

14. R. L. Nosworthy (Ambassade de Grande-Bretagne à Rome) à Prunas (Ministère italien des Affaires étrangères), 30.1.1945

British Embassy  
Rome, 30th January, 1945

Dear Dr. Prunas,

We have received instructions from the Foreign Office to invite the urgent attention of the Italian Government to the possibility of securing the complete cessation of the German-Italian transit traffic via Switzerland.

2 – [sic] For your confidential information, I may explain that considerable restrictions of the traffic have already been obtained from the Swiss Government, due to the natur[e] of the goods which are allowed transit. The Simplon route is now closed except for local traffic and, thanks to the allied advance in Alsace, th[at] the route from thence via Basle is being cut, with a consequent large reduction in supplies from Germany. The transit traffic is, however, continuing via the St. Gothard route and it has not hitherto been possible to persuade the Swiss Government to impose further restrictions, since the Swiss Government contends that its hands are tied by the St. Gothard Convention. There is, however, some reason to think that a fresh attack upon the problem from a different angle might encounter a good deal less resistance on the part of the Swiss Government.

3 – Article 3 of the St. Gothard Convention clearly allows the Swiss Government to suspend the traffic on the grounds of neutrality or national defence. His Majesty's Government believe that the Swiss Government could, and indeed should, invoke the ordinary obligations of a neutral not to allow a belligerent to send across neutral territory supplies (of whatever kind) destined for the maintenance of its forces in the field or for its occupation forces in occupied territory. In the present case, even if certain of the supplies involved have ostensibly an Italian civilian destination, the whole of the north of Italy is controlled by German forces. The effect of these supplies is either to release local supplies for the use of German forces, or to keep in production factories making supplies for those forces, or to set free other routes (such as the Brenner) for the exclusive carriage of arms and munitions.

4 – His Majesty's Government suggest that the Italian Government, making use of the fact that it is recognised by the Swiss Government as the only *de jure* Government of Italy should call upon the Swiss Government to suspend the traffic on the St. Gothard route on the above mentioned grounds of the assistance which is being rendered to Italy's enemies by supplies from Germany, and on the ground of the Italian property which is being looted and sent to Germany by the enemy. The Italian Government could argue that there is ample ground upon which Switzerland can and should invoke h[is] position as a neutral under Article 3 of the Convention. The additional point could be made that the Convention was intended to facilitate traffic between the two ind[e]pendent states of Germany and Italy, but not traffic between Germany and territory under German occupation and control.

5 – It is further suggested that the Italian Government might at the same time, demand that, if the Swiss are unable to agree to the action suggested under Article 3 of the



Convention, the question should be referred to arbitration under Article 13 and that the transit traffic should be suspended pending the result of the arbitration. It is, of course, true that Article 13 of the Convention does not really contemplate anything like a cessation of traffic, but it is in the present circumstances so strongly to the advantage of the Italian Government that the transit traffic should be stopped, that His Majesty's Government assumes that the Italian Government will be ready to take this course.

6 – The urgency of action on the above lines arises not only from obvious military considerations to which the Supreme Allied Commander attaches great importance, but from the fact that the British and United States Governments propose sending delegations to Berne in the very near future to discuss Swiss exports to Germany, transit traffic etc. The task of these delegations will be extremely difficult unless the Swiss can in the meantime be moved from their present position, which is that in no circumstances can they impose further restrictions upon the transit traffic. His Majesty's Government, for their part, therefore trust that the Italian Government will, in its own interest feel able to instruct the Italian Representative in Berne to act immediately in the sense of the preceding paragraphs.

7 – The foregoing suggestions have been fully discussed with the United States Government and I believe that the United States Embassy will be writing in the same sense to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Your sincerely  
R.L. Nosworthy  
for the Ambassador

*Source:* AfZ, AMAE, AAEE, Mf 15 fasc 8; cf. p. 45 (note 26), p. 105 (note 77).