

ARTICLE

The Transfer of Soviet Prisoners of War from Afghanistan to Switzerland, 1982–1986

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After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Swiss government initially refused to become diplomatically involved, arguing that as a small, permanently neutral state, Switzerland was unable to make a difference in the Afghan crisis. The present article shows that between 1982 and 1986, the Swiss authorities began to identify the transfer of eleven Soviet prisoners of war from Afghanistan to Switzerland as an opportunity to demonstrate Switzerland's neutral good offices in situations of armed conflict. It also shows that Switzerland's involvement came about primarily through direct and indirect exchanges with non-state actors in the Afghan crisis.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, the Swiss government delivered humanitarian aid to the conflict region, took in Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) and eventually even mediated directly between the Afghan government and the armed resistance – the *mujahideen*. These developments are scarcely known both within and outside of Switzerland for two reasons. First, Switzerland and Afghanistan have officially entertained only scarce bilateral ties both prior to and since the Soviet invasion of 1979. Modest diplomatic relations between the two countries began on 12 March 1929, when Switzerland recognised the Kingdom of Afghanistan, as it was then called.¹ Second, and more importantly for the present article, both the Swiss government and parliament initially refused to become diplomatically involved in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion. They argued that as a small, permanently neutral state, Switzerland was unable to make a difference in the context of this sudden invasion.

In the present article, I show that the reasoning behind the Swiss government's categorical decision of early 1980 began to change over the course of the Soviet occupation. Permanent neutrality was the main reason for the Swiss government's initial decision not to become involved in the Afghan crisis. However, it gradually became the main reason why a number of non-state actors in the Afghan conflict sought out Switzerland's good offices – acts of third-party diplomacy intended to contribute to the resolution of armed conflict. I focus specifically on a critical juncture in Switzerland's foreign policy towards Soviet-occupied Afghanistan in early 1982. That year, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) approached the Swiss Foreign Ministry, also known as the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA), with a request to transfer a small number of Soviet prisoners of war, who had been captured by the Afghan resistance, to neutral Switzerland. In arranging this transfer, the ICRC hoped to then receive permission to return to Afghanistan, from where it had been expelled in 1980, together with most other international humanitarian aid organisations. The nature of this arrangement was largely unprecedented and a series of political issues arose both from the sheer number of state and non-state actors involved, as well as from the fact that the arrangement lacked a universally recognised legal framework. Yet despite these flaws, the transfer of Soviet POWs to Switzerland eventually contributed to the ICRC's return to Afghanistan in 1987 as one of the first humanitarian organisations to do so legally.

¹ N.a., Relations bilatérales Suisse-Afghanistan, 21 Sept. 1992, Swiss Federal Archives (CH-BAR), E2200.141–03#2000/235#2* (sic).

The purpose of the present article is not primarily to demonstrate the Swiss government's substantive impact on the war in Afghanistan. Nor is it to argue that its involvement set a precedent for Switzerland's role in later conflicts. Future research on the basis of newly released archival material will be able to verify this point in greater detail. Rather, the purpose of the present article is to challenge the way in which we think about permanently neutral states in armed conflict during this period. Despite having received increased scholarly attention in recent years, permanent neutrality continues to be conceptualised primarily as a phenomenon of inter-state relations. Using the case of neutral Switzerland in the context of Soviet-occupied Afghanistan from 1980 to 1986, the present article argues not only that permanent neutrality did not mean inaction or indifference. It argues that a substantial amount of Switzerland's diplomatic activity resulted from direct and indirect interactions with non-state actors, including transnational humanitarian aid organisations, armed resistance groups and the press. In this particular case, Swiss neutrality enabled the return of a non-governmental humanitarian organisation to a conflict region with the consent of the host government thanks to the extraction of POWs held by armed resistance groups. Moreover, the Swiss government's role in the arrangement was heavily influenced by national and international press coverage of the operation itself, which depicted the Soviet prisoners not merely as prisoners of war but as prisoners of conscience and warned of the consequences of their eventual repatriation to the Soviet Union.

Thus far, a number of prominent scholars have already contributed significantly to our understanding of the role played by smaller powers and permanent neutrals in the global Cold War, as well as to our understanding of the relationships between neutral states and non-state actors in armed conflict. Sabina Widmer, for instance, has recently investigated Switzerland's involvement in the Angolan War of 1975–6 and argued that the Swiss government sought to use the activities of the ICRC in this conflict to improve its own image of neutrality in Southern Africa.² Meanwhile, Timothy Nunan has compared the work of the *Svenska Afghanistankommittén* (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, SCA) and the French organisation *Médecins sans Frontières* (Doctors without Borders, MSF) in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan itself.³ Most recently, Olof Kronvall has investigated Sweden's active foreign policy and criticism of superpower behaviour in the Vietnam War, the war in Afghanistan and the Polish crisis of 1981.⁴

Their research in turn builds on a growing body of scholarship, which has begun to explore the historical dynamics of the Cold War beyond the immediate ideological confrontation between the superpower blocs.⁵ In 2007, Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* notably portrayed the impact of the Cold War superpower confrontation on the so-called Third World, and since then researchers – including Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, Sandra Bott, Jussi Hanhimäki and Marco Wyss – have actively encouraged investigations into the extent to which independent agency was possible beyond the Eastern and Western Cold War blocs.⁶ In 2020, an edited volume by Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson investigated precisely these so-called 'margins of manoeuvre' for smaller powers in Cold War Europe, and in 2021, Mark Kramer, Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko released an edited volume on the relationships between the Soviet Union, Cold War neutrality and non-alignment in Europe.⁷ On the basis of these investigations, I would argue that it has become possible to explore

² Sabina Widmer, 'Neutrality Challenged in a Cold War Conflict: Switzerland, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Angolan War', *Cold War History*, 18, 2 (2018), 205.

³ Timothy Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development? Afghanistan's Cold War Encounters with International Development and Humanitarianism', in Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 237.

⁴ Olof Kronvall, 'Swedish Neutrality, 1949–91', in Mark Kramer, Aryo Makko and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 31–63.

⁵ Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, Sandra Bott, Jussi Hanhimäki and Marco Wyss, 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting: Independent Pathways in the Cold War', *The International History Review*, 37, 5 (2015), 901.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 901–2; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷ Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson, eds., *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe: The Influence of Smaller Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Mark Kramer, Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko, eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021).

not only the role of permanently neutral states in the global Cold War during the latter half of the twentieth century, but to investigate the complex nexus between permanently neutral states, non-state actors and transnational networks as well.

The present article will begin by tracing the close historical relationship between Swiss Cold War neutrality and its historical record of providing good offices in armed conflict. Against this background, it will then assess the Swiss government's initial reluctance to become diplomatically involved in Afghanistan in early 1980, before turning to the role of the ICRC in bringing about a change in the Swiss government's position towards the Afghan crisis. Ultimately, it will analyse the inherent complications and the political implications of the Soviet prisoner transfer scheme enhanced by both national and international press coverage. In doing so, it will engage with the ongoing debates on the relationship between the Swiss government and the ICRC, with the broader debate on the relationship between Swiss neutrality, good offices and humanitarianism, as well as with the significance of permanent neutrality for non-state actors in the Afghan crisis, including both the ICRC and the *mujahideen*.

In terms of source material, this article draws primarily on recently declassified archival materials from the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne (CH-BAR) and the collections of the Swiss Afghanistan Foundation, the *Bibliotheca Afghonica* (CH-SBA), based in Bubendorf, Switzerland. What is more, the ICRC has given this research project first-time special access to their classified archives concerning the internment of Soviet prisoners of war in Switzerland from 1982 to 1986. Special access does not change the status of the consulted archives, which remain classified for as long as the series is not open to the public.⁸ The relevant holdings have therefore been consulted for the purpose of triangulation only, so as to verify the holdings of ICRC documents at the Swiss Federal Archives and to thereby provide the basis for critical engagement with the source material itself, while at the same time respecting the closure period of at least fifty years observed by the ICRC.

Swiss Cold War Neutrality and Good Offices, 1946–1979

At its core, the present investigation is a case study of the complex phenomenon of permanent neutrality during the Cold War. According to Harto Hakovirta, 'In an international conflict, a policy is the more neutral the less it interferes in the conflict, the more equally it benefits or harms the parties concerned and the less it affects the outcome of the conflict'.⁹ Neutrality was originally conceived as a phenomenon of inter-state relations and based on the fifth and thirteenth Conventions of The Hague of 1907.¹⁰ Yet permanent neutrality of the kind practiced by states such as Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Austria and Ireland tended to extend beyond wartime into peacetime, as well as into the ambiguous space between war and peace that was the Cold War. Neither of these conditions is explicitly regulated under the Conventions of The Hague, and as a consequence permanent neutrality has primarily evolved as the product of each country's foreign policy.

Swiss neutrality is commonly dated back to the Battle of Marignano of 1515.¹¹ In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, it became internationally recognised by the Treaty of Paris of

⁸ See Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 Mar. 2017. Per request of the ICRC, my research does not quote or cite the consulted classified archives, some of which remain protected by the ICRC's privilege of non-disclosure. Instead, where information contained in these archives confirms information gathered from other archives, I have agreed to cite the latter. Where information contained in the ICRC archives diverges from information gathered at other archives, I have agreed to add a footnote instructing the reader to apply for specific access to the classified archives at the ICRC to verify the relevant details. The decision of granting special access remains at the sole discretion of ICRC.

⁹ Harto Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 8.

¹⁰ N.a., 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land (Hague V)', The Avalon Project, 1907, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague05.asp (last visited 13 Jun. 2022); N.a., 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War (Hague XIII)', The Avalon Project, 1907, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague13.asp (last visited 13 Jun. 2022).

¹¹ Hanspeter Neuhold, 'The Neutral States of Europe: Similarities and Differences', in Alan T. Leonhard and Nicholas Mercurio, eds., *Neutrality: Changing Concepts and Practices* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 103.

1815.¹² In contrast to Switzerland, Swedish neutrality has never been regulated by an international treaty.¹³ Like Swedish neutrality, Irish neutrality was the result of unilateral policy choices taken by successive Irish governments since Irish independence from the United Kingdom in 1921. Austrian and Finnish neutrality meanwhile, were both products of the early Cold War period and arguably the result of external interference.¹⁴ In the Austrian case, according to Hanspeter Neuhold, it was ‘the price Austria had to pay to regain full sovereignty’ from Allied occupation in the wake of the Second World War.¹⁵ Arguably the most important development with regards to Finnish neutrality was the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) that the Finnish government signed with the Soviet Union in 1948. Its preamble stressed ‘Finland’s desire to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers’.¹⁶ That is why, in substance, Finnish neutrality is often traced back to the preamble of its FCMA and why, in form, it is often associated with Soviet power politics in the region.

What arguably set Switzerland’s interpretation of permanent neutrality apart from that of most other permanent neutrals was that the Swiss government chose to refrain from joining the United Nations (UN) until 2002. Sweden and Ireland joined in 1946, while Finland and Austria joined in 1955.¹⁷ In 1946, Swiss Foreign Minister Max Petitpierre originally intended Switzerland to join the UN as well. However, he asked that the UN exclude Switzerland from its collective security mechanism, as the League of Nations had done for the Swiss authorities in May of 1920.¹⁸ The UN refused this request and in fact some UN members – particularly the French delegation – argued that neutrality was incompatible with the UN Charter.¹⁹

Petitpierre therefore devised Switzerland’s principal Cold War foreign-policy doctrine of ‘Neutrality and Solidarity’ in 1947 with the intention of giving Swiss neutrality an explicit purpose.²⁰ This doctrine constructed a conceptual link between Swiss neutrality and its provision of good offices for the first time.²¹ It also contained an element of universality, which aimed at the establishment of diplomatic relations with as many states as possible on either side of the Cold War divide.²² In the absence

¹² Surya Subedi, ‘Neutrality in a Changing World: European Neutral States and the European Community’, *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 42, 2 (1993), 243.

¹³ Mikael Nilsson, ‘The United States and Neutral Countries in Europe, 1945–91’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 21, 4 (2019), 209.

¹⁴ Mikael Nilsson and Marco Wyss, ‘The Armed Neutrality Paradox: Sweden and Switzerland in US Cold War Armaments Policy’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51, 2 (2016), 336.

¹⁵ Hanspeter Neuhold, ‘Permanent Neutrality on Contemporary International Relations: A Comparative Perspective’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 1, 3 (1982), 18.

¹⁶ N.a., ‘The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and The Republic of Finland’, 1948, available at http://heninen.net/sopimus/1948_e.htm (last visited 12 Jun. 2022).

¹⁷ Norbert Götz, ‘From Neutrality to Membership: Sweden and the United Nations, 1941–6’, *Contemporary European History*, 25, 1 (2016), 89; 91; Franz Cede, ‘Austria’s Neutrality – Myths versus Reality’, in Mark Kramer, Aryo Makko and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 20.

¹⁸ Georges-André Chevallaz, *Neutralité suisse et Nations Unies* (Lausanne: Editions de l’Aire, 1986), 57; Edgar Bonjour, Die Schweizerische Neutralität als Historisch Gewachsene Maxime im Seminar über Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Zeitalter der Weltweiten Interdependenz, 4–6 Nov. 1982, CH-BAR, E9500.1#1993/131#39*.

¹⁹ Daniel Frei, *Neutralität – Ideal oder Kalkül? Zweihundert Jahre aussenpolitisches Denken in der Schweiz* (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1967), 82; N.a., Schweizerisches Institut für Berufspädagogik, Kurs A 13: Schweizerische Innen- und Aussenpolitik aktuell – Die Mitarbeit der Schweiz im System der Vereinten Nationen, n.d., CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#39*.

²⁰ Max Petitpierre, ‘Exposé du Chef du Département politique, M. Petitpierre, lors de la Conférence annuelle des Ministres de Suisse à l’étranger, 12 Sept. 1947’, in Michele Coduri et al., eds., *Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz 17* (Bern: DODIS, 1999), 86–92.

²¹ Thomas Fischer, ‘From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace: Switzerland’s Contribution to International Conflict Resolution’, in Jürg Martin Gabriel and Thomas Fischer, eds., *Swiss Foreign Policy, 1945–2002* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 75; Daniel Trachsler, ‘Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey: Wiederkehrende Debatten um die Schweizer Aussenpolitik’, *Bulletin zur Schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (2011), 113.

²² Ambassador Ulrich Lehner, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 22 Jun. 2020.

of Swiss UN membership, Petitpierre's idea was to reposition Switzerland as an active neutral and a useful member of the international community by providing good offices. According to Thomas Fischer, this term encompassed all measures which third parties – be they states, international organisations or private individuals – can undertake in order to induce the parties to an armed conflict to negotiate a peaceful solution.²³ Strictly speaking, a provider of good offices should not express their own opinion or influence the conflict parties during this process. That is why some assume that neutral states are ideally suited to provide them.²⁴

Yet the literature does not fully support this assumption.²⁵ In fact, in Switzerland's case, the literature has shown that its record on good offices was largely mixed by the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, Switzerland participated in both the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) to oversee the ceasefire agreement of 27 July 1953, as well as the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), which was responsible for the repatriation of prisoners of war.²⁶ In 1954, Switzerland hosted the peace talks on Indochina, and from 1961 to 1962 it hosted discussions on the neutralisation of Laos. Various meetings of the Second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) and the second phase of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1972 to 1975 also took place in Switzerland. As Thomas Fischer has shown, after 1978, the new foreign minister, Pierre Aubert, became especially well known for promoting an active Swiss foreign policy in the domains of solidarity and human rights.²⁷ Yet even under Aubert, Switzerland hardly ever took the initiative to extend its good offices pro-actively.²⁸

One early exception to this pattern was the Suez Crisis of 1956. On the morning of 6 November 1956, the Swiss government issued a proposal for an international peace conference, following an attempt by British, French and Israeli forces to occupy the Suez Canal.²⁹ Yet the Swiss initiative was rejected by all parties, except for the Soviet Union, and this in turn led to heavy criticism in the Swiss press, given the concurrent Soviet invasion of Hungary.³⁰ From this point on, the Swiss government became cautious in offering its good services pro-actively.³¹ Switzerland abstained, for instance, from taking any initiatives to mediate between the parties to the Berlin Crisis of 1961 or the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, a pattern that repeated itself during the initial stages of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.³² The last serious Swiss mediatory mandate found in the literature were the French-Algerian negotiations of 1961. The Swiss were unsuccessful in attempting to mediate between India and Pakistan and played no part in the Accords of Delhi of 1973 and 1974. The same is true for the resolution of the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 and of the Falklands crisis of 1982. In both instances, Switzerland took on protecting power mandates for the disputing parties yet attempts to mediate were unsuccessful.

²³ Thomas Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979–81: Eine Studie zur Politik der Guten Dienste im Kalten Krieg* (Zürich: Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik der ETH Zürich, 2004), 17–8; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 75.

²⁴ Konrad Walter Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz: Aktive Neutralitätspolitik zwischen Tradition, Diskussion und Integration* (Bern: Lang, 1974), 3.

²⁵ Jon A. Fanzun and Patrick Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt: Aussen- und sicherheitspolitische Beiträge der Schweiz zu Frieden, Sicherheit und Stabilität, 1945–2000', *Zürcher Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktforschung* 57(2000), 106–7; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 96; Daniel Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven', *Bulletin 2004 zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (2008), 36.

²⁶ Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 90.

²⁷ Thomas Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität: Schweizerisches KSZE-Engagement und gescheiterte UNO-Beitrittspolitik im kalten Krieg, 1969–86* (Zürich: Chronos, 2004), 268.

²⁸ Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt', 103.

²⁹ Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979–81*, 33.

³⁰ Frei, *Neutralität – Ideal oder Kalkül?*, 84.

³¹ Thomas Fischer and Daniel Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation: Swiss Neutrality Policy in the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 18, 4 (2016), 25; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 85.

³² *Ibid.*

Restricted Humanitarian Access to Soviet-Occupied Afghan Territory, 1979–1982

In line with these developments, the Swiss government's initial response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 was carefully guarded. On 9 January 1980 the government's executive body, the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*), condemned the invasion, but did not identify the Soviet Union by name.³³ On 14 February 1980, Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert appeared before the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs of the upper house of parliament, the so-called Council of States (*Ständerat*). He argued that in light of its neutrality, Switzerland should not participate in international sanctions against the Soviet Union. Several committee members agreed with Aubert. One even suggested that 'In situations such as these, Switzerland tends to be an interested observer'.³⁴ Another added that, 'In the present circumstances, our country should remain true to its neutrality and should not contribute to the return of a Cold War climate'.³⁵ When challenged on this subject in open parliament on 21 February, Aubert responded that, 'It is out of the question for Switzerland, whose neutrality demands great reticence, to play a leading role in this matter'.³⁶

Yet while the Swiss authorities were reluctant to become diplomatically involved in the Afghan crisis, they did provide humanitarian aid. An estimated 4.3 million refugees and an unrecorded number of internally displaced persons were forced to flee their homes as a result of the Soviet occupation.³⁷ This figure gradually became the highest number of refugees worldwide by the time of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, involving almost a third of Afghanistan's pre-war population of 15 million.³⁸ According to the Federal Council, the Swiss government contributed over CHF 7 million to humanitarian aid for Afghan refugees by 1984.³⁹ The council had only created an official policy on humanitarian aid in March 1973, which subsequently became a core element of the 1976 federal law on international development and humanitarian aid and the Afghan crisis became one of the first as well as one of the most substantial agenda points under this new legislation.⁴⁰ Another, as Sabina Widmer has shown, was the provision of humanitarian to Angola, following recognition by the Swiss government in 1976.⁴¹

A significant number of other western European governments, international and non-governmental aid organisations also tried to become active in the region alongside the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the ICRC and various national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.⁴² These included the Austrian Relief Committee, the Church World Service, the Afghan Inter-Aid Committee, Save the Children and the Union Aid for Afghan Refugees, among others.⁴³ Yet by far the biggest problem for most of these organisations was that they were expelled from Afghan territory shortly after the Soviet invasion of 1979 without receiving a formal explanation.⁴⁴ On 10 January 1980, the new Soviet-installed regime of Babrak Karmal had

³³ Bundesrat, Erklärung des Bundesrates zu den Ereignissen in Afghanistan, 9 Jan. 1980, CH-BAR, E2010A#1995/313#1860*.

³⁴ Paul Bürgi in Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Ständerat), Hauptprotokoll der Sitzung vom 14. Feb. 1980, 09:00–12:30 Uhr in Bern, Parlamentsgebäude, Zimmer 4, 14 Feb. 1980, CH-BAR, E2004B#1984/38#2*.

³⁵ René Meylan in Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Ständerat), Hauptprotokoll der Sitzung vom 14. Feb. 1980, 09:00–12:30 Uhr in Bern, Parlamentsgebäude, Zimmer 4, 14 Feb. 1980, CH-BAR, E2004B#1984/38#2*.

³⁶ Pierre Aubert, Rapport du Conseil Fédéral, n.d., CH-BAR, E5001G#1993/174#17*, author's translation from, 'Il est exclu que la Suisse, que sa neutralité oblige à une grande réserve, joue un rôle pilote en l'occurrence'.

³⁷ Susan Goodwillie, 'Refugees in the Developing World: A Challenge to the International Community', 5 Aug. 1983, CH-BAR, E2025A#1993/130#1536*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Longet (*sic*), 84.930 I Longet – Lage in Afghanistan (14. Dez. 1984), 14 Dec. 1984, CH-BAR, E2023A#1998/212#2473*.

⁴⁰ Jean Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz', *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik*, 18 (1999), 28.

⁴¹ Widmer, 'Neutrality Challenged in a Cold War Conflict', 204.

⁴² Helga Baitenmann, 'NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid', *Third World Quarterly*, 12, 1 (1990), 62–85.

⁴³ S.D. Bazeley, Minutes of the Third Voluntary Organisations Meeting, 9 Dec. 1980, CH-BAR, J2.233-01#1999/248#129*.

⁴⁴ Irène Herrmann, 'Quand Berne aidait Moscou: Conception et Perception de l'Aide Humanitaire Suisse lors de l'Effondrement de l'Union Soviétique', *Relations Internationales*, 147 (2011), 100.

granted the ICRC access to its territory.⁴⁵ Yet in June of 1980, the Afghan authorities refused to renew the ICRC delegates' visas, forcing them to interrupt their mission and leave the country unexpectedly.⁴⁶

There were a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which continued to operate outside government-controlled zones illegally. Writing in 1985, Edouard Girardet reported that since the summer of 1980, *Aide Médicale Internationale* (International Medical Aid), MSF and *Médecins du Monde* (Doctors of the World) had collectively sent over 400 French, Belgian and Swiss doctors and nurses to the country.⁴⁷ Timothy Nunan's recent work has brought particular attention to the complexity of cross-border humanitarian aid operations conducted by NGOs such as MSF and the SCA. During the Biafra crisis of 1967 to 1970, the ICRC had similarly withdrawn from the region at the request of the Nigerian government.⁴⁸ Partially as a result, a small group of former members from the French Red Cross, including Bernard Kouchner, Max Récamier and Jacques Bérès, founded MSF in 1971.⁴⁹ Unlike the ICRC, which operated in conflict regions only with the consent of host governments, MSF took the view that doctors should be able to operate across borders without official consent, a concept also known as new humanitarianism (*sans-frontiérisme*).⁵⁰

This article shows that the close yet ambiguous ties between the ICRC, the Swiss government and the latter's reputation for permanent neutrality became a crucial factor in allowing the ICRC to return to Afghan territory with the consent of the authorities. The interdependence of the Swiss government and the ICRC has given rise to considerable debate in the literature. This is because the Red Cross Movement and the original Geneva convention of 1864 were at the root of Switzerland's own humanitarian tradition. The Red Cross Movement was arguably the principal agent behind this very first codification of international humanitarian law – the body of law that governs conduct in war – and Switzerland, which hosted both the movement's headquarters and the signing of the convention, became not only a signatory but a depository state of the convention itself.⁵¹ As such, the Swiss government was obliged to inform other signatories of any obligations on their part under international humanitarian law, as well as of changes to the convention and of any new ratifications.⁵²

Having been expelled from Afghan territory in mid-1980, the ICRC initially turned its attention towards the Afghan refugee population in neighbouring Pakistan. There, it assumed responsibility for the provision of health care in ten refugee camps.⁵³ Yet in March 1981, the Pakistani government transferred these responsibilities to a series of government medical teams under the supervision of the UNHCR.⁵⁴ Consequently, the ICRC began to install a war surgery hospital in Peshawar, near the Afghan-Pakistani border.⁵⁵ Its presence there ultimately became important for Switzerland's future involvement in the Afghan conflict, for two reasons. First, it created a substantial amount of goodwill

⁴⁵ ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. – Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*; ICRC, Communiqué de Presse no. 1386, 25 Jan. 1980, CH-BAR, E2023A#1991/39#921*.

⁴⁶ ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. – Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*.

⁴⁷ Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 215.

⁴⁸ Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 133.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mie Vestergaard, 'An Imperative to Act: Boarding the Relief Flights of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Biafra, 1967–70', *New Political Science*, 40, 4 (2018), 676; Shai Dromi, *Above the Fray: The Red Cross and the Making of the Humanitarian NGO Sector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 117.

⁵¹ J. D. Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners', *International Organisation*, 39, 4 (1985), 616; Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz', 28.

⁵² Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz', 33.

⁵³ ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. – Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; ICRC, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No. 7', Jan. 1987, CH-BAR, E2023A#1998/212#976*.

⁵⁵ ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. – Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*.

amongst the Afghan population.⁵⁶ By June 1981, the ICRC had received more than 1,500 war-wounded and performed over 3,500 operations.⁵⁷ Second, through its presence in Peshawar, the ICRC came into contact with a large number of *mujahideen* resistance groups who were based there as well. Some of these groups held prisoners of war and the ICRC gradually came to identify their presence as an opportunity to negotiate its return to the Afghan interior.

Prisoners of war are a social construct within international humanitarian law. They are not imprisoned because they are criminals. Strictly speaking, they are not political prisoners either, although these two categories at times overlap. According to the Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, dated 12 August 1949, prisoners of war are armed combatants or other persons accompanying armed forces, who are party to a conflict and who 'have fallen into the power of the enemy'.⁵⁸ Imprisonment prevents them from further engaging in hostilities, but if it is to occur within the remit of the Geneva Conventions, it must also safeguard their basic human rights.⁵⁹ POWs may be detained, but they may not be harmed and must be humanely treated throughout their internment.⁶⁰ In practice, this is often difficult to ensure. Monitoring compliance with international humanitarian law and reminding conflict parties of its existence is one of the principal tasks of the ICRC and as this article demonstrates, this task is a political as well as a legal one.⁶¹

After its expulsion, the ICRC struggled to fulfil this mandate. The Afghan regime was known for detaining POWs in its notorious *Pul-i-Charkhi* prison facilities near Kabul. On the other hand, few *mujahideen* resistance groups had prisons of their own. Their guerrilla tactics required a high degree of mobility and their supply lines both from the Afghan interior and from their foreign bases were under incessant attack from the Soviet and Afghan armies.⁶² As a result, they gained a reputation for ruthlessly shooting prisoners on the spot, which was a violation of the Geneva Conventions.⁶³ That being said, according to Rodric Braithwaite, the former British ambassador to the Soviet Union and subsequently to Russia, prisoners did exist, mostly if they had been wounded or incapacitated.⁶⁴ The problem for the ICRC was that without access to Afghan territory, it was impossible to verify the conditions among the conflict parties.

The Transfer of the First Soviet Prisoners from Afghanistan to Switzerland, 1982–1983

Then, in October of 1981, the fundamentalist Afghan resistance group *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis* (Islamic Party/ Khalis) – named after its leader Lawlawi Yunis Khalis – captured a Soviet land mine specialist by the name of Michael Akhrimof.⁶⁵ Arguably fearful of his expertise remaining in the hands of the *mujahideen*, the Soviet authorities attempted to negotiate his release. This was exceptional, both seeing as the *mujahideen* seldom took prisoners and as the Soviet authorities seldom negotiated their

⁵⁶ Paul Bucherer, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 16 Oct. 2018.

⁵⁷ N.a., The ICRC Hospital at Peshawar, *Refugees Magazine*, Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#802*.

⁵⁸ N.a., 'Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War', Art. 4, 12 Aug. 1949, available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c8.html> (last visited 1 Sept. 2021).

⁵⁹ Silvia Sanna, 'Part II Specific Issues and Regimes, B Geneva Convention III, Ch.48 Treatment of Prisoners of War', in Andrew Clapham, Paola Gaeta and Marco Sassòli, eds., *The 1949 Geneva Conventions: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.1093/law/9780199675449.001.0001.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ ICRC, 'Statutes of the ICRC', 12 Aug. 1949, available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/statutes-international-committee-red-cross-0> (last accessed 16 Jun. 2020).

⁶² Girardet, *Afghanistan*, 226.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–89* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 259.

⁶⁵ Bringolf (*sic*), Correspondence to De Courten, 5 Oct. 1981, CH-BAR, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*; ICRC archival documents are more detailed on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a Freedom of Information Access (FOIA) request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 Mar. 2017.

release.⁶⁶ Yet Lawlawi Yunis Khalis refused to treat directly with the Soviet authorities. Instead, he referred them to the ICRC, which had recently begun to operate from Peshawar near the Afghan-Pakistani border.⁶⁷ This was an unexpected development for the ICRC, even more so as the Soviet authorities agreed to a clandestine channel of communication.⁶⁸ This led to a joint memorandum of understanding on 22 January 1982, which also included the transfer of future Soviet prisoners to a neutral country via the ICRC. Initially, India was designated for this purpose.⁶⁹ In exchange, the ICRC demanded permission to return to Afghanistan to provide humanitarian aid both to the civilian population and to prisoners captured by the Soviet forces and the Afghan regime.

The *mujahideen* were neither represented in these discussions nor signatories to the memorandum, yet their consent was imperative because they were the ones holding Soviet prisoners captive. A substantial number of resistance groups agreed with the terms of the memorandum. The most important group to disagree, however, was *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis* (Islamic Party/ Khalis) itself.⁷⁰ Their main grievance was that despite being a non-aligned state, India had refrained from criticising the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and in fact received over 70 per cent of its arms imports from the Soviet Union at the time.⁷¹ As such, India was politically unacceptable to them and they suggested Pakistan instead.⁷² The Soviet Union, on the other hand, rejected this option, seeing as Pakistan harboured several *mujahideen* groups on its territory near Peshawar by this point.⁷³ According to the records of the Swiss Foreign Ministry, the FDFA, Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leader of the moderate *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* (Islamic Society) resistance group, ultimately suggested Switzerland on account of its reputation for permanent neutrality.⁷⁴

This was a critical juncture for Switzerland's foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. On 10 May 1982, the ICRC contacted the Swiss Foreign Ministry about the Soviet-ICRC memorandum of understanding and the *mujahideen* proposal to involve the Swiss government.⁷⁵ Two days later, the FDFA informed the Federal Council and contrary to the council's original intention to remain diplomatically aloof of the Afghan crisis, it authorised Edouard Brunner – the Head of the Directorate for International Organisations at the FDFA – to consent.⁷⁶ In subsequent exchanges with the ICRC between 12 and 14 May 1982, it was stressed that Switzerland had not been party to the memorandum of 22 January, but that if the Soviet Union were to cover the costs of the internment, the Swiss government would carry it out as a demonstration of its neutral good offices.⁷⁷ The Swiss government would be responsible for the terms and the location of the internment and the internment was capped at a maximum of two years – a condition that had arisen from ICRC negotiations with various *mujahideen* groups.⁷⁸ As will be discussed further on, this final condition eventually gave rise to considerable debate in the press once the arrangement was made public.

⁶⁶ Giradet, *Afghanistan*, 226.

⁶⁷ Bringolf (*sic*), Correspondence to De Courten, 5 Oct. 1981, CH-BAR, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*.

⁶⁸ Adrien Evéquo, Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan – Entretien avec une délégation du CICR, 11 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2761*.

⁶⁹ ICRC, Protocole d'Entente donnant suite aux entretiens qui ont eu lieu à la mission permanente de l'URSS à Genève du 13 au 22 Janvier 1982, 22 Jan. 1982, CH-BAR, E2850.1#1991/234#173*.

⁷⁰ Evéquo, Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan – Entretien avec une délégation du CICR, 11 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2761*.

⁷¹ W. Howard Wriggins, 'Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan', *Pacific Affairs*, 57, 2 (1984), 289.

⁷² Evéquo, Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan – Entretien avec une délégation du CICR, 11 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2761*.

⁷³ Edouard Brunner, Correspondence to unknown, 2 Jun. 1982, CH-BAR, E2210.5#1996/373#21*.

⁷⁴ Evéquo, Note de dossier: Afghanistan – Professeur Rabbani, 19 Apr. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2764*.

⁷⁵ Jean De Courten, Correspondence to Kirile L. Keline, Conseiller, 11 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2850.1#1991/234#173*.

⁷⁶ Aubert, Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan, 18 May 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#547*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Evéquo, Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan – Entretien avec une délégation du CICR, 11 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2761*.

The Swiss government had already gathered extensive experience as a host of foreign POWs by this point. According to Thomas Bürgisser, the Swiss authorities had hosted over 12,000 Italian, 7,000 German, 2,000 French and 2,000 Austria-Hungarian POWs on Swiss territory during the First World War.⁷⁹ During the Second World War, nearly 10,000 Soviet prisoners of war fled Germany for Switzerland.⁸⁰ At the end of the war, the repatriation of these prisoners formed part of the bilateral negotiations, which led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and the Soviet Union in 1946, Switzerland being among the last European states to do so.⁸¹ This subsequently led to sustained public criticism, however, as it became known that most of these prisoners were treated as deserters and sentenced to forced labour upon their repatriation.⁸²

As discussed, following the Korean War, Switzerland had also participated in the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), which was responsible for the repatriation of POWs on the basis of the Third Geneva Convention.⁸³ Some might also point to Switzerland's engagement in negotiating the release of over sixty American hostages in Teheran, after protesters stormed the American embassy on 4 November 1979. The Carter Administration contacted future Swiss Secretary of State, Raymond Probst, who served as the Swiss ambassador to Washington at the time, to open an informal channel of communication with the Iranian authorities.⁸⁴ Yet it was not through this channel that the hostage crisis was resolved. The regime of Ayatollah Khomeini eventually signalled its willingness to enter negotiations via the West German government and, ultimately, it was the Algerian government which mediated between the Iranian and the American governments on the issue, leading to the release of the hostages in January of 1981.⁸⁵

By May of 1982, the ICRC knew of six Soviet soldiers detained by the *mujahideen* in neighbouring Afghanistan.⁸⁶ Out of these, one soldier chose to stay in Afghanistan and the *mujahideen* made the transfer of two dependent on the successful resumption of the ICRC's activities in Kabul.⁸⁷ This meant that only three prisoners could be transferred at the time. All three were held by a guerrilla faction of *Hezb-i-Islami* and on 27 May they were handed over to the ICRC.⁸⁸ Their names were Valeri Didenko, Yuri Povarnitsin and Viktor Sintshuk.⁸⁹ Each was able to speak to an ICRC delegate in confidence and each was asked whether they agreed to be transferred to Switzerland for a two-year internment period after which they would be repatriated to the Soviet Union. According to ICRC records held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne, all three agreed, were taken to Karachi and onto a direct Swissair flight bound for Zurich, where they arrived on the morning on 28 May.⁹⁰

⁷⁹ Thomas Bürgisser, 'Internees (Switzerland)', in Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson, eds., *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10735>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Thomas Bürgisser, Sacha Zala and Thomas Fischer, "'Always Hit Back Right on the Kisser'": The Soviet Union in Swiss Foreign Policy during the Cold War', in Mark Kramer, Aryo Makko and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 261; 263; Unité d'enseignement et de recherche de Verte-Rive (Pully, Suisse), *L'internement et le rapatriement des militaires soviétiques réfugiés en Suisse pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2763*.

⁸² Unité d'enseignement et de recherche de Verte-Rive (Pully, Suisse), *L'internement et le rapatriement des militaires soviétiques*, 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2763*.

⁸³ Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 90.

⁸⁴ Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselnahme*, 9.

⁸⁵ Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 78.

⁸⁶ N.a., *Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan par les mouvements de la résistance afghane*, 18 May 1982, CH-BAR, E2850.1#1991/234#173*.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., ICRC archival documents are more detailed on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 Mar. 2017.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Please note that the spelling of their names has been adopted from the archival documents held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne.

⁹⁰ Brunner, *Correspondence to unknown*, 2 Jun. 1982, CH-BAR, E2210.5#1996/373#21*.

From there, they were first taken to St. Jean in western Switzerland, before ultimately being transferred to the military correctional facility on the Zugerberg in central Switzerland in August.

The Swiss press was initially caught off-guard by the ICRC's press statement announcing their arrival. The conservative weekly *Weltwoche* declared itself 'baffled', but reckoned that 'what may appear very simple to a layperson is in reality a brave diplomatic act of the finest quality'.⁹¹ What made it such was that the ICRC managed to persuade both the Soviet Union and the *mujahideen* to participate.⁹² Ueli Schmid of the daily *Berner Zeitung* similarly commended the operation as 'a world premiere and a diplomatic masterpiece by the ICRC' and the *Tribune de Genève* enthusiastically compared the operation to a 'theatre stunt or a poker move'.⁹³ According to Charlotte Carr-Gregg, the ICRC had previously played the role of an intermediary during the transfer of Portuguese prisoners from Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau to Tanzania, Senegal, Zaire and Guinea.⁹⁴ Edouard Giradet has similarly described the role of the ICRC in managing a limited exchange of prisoners during the Vietnam War.⁹⁵ Yet in the same vein, Giradet recognised that in the case of Afghanistan, 'for the first time in its history, and in the history of any humanitarian institution', the organisation was faced with 'a totally new concept of prisoner responsibility, namely the proxy internment of conventional (Soviet) POWs captured by (Afghan) guerrillas'.⁹⁶

In August of 1982, the ICRC transferred two further prisoners and the Afghan regime provisionally authorised the ICRC's return. The organisation's delegates were received by Foreign Minister Shah Mohammad Dost and given assurances that they could visit all prisoners captured in combat.⁹⁷ On 16 and 17 August, they inspected three local hospitals in Kabul and further inspections were planned.⁹⁸ Yet in total, the ICRC's mission lasted only three months, and in early October of 1982 the delegation was again asked to leave.⁹⁹ Over subsequent months, the Swiss Foreign Ministry devised a number of possible explanations for the ICRC's renewed expulsion.

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Raymond Probst speculated that despite having been allowed back into Afghanistan, the ICRC had actually made little progress in transferring further prisoners.¹⁰⁰ According to Bernard de Riedmatten of the FDFA's Directorate for International Organisations, a second possible reason might have been that the Soviet Union had lost interest in the arrangement. After all, the Soviet government had originally shown interest only because *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis* had captured a Soviet land mine specialist back in 1981.¹⁰¹ A third possible reason might have been that the Afghan regime had become uneasy about what the ICRC might witness, both in prisons

⁹¹ N.a., Irgendwo in der Schweiz: Sowjetarmisten aus Afghanistan in helvetischem Gewahrsam, *Weltwoche*, 2 Jun. 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*, author's translation from, 'Was Laien höchst simpel erscheint, ist in Wirklichkeit ein diplomatischer Bravourakt erster Qualität'.

⁹² N.a., Die sowjetischen Gefangenen in Schweizerischer Obhut, *NZZ*, 19/20 Jun. 1982, CH-BAR, E4300C-01#1998/299#602*.

⁹³ Ueli Schmid, Unklarer Status der drei Russen in St. Johannsen: Weder Kriegsgefangene noch Internierte, *Berner Zeitung*, 5 Jun. 1982, CH-BAR, E4300C-01#1998/299#602*, author's translation from 'dürften als Weltpremiere sowie als diplomatisches Meisterstück des IKRK gelten'; *Tribune de Genève*, Coup de théâtre ou de poker du CICR! Des prisonniers soviétiques relâchés par les Afghans sont en Suisse, 29 May 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*.

⁹⁴ Charlotte Carr-Gregg, 'An Extension of Humanitarian International Law: The Case of Soviet Soldiers Captured by Afghan Liberation Movements, 1982-6', *War & Society*, 7, 2 (1989), 97.

⁹⁵ Giradet, *Afghanistan*, 225.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. - Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*.

⁹⁸ ICRC, Communiqué de presse no 1449, 27 Aug. 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#802*.

⁹⁹ Brunner, Correspondence to Ambassadors, 19 Nov. 1982, CH-BAR, E2210.5#1996/373#21*; ICRC Department of Operations, Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (Jan. - Dec. 1983), Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#1000*.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Probst, Correspondence to Brunner, Muheim, Riedmatten, 20 Oct. 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#547*; Bernard de Riedmatten, Note de dossier: Internés soviétiques: téléphone de M. Jean de Courten du CICR, le 27.10.1982, 28 Oct. 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#548*.

¹⁰¹ Bringolf (*sic*), Correspondence to De Courten, 5 Oct. 1981, CH-BAR, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*.

and on the battlefield.¹⁰² Interestingly, however, the ICRC still managed to negotiate the release of two prisoners in November of 1982, one more in January of 1983 and one in October of 1983. Rimas Victorovitch Burba and Guernam Vassilievitch Anissimov both arrived in Switzerland on 23 November 1982.¹⁰³ Youri Ivanovitch Washenko, landed in Zurich on 14 January 1983. At the time of his release, the ICRC sent word to the FDFA that thirty more Soviet prisoners were ready to be transferred.¹⁰⁴ Yet only one more prisoner arrived by 1983. His name was Mikhail Nicolaievitch Govtva.¹⁰⁵

Public Controversy over the Soviet Prisoners and their Repatriation, 1982–1986

Meanwhile, the arrangement began to attract criticism in the Swiss and international press. Writing for the French daily *Le Matin*, for instance, French public intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy criticised that the Soviet POWs were held in complete isolation on the Zugerberg as a way to prevent them from engaging with the press and the public.¹⁰⁶ The Swiss journal *ZeitBild* also reported that prisoners who did not agree to be repatriated to the Soviet Union after two years were systematically excluded from the transfer scheme for fear that they might defect once in Switzerland and be perceived as political refugees from the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷ Defectors and deserters were inherently difficult to distinguish from prisoners of war and for that reason, they have historically suffered abuse in the Soviet Union. As Nikolas Tolstoy of the *Wall Street Journal* reported on 14 November 1983, in the Soviet Union ‘traditionally, prisoners of war have been considered as traitors’.¹⁰⁸ According to Tolstoy’s reporting, 5.5 million Soviet prisoners who had returned to the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War had been either executed or sent to Siberian labour camps.¹⁰⁹

Yuri Povarnitsin, one of the earliest transferees, confirmed his fear of this legacy in an interview that he gave to *Radio Free Kabul* in early 1982. *Radio Free Kabul* was a radio station run by the so-called Committee for Human Rights, which included writers such as Bernard-Henri Lévy, Vladimir Boukovsky and Marek Halter.¹¹⁰ ‘On my return’, Povarnitsin told them, ‘the government in Moscow will convene a tribunal and they will decide whether to put me in prison or in front of a firing squad’.¹¹¹ The Soviet Ambassador to Switzerland, Vladimir Lavrov, lodged an angry protest with the Swiss Foreign Ministry after the interview was published in the Swiss daily *24 heures* in August of 1982.¹¹² Due in part to interviews such as these, the Soviet prisoners were increasingly portrayed and perceived not merely as prisoners of war, but as prisoners of conscience – imprisoned for their beliefs.

This in turn alarmed the ICRC and the Swiss government. According to Jean-Pierre Hocké of the ICRC, the real purpose of *Radio Free Kabul* was precisely to encourage desertion amongst Soviet soldiers as a critique of the Soviet system and of the Soviet war in Afghanistan.¹¹³ Should their narrative

¹⁰² Paul Wipfli, Correspondence to Jean-Pierre Ritter, 19 Oct. 1982, CH-BAR, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*.

¹⁰³ N.a., Personalien der sowjetischen Internierten, 14 Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2764*.

¹⁰⁴ Evéquo, Note de dossier: Internés militaire soviétiques – Prochain transfert en Suisse, Entretiens avec M. Fournier du CICR, 5 Jan. 1983, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#548*.

¹⁰⁵ Evéquo, Note de dossier: Internés militaire soviétiques – Nouveau transfert en Suisse d’un soldat soviétique capturé en Afghanistan, 25 Oct. 1983, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#548*.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Matin*, ‘Scandale à la Croix-Rouge?’, 10 Nov. 1982, CH-BAR, E2850.1#1991/234#173*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Nikolas Tolstoy, ‘The Clock is Ticking on Seven Russian Soldiers’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 Nov. 1983, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Vincent Philippe, ‘Détenu soviétique en Suisse dénonce la guerre en Afghanistan: Entre la mort et la prison’, *24 heures*, 21/22 Aug. 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*.

¹¹¹ Ibid., author’s translation from, ‘A mon retour, le gouvernement de Moscou convoquera un tribunal et ils décideront s’il faut me mettre en prison ou me fusiller’.

¹¹² Paul Widmer, Stichwortartige Aufzeichnung: Gefangenaustausch und Probleme mit Internierten; Unterredung mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Lavrov, Bern den 24. Aug. 1982, 25 Aug. 1982, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#548*.

¹¹³ N.a., Note de dossier: ‘Internés militaires soviétiques – Offensive des ‘Comités Radio-Kaboul libre’, 2 Sept. 1982, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2762*.

take hold, it would raise the question of whether the prisoners on the Zugerberg were themselves deserters, as opposed to genuine POWs. This would threaten to derail the ICRC's transfer mission anew and thereby imperil its chances of returning to Afghanistan. In fact, Thomas Bürgisser, Sacha Zala and Thomas Fischer have recently argued that the Soviet Union insisted on the repatriation of the prisoners held in Switzerland precisely to prevent the scheme from being used as a means of desertion among Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan.¹¹⁴ In other words, by agreeing to repatriation as a precondition to be transferred, the scheme was intended to demonstrate that these prisoners were anything but prisoners of conscience.

Yet to compound matters further, one of the prisoners escaped to West Germany on 8 July 1983. That day, four of the Soviet prisoners were taken into the nearby town of Zug, where Youri Washenko asked permission to use the facilities as a pretext to escape into the crowd.¹¹⁵ By 12 July, Washenko formally applied for asylum in West Germany, and in an interview with the West German magazine *Die Bunte* in September of 1983 he declared that, 'I am not ashamed to be Russian. I am ashamed for my political leadership'.¹¹⁶ Throughout his internment, he had received visits from high-ranking officials at the Soviet embassy who had pressured him to return home at the end of his internment. He escaped to West Germany because it was geographically close and because, unlike the Swiss, 'they don't collude with the Soviets'.¹¹⁷

The issue of repatriation remained unresolved until the two-year internment period of the first three prisoners ended in 1984. On 12 March 1984, the National Assembly (*Nationalrat*) – the lower house of the Swiss parliament – scheduled a public debate to discuss the political consequences of the prisoners' choice in the matter. According to Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert, the Swiss government's plan was still for the original three prisoners to return to the Soviet Union on 27 May 1984.¹¹⁸ Yet instead of following up with a formal guarantee, Aubert took the liberty to depart from the original arrangement between the ICRC and the Soviet Union of 22 January 1982. Instead, he announced that:

If, at the end of their internment, any of the internees express their desire not to go back, to stay in Switzerland or to go to a different country, that will, freely expressed, will be respected. We will force none of them to return to their home country against their will.¹¹⁹

This was a critical turning point for the prisoner transfer scheme. Despite initial hesitations to become diplomatically involved in the Afghan crisis, the ICRC's prisoner transfer scheme appeared to provide an opportunity for the Swiss authorities to demonstrate the compatibility of their neutrality and their humanitarian tradition – the two key components of Max Petitpierre's 1947 doctrine of 'Neutrality and Solidarity'. Meanwhile, having given their consent to the transfer operation, the Swiss authorities had observed a dwindling number of transferees, the escape of one, repeated expulsions of the ICRC from Afghanistan as well as criticism in the Swiss and international press about the personal implications of the operation for the prisoners themselves. Verifying the POWs' inclinations towards repatriation may have been an attempt to reassert Switzerland's continued commitment to neutrality and humanitarianism in view of these new circumstances.

¹¹⁴ Bürgisser, Zala and Fischer, "Always Hit Back Right on the Kisser", 278.

¹¹⁵ Evéquoz, Note de Dossier: Internés soviétiques – Disparition de Iouri Vachtchenko, 11 Jul. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2765*; Brunner, Note de dossier: Internés militaires soviétiques/ Vachtchenko /Entrevue avec l'Ambassadeur d'URSS, Mercredi 27 juillet 1983, 28 Jul. 1983, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2765*.

¹¹⁶ *Die Bunte*, 'Ein Russe packt aus', 15 Sept. 1983, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*, author's translation from, 'Ich schäme mich nicht, ein Russe zu sein. Ich schäme mich für meine politische Führung'.

¹¹⁷ *Die Bunte*, 'Ein Russe packt aus', 15 Sept. 1983, CH-BAR, J1.301#2002/197#549*, author's translation from 'Deutschland steckt nicht mit den Sowjets unter einer Decke'.

¹¹⁸ N.a., Antwort von Bundesrat P. Aubert vom 12. März auf die parlamentarische Anfrage Clivaz, 27 Apr. 1984, CH-BAR, E2023A#1993/129#2766*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, author's translation from, 'Je voudrais redire ici très clairement ce qui suit: si l'un ou l'autre des internés devait à l'échéance exprimer le désir de ne pas rentrer, de rester en Suisse ou de gagner un autre pays, sa volonté librement exprimée serait respectée'.

What was more, while the prisoner transfer scheme had become a highly visible component of Swiss-Soviet relations during this period, it did not at any point threaten to derail them. In fact, Olga Pavlenko has recently argued that, ‘Unlike Austria and Finland, there was always a considerable distance in the relations between Switzerland and the Soviet Union’.¹²⁰ A range of issues, including a strong domestic sense of nationalism and anti-communism in Switzerland, arguably stood in the way of closer diplomatic ties between both countries.¹²¹ Additionally, as Thomas Bürgisser, Sacha Zala and Thomas Fischer have pointed out, the FDFA had concurrently also taken on a protective power mandate on behalf of the United States to conduct their diplomatic relations in Iran, following the revolutionary takeover of 1979.¹²²

The impact of the prisoner transfer scheme on Swiss-Soviet relations may also have remained small, because the majority of those prisoners who had chosen to partake in the transfer scheme did chose to repatriate voluntarily. As a result, Jacques de Watteville, who oversaw the prisoner transfer operation at the FDFA’s Directorate for International Organisations at the time, concluded that, ‘despite temporary tensions, we can deduce that the impact of this operation on our bilateral relations with the Soviet Union was rather positive’.¹²³ Three weeks prior to 27 May, when their internment was due to end, the Swiss Foreign Ministry formally invited the three original Soviet POWs, Didienko, Povarnitsin and Sintshuk, to re-state their intentions with regards to repatriation. Didienko decided to return home, while Povarnitsin and Sintshuk chose to stay.¹²⁴ Didienko was driven to Zurich-Kloten airport on 27 May, where he boarded an Aeroflot flight to Moscow in the presence of the FDFA, the ICRC and officials from the Soviet embassy.¹²⁵ Being the first to repatriate to the Soviet Union, he initially maintained regular correspondence with Markus Zemp, his former translator on the Zugerberg. According to this correspondence, Didienko returned to his native Ukraine, where he first stayed with his parents in Zaporoshie and then settled in Kiev where he resumed work as a crane operator on various construction sites.¹²⁶

Sintchouk and Povarnitsin both attempted to settle in Switzerland but encountered difficulties. Sintchouk briefly settled in Binningen, a German-speaking village close to the city of Basel on the border to West Germany and France. There, he took up employment as an agricultural labourer on the farm of Andreas Koellreuter.¹²⁷ Yet to Koellreuter’s surprise, one day Sintchouk simply disappeared. Records at the Swiss Federal Archives locate him in Australia several years later.¹²⁸ Povarnitsin was the only former prisoner to apply for political asylum in Switzerland. His application was originally rejected but eventually successful upon appeal, and he settled in the region of Lake Geneva. In December of 1985, he moved to Bovy near Chexbres, where he began to work as an agricultural technician.¹²⁹

¹²⁰ Olga Pavlenko, ‘The Soviet Union and Neutral Switzerland: Concerns and Hopes in 1989’, in Mark Kramer, Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko, eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 173; 178.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²² Bürgisser, Zala and Fischer, ‘Always Hit Back Right on the Kisser’, 278.

¹²³ Jacques de Watteville, Note de dossier: Bilan de l’opération Zugerberg – Internement de prisonniers soviétiques en Suisse (1982–6), 5 May 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*.

¹²⁴ Jacques de Watteville, Sort des soldats soviétiques ayant terminé leur période d’internement en Suisse, 20 Jan. 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ N.a., Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen: Wie Walerij versucht, so zu leben wie alle, 2 Nov. 1990, CH-BAR, E2200.157–04#2000/409#53*; ICRC archival documents are much more detailed on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 Mar. 2017.

¹²⁷ Jacques De Watteville, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 11 Dec. 2018.; De Watteville, Sort des soldats soviétiques ayant terminé leur période d’internement en Suisse, 20 Jan. 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*.

¹²⁸ N.a., Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen: Wie Walerij versucht, so zu leben wie alle, 2 Nov. 1990, CH-BAR, E2200.157–04#2000/409#53*.

¹²⁹ De Watteville, Note de dossier: Bilan de l’opération Zugerberg: internement de prisonniers soviétiques en Suisse (1982–6), 5 May 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*; N.a., Pressemitteilung: Asylentscheid im Fall Povarnitsin, 25 May 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*.

Without exception, all of the remaining Soviet prisoners returned to the Soviet Union. Even Youri Washenko returned, after having originally applied for political asylum in West Germany.¹³⁰ The last Soviet prisoner of war left Switzerland on 26 March 1986 and, overall, the prisoner transfer scheme never exceeded eleven prisoners in total. The Swiss Foreign Ministry even argued in its concluding report that the decision of the Swiss government to verify the voluntary repatriation of the prisoners, followed by the apparently voluntary repatriation of most prisoners, may ultimately have salvaged the ICRC's recurrent attempts to return to Afghanistan. According to Jacques de Watteville, 'It even seems as though under these circumstances, [the Soviet Union] encouraged the Afghan government to resume negotiations with the ICRC to arrange for its activities in Afghanistan to continue'.¹³¹

On 6 April 1986, after six years of negotiation, repeated visits and recurring expulsions, the ICRC received permission to return to Kabul.¹³² The conservative daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published an enthusiastic commentary on the occasion, emphasising that 'for the first time in four years, an ICRC delegation will visit Afghanistan'.¹³³ Others, such as the daily *Tages-Anzeiger*, were slightly more cautious, arguing that the terms of the Afghan regime's invitation were actually quite 'vague' and that, interestingly, the invitation coincided with the first rumours that the Red Army might begin to unilaterally withdraw some of its troops from Afghanistan.¹³⁴ In the meantime, on 13 April, Jean de Courten, the ICRC's Delegate General for Asia, personally led the ICRC's renewed mission to Kabul, and it turned out to be the ICRC's most successful mission to date. It precipitated a further round of negotiations with the Afghan regime, the results of which allowed the ICRC to establish a permanent presence in the country starting in March 1987.¹³⁵ What was more, not only was the ICRC now authorised to operate in the government-controlled areas but in all areas controlled by the *mujahideen* as well.

As might have been expected, complications surrounding the ICRC's presence in Afghanistan led to a renewed interruption of inspections between July and December of 1987.¹³⁶ According to the conservative Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the government of Mohammad Najibullah had briefly refused to comply with the ICRC's confidentiality criteria during its prison visits.¹³⁷ This time however, the ICRC itself chose to interrupt its visits.¹³⁸ The interruption was shorter than previous ones and the ICRC was not only allowed to return the following year but to open its first ever hospital in Kabul.¹³⁹ Originally, the clinic operated with fifty patient beds, yet by the end of 1990 this number had increased to 280. Between January and December of 1990, it had admitted 4,088 patients, carried out 8,724 surgical interventions and seen 7,189 out-patients.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁰ N.a., Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen: Wie Walerij versucht so zu leben wie alle, 2 Nov. 1990, CH-BAR, E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*.

¹³¹ De Watteville, Note de dossier: Bilan de l'opération Zugerberg: internement de prisonniers soviétiques en Suisse (1982-6), 5 May 1986, CH-BAR, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, author's translation from, 'Il semble même que dans ce contexte elle ait encouragé le gouvernement afghan à reprendre des négociations avec le CICR en vue d'une reprise de ses activités en Afghanistan'.

¹³² ICRC, Afghan Sitrep No. 49, 23 Apr. 1986, CH-BAR, E2023A#1998/212#976*.

¹³³ N.a., Sondierungsgespräche des IKRK in Afghanistan, NZZ, 9 Apr. 1986, *Bibliotheca Afghanica* (CH-SBA), Bubendorf, Switzerland, Press Collection, author's translation from, 'Erstmals nach vier Jahren besuchte in dieser Woche wieder eine Delegation des IKRK Afghanistan'.

¹³⁴ Pierre Simonitsch, Das IKRK hat wieder einen Fuss in Afghanistan, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 15 Apr. 1986, CH-SBA, Press Collection.

¹³⁵ ICRC, Afghan Sitrep No. 64 (Jan. to Jun. 1987), Jun. 1987, CH-BAR, E2023#1998/212#861*; ICRC, Pressecommuniqué Nr. 1531: Wiederaufnahme der IKRK-Aktivitäten in Afghanistan, 3 Feb. 1987, CH-BAR, E2023#1998/212#861*.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ N.a., Wieder IKRK-Gefangenenbesuche in Kabul: Entsendung einer achtköpfigen Delegation, NZZ, 9 Feb. 1988, CH-SBA, Press Collection.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ N.a., 'Afghanistan', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 30, S1 (1990), 53.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

With support from the Swiss government, the ICRC became the first major humanitarian aid organisation to gain access to the Afghan interior with the consent of the Afghan regime. Archival materials at the Swiss Federal Archives do not suggest that the Swiss government in any way controlled or dominated the ICRC over the course of the prisoner transfer operation or during the ICRC's return to Afghanistan. Rather, despite having initially hesitated to become diplomatically involved in the Afghan crisis on account of its neutrality, the Swiss authorities subsequently provided the neutral ground for the internment of eleven Soviet POWs on behalf of the ICRC between 1982 and 1986. They conducted the day-to-day operations of the internment and thereby enabled the ICRC to return to Afghanistan by 1987. In doing so, the Swiss government transitioned from a conventional provider of humanitarian aid to a provider of an unprecedented form of good offices and demonstrated two aspects of neutral foreign policy that could benefit from further discussion in the literature on permanently neutral states during the Cold War period. The first was that permanent neutrality did not mean aloofness or idleness. The second was that Switzerland's eventual diplomatic involvement in the Afghan crisis was to a large extent driven by a series of non-state actors, including the ICRC and the Afghan *mujahideen*. Further research might investigate comparable cases amongst permanently neutral states in situations of armed conflict.

In the meantime, the present article adds an important dimension to the ongoing historiographical debate on the Cold War relationship between the Swiss government and the ICRC. Writing in 1985, J.D. Armstrong has argued that 'Switzerland has given the ICRC something approaching to diplomatic status' and, in this respect, the ICRC is unique among non-governmental international organisations.¹⁴¹ Former ICRC director Cornelio Sommaruga later relativised this argument in a 1992 contribution to the *International Review of the Red Cross* when he wrote that, 'The historical ties between the ICRC and the Confederation helped to create a situation whereby, for a long time, it is true, the ICRC's neutrality was identified with Swiss neutrality'.¹⁴² The difference between the two, he argued, was that Swiss neutrality is based on its conduct towards states, while the neutrality of the ICRC rests on its conduct towards individuals – towards victims of conflict.¹⁴³ Over time, the Swiss government and the ICRC came to benefit from each other's neutrality. Their relationship was symbiotic but not interdependent. The ICRC gained the diplomatic status of a neutral non-governmental organisation and Switzerland gained a reputation for humanitarianism.

As such, the work of the ICRC differs from other European humanitarian aid organisations such as MSF and SCA, whose work in Afghanistan has been analysed extensively.¹⁴⁴ Part of the reason why the ICRC lacks affiliation with a particular government, why it insists on being neutral in an armed conflict and why it refuses to engage in cross-border humanitarian operations without the consent of the government concerned is that the ICRC has a unique mandate to protect and promote compliance with international humanitarian law among conflict parties. Unlike the SCA and MSF, the ICRC operated on the basis of the assumption that states were the principal actors responsible for the implementation of international humanitarian law and it therefore required their explicit cooperation for the provision of humanitarian aid. Working with POWs was an aspect of the ICRC's work which rested implicitly on this assumption. Admittedly, the ICRC's approach to return to Afghanistan turned out to take much longer than the cross-border approach taken by MSF and the SCA, yet eventually, the ICRC did manage to return with the consent of the Afghan authorities.

This is not to say that either the ICRC or the Swiss government had a substantial impact on the outcome of the war in Afghanistan. Overall, the prisoner transfer scheme never exceeded eleven prisoners and hostilities continued even after the Soviet Union withdrew its forces in 1989. Rather,

¹⁴¹ Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners', 641.

¹⁴² Cornelio Sommaruga, 'Swiss neutrality, ICRC neutrality: Are they indissociable? An Independence worth protecting', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 32, 288 (1992), 266.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁴⁴ Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development?', 222.

Switzerland's involvement in the ICRC's prisoner transfer scheme showed many Afghans that Switzerland was authentically neutral in the Afghan crisis and that both its humanitarian tradition and its good offices were genuine. This in turn was a significant development in Switzerland's pursuit of defining a role for itself as a small, neutral state in a changing international environment. Olga Pavlenko has recently argued that, 'there was a clear surge in the foreign policy activities of Switzerland against the background of the system-wide collapse that covered not only the Soviet Union, but also the entire Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations'.¹⁴⁵ In the case of Afghanistan, both the Afghan authorities and a substantial number of moderate *mujahideen* resistance groups approached the Swiss government for neutral mediation, following the Soviet withdrawal of 1989.¹⁴⁶ The Soviet Union welcomed these exchanges and, following its collapse in 1991, the Russian Federation approached the Swiss government to facilitate the repatriation of POWs who had remained in the hands of the *mujahideen* after the Soviet withdrawal.¹⁴⁷ What therefore in essence became evident during the course of the Swiss government's involvement in the Afghan conflict between 1982 and 1986 was not only that its permanent neutrality did not equate to disengagement, but rather that it had practical implications for both state and non-state actors involved.

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¹⁴⁵ Pavlenko, 'The Soviet Union and Neutral Switzerland', 179.

¹⁴⁶ Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace', 74.

¹⁴⁷ Christian Fotsch, Notiz an Botschafter Simonin: Sowjetische POWs in Afghanistan, 16 May 1990, CH-BAR, E2010-01A#1996/396#2*; N.a., Offizieller Arbeitsbesuch von Herrn Staatssekretär Jacobi in der UdSSR (14. Bis 20. Nov. 1991), 6 Nov. 1991, CH-BAR, E2010A#2001/161#1725*.