited the debate over religious expression and employment equality in Switzerland. In Eschenbach (St. Gallen), a primary school teacher was dismissed before taking up her post following parental complaints about her headscarf. At the **University of Teacher Education** in Schwyz, a Muslim student was permitted to study but barred from completing her mandatory teaching internship while wearing a hijab, effectively preventing her from entering the profession. Similarly, at the **University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW)**, the presence of a hijab-wearing lecturer has prompted political backlash and renewed calls for stricter “neutrality” policies in education.

While these incidents are often justified with reference to earlier legal precedents, it is important to note that the key judicial decisions, including the Federal Supreme Court ruling *BGE 123 I 296 (1997)* and the European Court of Human Rights’ *Dahlab v. Switzerland* judgment (2001), both originated in the canton of Geneva, which is constitutionally secular (laïc). As such, these rulings cannot automatically be applied to other cantons that do not share Geneva’s laicist constitutional framework.

The result is a highly fragmented legal landscape where some cantons even allow public pressure or parental opposition to influence employment decisions despite the absence of a clear legal prohibition.

Outside the education sector, similar tensions persist: Muslim women wearing the hijab have faced obstacles in different sectors of employment. While the retailers Denner and Lidl allow the hijab as part of their work uniform, Switzerland’s two largest retail chains, **Migros** and **Coop**, prohibit their employees from wearing it. Moreover, dismissals of women who choose to wear the hijab continue to occur. Due to Switzerland’s relatively limited employment protection and the broad discretionary power employers hold over the appearance of their staff, it is rarely possible in such cases to substantiate a claim of unlawful discrimination.

Overall, these cases demonstrate that, despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and non-discrimination, Muslim women in Switzerland continue to experience de facto limitations on access to education, employment, and public participation.

## **Citizen Surveillance and Minority Rights Egerkinger Committee launches Reporting Platform**

The **Egerkinger Committee** that has initiated both, the constitutional ban of minarets and the ban of Islamic face covering in Switzerland, has launched an online platform inviting Swiss citizens to report alleged violations of the national face-covering ban to law enforcement authorities. The Committee has indicated that, if reported cases are not formally pursued, they will be published in anonymized form and followed up with security agencies. While framed as a tool to ensure compliance with the law, the platform has generated considerable legal and societal concern.

The reporting mechanism raises significant data protection and privacy issues. It allows the collection and dissemination of personal information without the explicit consent of the individuals involved. Although the Committee asserts that anonymity is preserved, anonymization does not fully preclude identification, particularly in local or close-knit communities. Women who wear religious attire or have a migration background may be disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of harassment, discrimination, or social stigmatization. The platform thus operates in a legally ambiguous space, potentially conflicting with Switzerland's data protection framework and the rights of those targeted.

Beyond legal concerns, the platform cultivates a culture of public surveillance and denunciation, encouraging citizens to monitor and report one another. This dynamic is especially concerning for marginalized communities, who may experience intensified social isolation and vulnerability.

There has been a notable increase in incidents, including actions by members of the Egerkinger Committee, in which Muslim women were specifically confronted for wearing hygienic face masks in public, despite the face-covering ban explicitly exempting such masks. In some cases, demands were made that Muslim women provide medical documentation to justify mask use. No comparable incidents have been reported involving non-Muslims wearing hygienic masks. These developments again illustrate the discriminatory nature of the law that was never meant to improve public safety as stated by its supporters and raise significant concerns regarding equal treatment, religious freedom, and the potential targeting of minority communities under the guise of legal enforcement.