

October 31, 1962

Note on the Potential ICRC Mission

Citation:

"Note on the Potential ICRC Mission", October 31, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, BAR, 2001 (E): 1976/17, Inspizierung russischer Schiffe die nach Kuba fahren durch Vertreter des IKRK. (Schweizer). Note on potential ICRC mission, 10/31/1962. Translated from German by Stephanie Popp.

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Summary:

In regards to the recent appointment of Switzerland (and other countries) to inspect ships bound for Cuba, the Swiss Mission to the UN describes a phone call with Mister L. Boissier, President of the ICRC, and a conversation with Messrs. Federal Councilor Wahlen and Ambassador Micheli on this subject.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

o.- BJK/etc
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[handwritten:] p.B.73.Cuba.O.U'ch IKRK

Note

Phone call with Mister L. Boissier, President of the ICRC.

I told him that we had been informed by [Swiss Observer at the United Nations] Mister [Ernesto A.] Thalmann of Spinelli's demarche to him regarding the potential acceptance of the mission to inspect ships bound for Cuba. In Mister Ambassador Micheli's and my opinion it would be difficult to reject the mission if it suits all interested powers. The Department, however did not want to influence the Committee's decision in any way. I asked B. to inform us of their decision and to keep us posted.

B. confirmed the information, as Thalmann had reported it to us. He particularly pointed out that he told Spinelli that the acceptance of the mission would only be considered, if in addition to the USSR and the USA, the Cuban government also gave its consent. U Thant will look into this on his trip to Cuba. The Committee will address the matter in today's meeting. B. will recommend accepting the mission if the conditions are met. The mission was a matter that serves to uphold peace and from which the Committee could hardly withdraw, all the less so because the offer was evidence of the acknowledgement that was shown to the ICRC.

He would, should the situation arise, ("re")inquire of Ambassador Rüeegger or potentially Director Fröhlich if they would take on leading this mission. Furthermore, 30 Swiss experts, most likely from the field of transportation, had to be found. Conversation with Messrs. Federal Councilor Wahlen and Ambassador Micheli.

Mister Federal Councilor [Friedrich Traugott] Wahlen tends to think that the ICRC should reject the offer. The task was beyond the framework of its humanitarian mission. If it were accepted, it could cause serious difficulties for the ICRC. It could become the "arbiter" (translator's note: arbitrator) in a political situation, which could get more compromising than the exercise of its functions in a humanitarian sense.

I will call B. again with the purpose of correcting the statement of this morning and to inform him of Mister Federal Councilor Wahlen's opinion, while emphatically remarking that the Head of Department does not want to intervene in the decision of the Committee.

B. confirmed that he had, in the meantime, received official statements of agreement by the USA and USSR. He was still waiting to learn about Fidel Castro's decision. This would, in any case, if the ICRC decided to accept the mission, be undertaken with all the necessary precautions and with emphasis that this was an exception. It would, by the way, probably be the first case of a mission for peace as the bylaws provide for. He said "L'affaire est grave." ["The affair is serious"-trans.] It would be easier to reject than to accept, but the easier way was not always the right way. After initial soundings the views of the members of the Committee were divided.

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