

September 21, 1962

Letter from Dutch Embassy, Havana (Boissevain), 21 September 1962

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Summary:

In this letter to Amsterdam, Dutch Ambassador to Cuba Boissevain remarks on how the American blockade of Cuba can effect Dutch trade in the Caribbean. He compares the situation to the one faced Japan and the Yellow Sea in the early 20th Century: Japanese control of the sea north of Shanghai strangled international shipping, and the British Navy was unable (or unwilling) to keep the Japanese in check. Boissevain decries the blockade of Cuba as foolhardy and says Washington risks losing the support of NATO over this.

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CUBA:
Blockade?

During the past days a US senator has ventured to urge the imposition of a blockade of Cuba which would include hailing all commercial vessels which bring goods to the island and if they refused (by continuing on or refusing investigation) a warning shot and ultimately hitting the "mark."

Such a proposition means a major step backward to the period in which H[is].M[ajesty]. Johan Maurits of Nassau [Prince of Orange] began to protect the Dutch shipping trade in the Mediterranean Sea against the arbitrariness of the Spanish or to that in which the 100 year "Pax Britannica" ended. Yet there are many ways to obstruct sea-faring.

During the "drôle de guerre" Japan had increasingly come to regard the Yellow Sea and the coastal area of Northern China and of course Manchuria and Korea as part of the Japanese sphere of influence. World trade and the shipping trade had resigned themselves to this and were limited to China south of Shanghai. When a Norwegian captain violated the unwritten rule by paying a commercial visit to northern ports the navy of the land of the Rising Sun so impeded his journey - without shooting - that he returned to Shanghai without having accomplished his aim and complained to the British Resident Naval Officer. The latter gave the Norwegian a lesson in practical maritime law: "Your country possesses 5 million tons of tonnage, the highest per capita tonnage in the world. Do you protect it? No, for as long as we can remember the existence of the British fleet has sufficed to function as a police force for all sea-faring nations, currently the situation has been changed: the Yellow Sea has become a Japanese sea."

If the government of the US would embark on the misbegotten project of obstructing the shipping trade in any form such as that proposed by the abovementioned senator the sea-faring countries would not tolerate this, N.A.T.O. would be jeopardized and all this would pale in comparison to the abuse of accepted principles of the law of peoples which would result in an enduring loss for mankind.

When Cuban youngsters from Florida shoot at merchant ships in the Caribbean that is bad enough, let Washington not be tempted to lend its sanction to these antics!

The Ambassador,

G.W.Boissevain.