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OCI No. 3377/55
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
23 April 1955

TO : Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: A short history of Switzerland's neutrality

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, Swiss neutrality in Europe "just grew"--not as a result of paper protection so much as Swiss skill and success in making the principle of neutrality their overriding foreign policy. The Swiss while engaging in numerous civil wars have not declared war on anybody since 1516--except for the short Napolenonic interlude in 1815. Switzerland's neutrality as envisaged by the Treaty of Vienna of March 1815 was not a new conception, nor was its recognition by foreign powers a novel idea.

The significance of the success of Swiss diplomacy at Vienna was that, in addition to obtaining a guarantee of the confederation's new frontiers, the Swiss were able to get the great powers to re-endorse Swiss neutrality in the general European settlement of 1815 which endured for decades. The famous Act of Perpetual Swiss Neutrality and Inviolability, signed on 20 November 1815 by Austria, Great Britain, Russia and Prussia, declared Switzerland a perpetually neutral country and contains the much-quoted lines, "The neutrality and inviolability of Switzerland and its independence from all foreign influences are in the true interests of the policy of the whole of Europe."

This act of 7 November 1815 expressed an unqualified acceptance by foreign powers of Switzerland's special position, but did not include a direct guarantee by the signatories. On the other hand, the Quadruple Alliance signed on the same day by the same four powers made clear the powers' intention to maintain, by force if necessary, the general European settlement of which the Swiss settlement was a part.

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It does not appear that the Swiss recognized or believed that their neutrality was guaranteed. They would not have desired any such guarantee, for by implication this might have conferred on the guarantors rights of supervision and even intervention.

Between 1815 and 1848, Austria, Prussia, and France repeatedly intervened in the purely internal affairs of the Swiss. For instance, Metternich forced the Swiss to restrict the admission of political exiles because their presence on Swiss territory was contrary to neutrality. King Louis Philippe of France forced the Bern government to stop its attempts to liberalize the status of the church. Prince Louis Napoleon was forced to flee from Switzerland because of French threats of war against the Swiss if he continued to reside there.

At the conclusion of Switzerland's last civil war in 1847, a prelude to the unification of the country when the victorious Radicals were just about to embark on their much overdue and far-reaching constitutional reforms, Austria, Prussia and Russia advised the Swiss they would not permit any changes in the 1815 constitution. Thanks to the passive assistance given by the English as well as the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, the Swiss were able to ignore these threats and were able to adopt the 1848 constitution which gave it the proper legislative and legal set-up for a strong government and army. Whenever their neutrality was challenged subsequently, the Swiss were able to combine "firmness" with the skillful negotiation, a policy backed by military forces.

It was also during the first year of the 1848 constitution that the question of sanctuary for political refugees from other countries arose in Switzerland's foreign relations, and that a humanitarian tradition, as well as an assertion of independence, was established. Closely connected with the granting of sanctuary to exiles was the question of internment and disarmament of retreating foreign troops driven onto Swiss territory. In both World Wars, the principle and technique of internment acquired proportions of over-whelming importance to neutral Switzerland and the belligerents alike.

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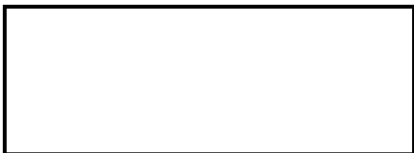
The international committee of the Red Cross established in 1862, and its affiliated national Red Cross Societies, raised the moral and practical significance of Switzerland. During both World Wars I and II, its many philanthropic services functioned with accustomed efficiency and generosity. In addition, as a protecting power, it was at one time or another representing the interests of most of the principal belligerents, possibly an additional reason why the country's neutrality was respected.

The Swiss joined the League of Nations in 1920, having had the proper guarantees of Swiss neutrality inserted. Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles has a specific reference to the 1815 treaties as "constituting international obligations for the maintenance of peace." Their experience in this organization left the Swiss disillusioned, however, and they did not join the United Nations when it was established in 1945, even though they since joined many of its specialized agencies.

The end of World War II found Switzerland without formal international recognition of its neutrality. In the West, the European powers were more willing to go along with the Swiss in their interpretation of their own neutrality, more so than the United States was willing to acknowledge. In the Orbit, the Swiss were regarded with deep hostility.

Most recently, however, the Swiss are meeting with more success in their efforts to reassert their neutrality. They were accepted as "neutral" by the Sino-Soviet bloc for the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in Korea; they are representing Soviet interests in Iraq, this being the first time the Swiss have represented Soviet interests; and their neutrality has been cited by Moscow as the model for Austrian neutrality.

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