

# **An Opportunistic Ally**

*The Thai-Indonesian Relations during the Indonesian Revolution*

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Master's Thesis

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August 1, 2016

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## Introduction

At anchor in the drowsy and deserted harbor of Phuket, a tiny, pear-shaped island hugging the southwest coast of Thailand, lay a trim, black motor ship. When the sky darkened she swung in a wide arc and slipped out past two rock islands sheltering the mouth of the harbor. She ran without lights. A red and white Indonesian Republican flag fluttered from her stern. And as she sped southward across the Malacca Strait, an Indonesian-born Chinese stood at her helm. His name is John Lie.<sup>1</sup>

In 1949, Roy Rowan, a journalist of *LIFE* magazine, wrote the article from which the above quote was taken, dealing with the clandestine activities executed by Indonesian Republicans and people of other nationalities. The article mainly focuses on the smuggling of arms into the areas occupied by the Republic of Indonesia. It shows that while Thailand did not officially take sides in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, some Thais were actively involved in unofficial trades with the Republic. As none of the existing historiography has examined the connection between Thailand and Indonesia during the latter's war of independence, this thesis aims to explore the position and role of Thailand in the conflict. This study is important as it will further the understanding of Thai foreign policies as well as the structure of world politics in the post-WWII era. The main research questions of this thesis are: (1) How did the relations, both official and unofficial, between Thailand and Indonesia develop during the Indonesian Revolution? And (2) why did the Thai-Indonesian relations develop in such ways? This thesis argues that Thailand took a hypocritically neutral stance during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Shortly before the conflict ended, Thailand, however, shifted to a pro-Indonesian stance. This change of Thailand's position was to a certain extent a result of the US's stance on the issue.

## Previous Related Studies

It is indisputable that Indonesia did not obtain its independence in December 1949 solely as a result of the fighting against the Dutch in the area formerly called the Netherlands East Indies, nor did the Dutch grant Indonesia its sovereignty as an act of mercy. The success of Indonesia in getting its independence also depended heavily on the international support. The US, which

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<sup>1</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Roy Rowan, "Guns and Bibles are smuggled to Indonesia," *LIFE*, September 26, 1949.

emerged as the hegemon in the new international system after the WWII, played a decisive role in settling the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, and a number of other countries influenced the course of the conflict.

Since international support was vital to the conflict, scholars in the field of Indonesian Revolution studies have paid much attention to the diplomatic support from Western nations. In the wake of WWII, according to Oey Hong Lee, the UK was the first country that mediated negotiations between the Netherlands and the Republic. This assistance led to the conclusion of the Linggajati Agreement in 1946.<sup>2</sup> The Agreement, however, did not solve the conflict peacefully. Another publication by Lee suggests that the US became involved in the conflict after the Dutch had launched a military campaign in July 1947. The US offered its good offices for negotiations and became one of the principal mediators. Yet, it took a mostly pro-Dutch stance. Only later did the US change its position and pressure the Dutch to grant sovereignty to Indonesia, by suspending economic aid of which the Netherlands was badly in need.<sup>3</sup>

Putting US foreign policies regarding the Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the context of the Cold War, Robert J. McMahon answers the question why the US changed its stance. Immediately after World War II, the main focus of the US was to prevent Europe from falling to Communism. The American policymakers thought that the well-being of the European economy would keep Europe away from communism. In the case of the Netherlands, its colony in Southeast Asia was necessary for the restoration of the Dutch economy. The US thus supported the Dutch to reoccupy Indonesia. The US, however, began to change its stance when it realized that the war between the Netherlands and the Indonesian Republic might replace the nationalists with communists. After the Republic crushed its communist fraction in 1948, the US became fully supportive of the Indonesian cause.<sup>4</sup>

Frances Gouda and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg share this view. The US, as they argue, reoriented its foreign policy in 1948. In the eyes of American policymakers, Western Europe became relatively safe from communism as its economy had already stabilized. Asia then

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<sup>2</sup> Oey Hong Lee, "British-Dutch relations and the Republic of Indonesia", *Asian Affairs* 3 (1976): 35-53.

<sup>3</sup> Oey Hong Lee, *War and Diplomacy in Indonesia 1945-1950* (Townsville, Australia: Committee of South-East Asian Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

became the new focal point of US foreign policy. The destruction of communist Republicans in 1948 therefore made the Americans support the Republic.<sup>5</sup>

The Dutch-Indonesian conflict was also settled under the auspices of an international organization, namely the UN. In fact, the negotiations between the disputed parties were not mediated by individual nations. They were mediated by the UN-established bodies: the Committee of Good Offices (GOC) and the United Commission for Indonesia (UNCI). The US, according to Alastair M. Taylor, was dominant in these bodies and could lobby other members to follow its opinion regarding the conflict. The way in which the UN solved the Indonesian question thus depended considerably on the US.<sup>6</sup>

So far it can be seen that historians generally accept that the US was a decisive factor in the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia. It could lobby other nations that mediated the negotiations and could force the Dutch directly through its economic power. The capacity of the US in settling the conflict, as suggested by these works, implies the dominant status of the US in world politics after the WWII.

In addition to the role of the US, however, some scholars have highlighted the significant roles of several newly emerging countries in assisting the Republic of Indonesia. This trend of research argues that the Republic had received crucial support especially from India and Australia in the period before the US became interested in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. This trend also implies the solidarity of newly emerging countries, some of which would later go on to unite into the so-called “non-aligned movement” that aimed to be the third alternative in the bipolar politics of the Cold War.

Although Australia did not express its opinion on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict immediately after the WWII, its labor unions, according to Rupert Lockwood, started to back Indonesia as early as 1945 by boycotting the ships that would reinforce the Dutch army in reoccupying the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>7</sup> Later, the Labor government of Australia officially supported the Republic of Indonesia after the first Dutch aggression by introducing the issue of Dutch violence to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Gouda and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism, 1920-1949* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Alastair M. Taylor, *Indonesian Independence and the United Nations* (London: Stevens & Sons limited, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada* (Sydney: Australian Book Society, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret George, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980).

During the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, Indian support for the Republic was second to none. Research by P.R.S. Mani has shown that Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian prime minister, had promised to support Indonesia even before India obtained its full independence. Besides Australia, India was another country that raised the matter of Dutch aggression to the UNSC. India played another crucial part in the conflict after the second Dutch aggression. It arranged a conference in New Delhi that raised support and sympathy for Indonesia. The resolutions from this conference were subsequently submitted to the UNSC as recommendations.<sup>9</sup> The support from India and Australia for the Republic, in Samuel E. Crowl's opinion, initiated cooperation among the newly emerging countries. Later this cooperation, as Crowl argues, offered the international system of the Cold War era another alternative that neither aligned with the US nor the USSR.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the works discussed so far were written between the 1960s and 1980s. These works tended to approach the topic of the Indonesian mainly through the diplomatic aspect. However, there was a shift in the way in which historians approach the topic from the 1990s onwards. A new set of works tended to study forms of indirect or unofficial support for the Indonesian cause.

In *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution 1945-50*, Suryono Darusman, a former staff member of the Indonesia office in Singapore, recorded the roles of Singapore, its government, and its people during the Indonesian Revolution. He argues that Singapore was an important base of support for Indonesia from outside. According to Darusman, Singapore's government was tolerant towards Indonesians and their illegal activities. The people of Singapore also sympathized with the struggle of the Indonesians. Moreover, the Chinese businessmen proved to be efficient in the trades between Singapore and Indonesia even when there was a Dutch blockade. Lastly, post-WWII Singapore was a giant warehouse of military equipment including arms—the most needed material for the struggle of Indonesia against its colonizer.<sup>11</sup>

A more in-depth study about Singapore in the Indonesian Revolution is that of Yong Mun Cheong. He examines the rise and fall of trade activities including the smuggling of arms

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<sup>9</sup> P. R. S. Mani, *The Story of Indonesian Revolution* (Madras: University of Madras, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Samuel E. Crowl, "Indonesia's Diplomatic Revolution: Lining Up for Non-Alignment, 1945-1955", in: *Connecting Histories: Decolonisation and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962*, eds Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Suryono Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-50: Recollections of Suryono Darusman* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992).

between Singapore and Indonesia and concludes that trades were more difficult to conduct as the Dutch tightened their blockade during the last period before the war of independence ended. A similar story of trades between Singapore and the Republic can also be found in *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia and the Transition to Independence* by Twang Peck Yang.<sup>12</sup> Although these works give us a new perspective on the issue of international support for the Indonesian freedom struggle, they confine their scope only to Singapore as if it was the only place that extended unofficial support to the Republic.

Regarding the connection between Thailand and the Indonesian Revolution, there is only one brief article by Omar Farouk Bajunid. Based exclusively on interviews with several Indonesians in Thailand, he wrote on the formation and activities of an organization called the Indonesian Independence League. This organization was established in 1946 and aimed to support the Republic on the world stage by urging the Thai government to recognize the Republican government. Unfortunately, it largely failed to do so.<sup>13</sup>

From the survey of the existing literature, one can conclude that attention is mainly paid to the diplomatic support from the US, the UK, India, and Australia. To a lesser extent, scholars have also studied unofficial support from Singapore. From the fact that Singapore was still a British colony during the Indonesian Revolution and the article by Bajunid is not conclusive, it is fair to say that scholars have not fully studied roles and positions of other independent countries in Southeast Asia towards to the conflict.

Since Indonesia is also located in the region of Southeast Asia, scholars should pay more attention to the politics of this region. It should be noted that Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand were independent countries in Southeast Asia during the Indonesian Revolution. Although the roles of Myanmar and the Philippines have not been fully studied, their stance in the conflict is mentioned. As former colonies themselves, they tended to support the Indonesians.<sup>14</sup> Such a clear position, however, could not be seen from Thailand until it

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<sup>12</sup> Yong Mun Cheong, *The Indonesian Revolution and the Singapore Connection* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003); Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia and the Transition to Independence 1940-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Omar Farouk Bajunid, "The Indonesian Independence League in Bangkok", *JEBAT* 14 (1986): 117-125.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, U Nu, Myanmar's Prime Minister, urged Nehru to arrange a conference to support Indonesia after the second Police Action. See Mani, *The Story of Indonesian Revolution*, 100. The Philippines declared its support to the Republic of Indonesia as early as 1945. At the New Delhi conference in 1949, it also showed its support to Indonesia in the resolutions concluded at the conference. See Bajunid, "The Indonesian Independence League in Bangkok," 119; and Russell Fifield, "Philippine Foreign Policy", *Far Eastern Survey* 4(1951): 37.

officially recognized the Republic at a very late stage of the conflict, as will be shown in this thesis.

The reason why Thailand was silent in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict may lie in the foreign policy tradition of neutrality which Thailand had long adopted since the nineteenth century. As Charivat Santaputra states in *Thai Foreign Policy, 1932-1946*, the major concern of Thailand during the period of high colonialism until WWII was to maintain its independence. It established relations with all Western nations that came into contact without favoritism. This neutrality enabled Thailand to play one country against another whenever there were threats to its freedom.<sup>15</sup> Similar remarks are made in “Thailand’s Foreign Policy: An Analysis of its evolution since World War II” by Liang Chi Shad. He also observed two major shifts in Thai foreign policy after WWII. Shad claims that there was a short period between 1945-1947 in which Thailand was relatively favorable towards the Asian struggle for independence. However, this policy ended with the coming of the Phibun government in 1948 (also see chapter 1 below). From then on, Thailand adopted a neutral stance once again. Yet, it was inclined to prioritize good relations with the US. Thailand eventually aligned with the US in 1950 because of the rise of communism in Asia.<sup>16</sup> In *A Special Relationship*, Daniel Fineman also agrees that Thailand began to turn to the US in 1948. Yet, in his analysis it was not because of the communist threat. Phibun chose to align with the US in 1950 in exchange for American aid that was necessary for stabilizing his government. This decision of Phibun, to cite Fineman, was a “revolution” of the Thai foreign policy as it broke a long tradition of neutrality.<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, the official recognition of the Indonesian Republic by Thailand came at the time when the Thai government was negotiating the American aid with Washington.

In the light of these studies, it is interesting to study the Thai-Indonesian relations during the Indonesian Revolution because such a study can test the understanding of Thai foreign policy after WWII. Was it really initially favorable towards Indonesian struggle for independence, (how) did that stance change, and what were the factors that contributed to the Thai position? The study of Thai-Indonesian relations also contributes a clearer picture of the post-WWII international system in which the US had the hegemonic status. Moreover, this

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<sup>15</sup> Charivat Santaputra, *Thai Foreign Policy, 1932-1946* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Liang Chi Shad, *Thailand's Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Its Evolution since World War II*, Occasional Paper Series of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Graduate Studies, Nanyang University; No. 73 (Singapore: Nanyang University, College of Graduate Studies, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and military government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

study of Thai-Indonesian relations suggest that Singapore was not the only place that gave Indonesia indirect support. Finally, in contrast to the case of India and Australia, this study of the case of Thai support suggests that Thailand did not support Indonesia because it wanted to initiate cooperation among peripheral countries which occurred in the post-WWII era.

## **Materials and Methods**

In this thesis, I rely mainly on materials gathered in the archive of the Dutch legation in Bangkok and the archive of the Far East Department. These archives consist of various kinds of documents. All of them are kept at the National Archive in The Hague. Most of them are letters, telegrams, and reports which were sent from the Dutch legation in Bangkok to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague or to other Dutch legations in Southeast Asia and vice versa. Some materials are newspapers clippings from Thailand. Some materials are confiscated or intercepted from the Republicans by the Dutch intelligence service. Since the Netherlands held high stakes in the conflict, the Dutch legation in Bangkok followed the activities and movements of the republicans who worked in Thailand closely. Consequently, these archives give extensive insights into the activities of Indonesian agents as well as the trilateral relations between Thailand, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Indonesia. Yet, it should be noted that these materials were created from the Dutch perspective. At times, it can be difficult to extract from these materials what the Thais were really thinking regarding the Dutch-Indonesian conflict because, out of diplomatic courtesy, the Thais generally inclined to be nice to the Dutch. Future research should therefore further include material from Thai archives that were not available to me while writing this thesis.

Memoirs also constitute an integral part of the material for this thesis. The most important one was written by John Coast, a Briton who worked with the Indonesian representative in Bangkok. His memoir, *Recruit to Revolution: Adventure and Politics during the Indonesian Struggle for Independence*, is a very useful record of the Republicans' activities in Thailand, although it is naturally heavily colored by Coast's sympathies and perspectives. Coast was acquainted and interacted with all the important actors in Thai-Indonesian relations. His memoir shows the way in which the Republicans approached Thai elites.<sup>18</sup> Beside Coast's, I use a memoir written by Konthi Suphamongkhon, former Director-General of the Department

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<sup>18</sup> John Coast, Laura Noszlopy, and Adrian Vickers, *Recruit to Revolution: Adventure and Politics during the Indonesian Struggle for Independence* (Copenhagen: Nias Press, 2015).

of Western Politics at the Thai Foreign Office. Although his memoirs does not mention anything directly related to the issue of Thai-Indonesian relations, it provides useful insights into the attitude of the author towards colonialism and the general tendencies of Thai foreign policies at the time.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, there are two limitations regarding the sources. Firstly, apart from newspapers clippings and a memoir, it was not possible for me during the writing of this thesis to access other Thai primary sources. Secondly, without the ability to read Bahasa Indonesia, I cannot work with untranslated sources in Indonesian. To compensate for this, I use secondary literature on Thai foreign policy. All of them are mention above. For the Indonesian foreign policies, I rely on the works of Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung.<sup>20</sup>

Although the issue of the Indonesian Revolution involves both the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia equally, this thesis pays more attention to the Thai-Indonesian relations, albeit mainly through the lens of Dutch sources, as they were the party standing in the way of official Thai-Indonesian diplomatic relations.

This thesis examines the Thai-Indonesian relations through aspects both of official diplomatic relations and of unofficial relations, in this case: (illicit) trade and movements of people to and from the Republic. The explanation of why Thailand acted in the way it did will be drawn from the concerns that Thailand had in that period. In other words, this thesis also looks at the relations between Thailand and the Netherlands as well as some of Thailand's internal issues at the time.

This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter seeks to answer how the idea of an official recognition of the Republic by the Thai government developed. It identifies the agents who pushed the issue forward and the reasons for the Thai government to stall. How did Indonesian agents approach the Thai government? How did the Thai government respond? How did Thai officials deal with the political status of the Republic when they attended international conferences? And when did Thailand finally recognize the Republic of Indonesia?

The second chapter explores unofficial relations — trade and movement of people — between Thailand and the Republic. What kinds of activities were executed in Thailand? Who were involved in these activities? How were these activities done? To what extent did these

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<sup>19</sup> Konthi Suphamongkhon, *On the foreign policy of Thailand during 1940-1952* (การวิเทศนศาสตร์ของไทย: ระหว่างปีพุทธศักราช 2483 ถึง 2495) (Bangkok: Arun Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *Twenty years Indonesian foreign policy 1945-1965* (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana university press, 1990).

activities succeed? In other words, were these unofficial relations prohibited, encouraged, or met by a neutral stance by the Thai government?

Although historical evidence clearly shows Thailand's involvement in the Indonesian Revolution, Thailand fails to feature in the existing literature of the topic. Since the study of Thai-Indonesian relations may advance our understanding of the Thai foreign policies and the post-WWII international system, this thesis will explore these relations in the pages that follow.

## **Chapter 1 - A Friend of All Is a Friend to None: The Diplomatic Relations between Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia, 1945-1949**

To understand Thailand's position in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, this chapter chronologically examines the process of granting recognition to the Republic by the Thai government. It looks at the Indonesian agents who approached the Thai government, the strategy they used, the reaction from the Thais, as well as the reasons why Thailand chose to develop such positions.

After the war, there was a short period between 1945 and 1947 in which Thailand deviated from the policy of neutrality and supported the fight of Southeast Asian countries against their colonizers. The government under Pridi Banomyong aided nationalists in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam by sending weapons into the French Indochina. Thailand was also the headquarters of the Southeast Asia League, a short-lived regional front against colonialism that was founded in September 1947. But in 1948, Field Marshal Phibun<sup>21</sup> ascended to his second premiership. Phibun<sup>21</sup> wanted to erase his war-time image of a Japanese ally so he adopted an overwhelmingly pro-western policy to please the former Allied powers, especially the US and the UK. Eventually, Thailand fully abandoned its neutrality and formally aligned itself with the US in 1950 because of the rise of communist threats in Asia.<sup>22</sup> From this background, it may be concluded that Thailand was generally neutral in world politics but it would take side when there was a necessity. In this chapter it will be explored how these general tendencies of Thai foreign policies came to the fore in Thai-Indonesian relations.

### **1.2 So Close, Yet So Far: Thai-Indonesian Relations in 1947**

After the Republic of Indonesia had proclaimed its independence in August 1945, diplomacy was chosen as the primary means for obtaining its full freedom. The Republic's major foreign policies during the revolution were as followed: to obtain recognition from other countries, to defend its freedom, and to settle the Dutch-Indonesian conflict through negotiations with the help of mediators. Sutan Sjahrir, who became the prime minister in November 1945, operated these policies by sending Indonesian representatives to establish relations with India, Pakistan, and Egypt. According to Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, Sjahrir chose India and Pakistan because

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<sup>21</sup> Field Marshal Phibun<sup>21</sup> will be referred to as "Phibun" for the rest of this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Shad, *Thailand's foreign policy*: 6-7; and Fineman, *Special Relation*: 66-67.

they were going to be independent.<sup>23</sup> Surprisingly enough, he did not send a representative to Thailand, the only independent neighboring country in Southeast Asia at the time. The early stage of contact between Thailand and the Republic had been left to the Indonesian community in Bangkok before any official representatives arrived.

After WWII, there were approximately 4,000 Indonesians in Thailand. Most people of the community had come before the war and stayed in Thailand for more than two decades. A smaller group of the community had just been transported to Thailand during the war as labor for the Japanese army. Yet, the exact number of each group was not known. These people still contacted their families in Indonesia and were interested in the political developments of the archipelago. In Bangkok, the Indonesian community was centered in a Javanese mosque in Sathorn district. The community became aware of its duty in the Indonesian Revolution and formed the Indonesian Independence League (*Persatuan Indonesia Merdeka*) in 1946.<sup>24</sup>

The league consisted of about 500 members. It was led by Captain Mohamed Shariff bin Taib who was the chairman and treasurer. Mahmud bin Samarn was the league's secretary. Beside these two head figures, there were seven committee members who ran the league and arranged activities in Thailand. This organization was located in Bangrak district not far from the Javanese mosque.<sup>25</sup>

The league's main agenda was to balance the information concerning the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, because all the news on the issue was being manipulated by the Dutch legation in Bangkok. This effort was viewed by the league's leaders as complementing the ongoing international campaign. However, the most immediate task in the league's opinion was to have a dialogue with the Thai government in order to obtain support in the form of recognition of the Republican government. As mentioned earlier, Sjahrir did not send an official representative to Thailand; the league's acted entirely on its own initiative.<sup>26</sup>

This first mission was helped by Chaem Phromyong or Haji Shamsuddin, who was the Thai minister counsellor for Muslim affairs at that time. Chaem was a close colleague of Pridi Banomyong, the Thai prime minister between March and August 1946. Pridi's<sup>27</sup> was succeeded as prime minister by his nominee, Admiral Thamrongnavasawat. Pridi himself became a

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<sup>23</sup> Agung, *Indonesian foreign policy*: 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Bajunid, "Indonesian Independence League";: 117-119; and National Archives The Hague (NL-HaNA), Dutch diplomatic representative in Siam/Thailand (Gezantschap Thailand), 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Polderman to Directie Verre Oosten (Far East Department - DIRVO), 20 July 1948, 3064/0.201.212.202.1/61.

<sup>25</sup> Bajunid, "Indonesian Independence League";: 120.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> It is customary to call Thai people by their first name.

statesman but could still control the government. Thanks to his personal connection, Chaem managed to schedule a meeting between Pridi and the Indonesian league.<sup>28</sup> The league hoped that Pridi might be able to persuade the Thai government to recognize the Republic of Indonesia. Although it is not known exactly when this meeting took place, it must have taken place somewhere between July and August 1947. It will be explained below why the meeting occurred in that period.

In the first quarter of 1947, the Republic of Indonesia and the Netherlands signed the Linggajati Agreement. According to this agreement, the Netherlands would transfer its sovereignty to a projected United States of Indonesia, of which the Republic would form a component, in January 1949. In the meantime, the agreement recognized that the Republic had *de facto* authority over large parts of Java, Sumatra, and Madura. As a result of this agreement, the UK, the US, Australia, China, India and a number of Arab states recognized the Republic's *de facto* status.<sup>29</sup>

After signing the agreement on March 25, Sjahrir arrived in New Delhi on March 31. He was there to attend the Asian Relations Conference that had been organized by the government of India. There, Sjahrir met with the Thai foreign minister, Attakij Banomyong, a half-brother of Pridi. At the conference, Attakij invited Sjahrir to come to Thailand and discuss the matter of the recognition of the Indonesian Republic.<sup>30</sup> This occasion may have brought Sjahrir's attention to Thailand for the first time.

On his way back to Indonesia, Sjahrir stopped over in Thailand. He arrived on April 7 at Don Muang, an airfield in the north of Bangkok. At Don Muang, there were many people waiting for the arrival of Sjahrir. Among them were the Indian vice-consul, a group of people from the Indonesian community, a representative of the Vietnamese delegation, and B.A. Piets, the Dutch charge d'affaires. However, there were neither Thai civil servants nor representatives of the Thai government. In Piets' opinion, it was Sjahrir's first visit to Thailand and he was officially not a guest of the Thai government. The Thais may have thought that it would be better if Sjahrir was received by the Dutch legation. Nevertheless, Piets reported, Sjahrir seemed disappointed by his reception in Thailand.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bajunid, "Indonesian Independence League";: 121.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, *War and diplomacy*: 127; and Taylor, *Indonesian Independence*: 33.

<sup>30</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 58.

<sup>31</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 350, Piets to DIRVO, 15 April 1947, 13/303c.

At the airfield, Piets invited Sjahrir to a ride around Bangkok. Sjahrir accepted the offer but said he had to meet other delegates at the Suriyanond Hotel first. Later the Dutch legation came to know that he went to see Admiral Thamrongnavasawat and Attakij.<sup>32</sup>

After dinner, Sjahrir was accommodated at the Dutch Legation. There Piets had an opportunity to exchange opinions with Sjahrir. In his letter to the chief of the Far East Department, Piets reported that Sjahrir had been disappointed by his conversation with the Thai prime minister. From the fact that Sjahrir talked about the urgency to stimulate the spirit of Asian people, Piets got the impression that the Thai prime minister might not share the spirit for Asian solidarity which Sjahrir had expected. Nevertheless, Piets concluded in his letter that the relations between Thailand and the Republic would soon develop. He therefore suggested to the Far East Department to send non-Republican Indonesian representatives to Bangkok in order to counterbalance the activities of the Republicans.<sup>33</sup>

The Linggajati Agreement did not assure a peaceful cooperation towards the independence of Indonesia. It lasted only from March to July 1947. During these four months, the Netherlands and the Indonesian Republic continually blamed each other for not implementing the Agreement. The Netherlands established a series of small states under its sponsorship while the Republic undertook its own foreign affairs, which was not allowed by the agreement. The dispute eventually led to a military campaign by the Dutch on July 21, 1947. This campaign became known as the First Police Action.<sup>34</sup>

In the morning of that day, Sjahrir boarded the plane of Biju Patnaik, an Indian businessman who happened to be in Jogjakarta, and left for Singapore. On 23 July, he continued his journey to India on a British commercial plane.<sup>35</sup> The plane must have stopped over in Bangkok as the members of the Indonesian Independence League claimed that they were briefed on the latest developments in Indonesia just before the scheduled meeting with Pridi took place.<sup>36</sup> Yet, this arrival of Sjahrir in Bangkok cannot be confirmed in other sources.

It is clear now that the aforementioned meeting between the league and Pridi must have taken place in mid-1947. Surprisingly, during the conversation Pridi claimed that there had been no official contact with the Republic. Provided that Sjahrir did not send representatives to Thailand in 1945 and that he had only met some Thai politicians informally for the first time

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ailsa Zainu'ddin, *Modern Times Indonesia* (Victoria: Longman Australia Pty Limited, 1975): 69.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell South East Asia Program, 1994): 349.

<sup>36</sup> Farouk Bajunid, "Indonesian Independence League";: 121.

around April 1947, there may have been no official contact as Pridi claimed. Nevertheless, Pridi, sympathising with the Indonesians, encouraged the league to ask the Republican government to send an official delegation to Thailand. The league's representatives promised to take action immediately.<sup>37</sup>

Around September 1947, Haji Khasruddin, an Indonesian activist, came to Bangkok. He had several meetings with Shariff, the chairman of the League. Khasruddin was persuaded to go back to Indonesia. The plan was to request Mohammad Hatta, the vice president of the Republic, for an official delegation to seek Thai recognition of the Republican government. In Bukit Tinggi (Sumatra), Hatta was informed about Pridi's sympathy for the Republic. Consequently, he instructed Sudarsono, the Indonesian representative in India, to make a formal visit to Thailand.<sup>38</sup> At this point, it can be seen that the Republic began to contact Thailand officially. Although Sjahrir met some Thai politicians in March and April, he might not have made any further contact with the Thai government because he resigned from the office in June. This might be the reason why the Indonesian Independence League could take an active role in mediating with the Thais.

Another Indonesian young man came to Thailand in October 1947. He would soon become an important figure of the Republican affairs in Thailand until the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949. His name was Ishak Mahdi. Before coming to Bangkok, he was a representative of Bank Negara and an economic adviser of the Indonesia Office in Singapore. In Bangkok, he had a meeting with Shariff at Hotel Europe where Mahdi himself was staying. He explained to Shariff that he had been sent to Bangkok to assist Sudarsono who would soon visit Bangkok to discuss the recognition of the Republic by the Thai government.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile on October 7, *Liberty*, one of two English language newspapers in Thailand, reported that Dr. Zain and Mrs. Tanya were coming to Bangkok to represent the Republic of Indonesia. The Dutch Legation in Bangkok was surely unpleasantly surprised by this news. Piets called on Admiral Thamrongnavasawat and Kenneth Patton, the American advisor of the Thai government. Both the prime minister and the advisor were as surprised as the Dutch

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid: 122; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, DIRVO to Piets, 10 February 1948, P.S. 4/1575/12. In this letter, the Dutch civil servant spelled Haji Khasruddin's name as "Hadji Kasoerdin Rasoel" and reported that he came to Bangkok in September 1947. Considering the similarity of the name and the time that was believed to be his arrival time in Thailand, it is likely that these two names refer to the same person.

<sup>39</sup> Bajunid, "The Indonesian Independence League", : 122; Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 58; and National Archives The Hague (NL-HaNA), Directie Verre Oosten, 2.05.52, inv.nr. 412, Polderman to DIRVO, 16 June 1948, 2497/0.201.205/48.

diplomat since they did not know the people in the news. It is clear from the date on the letter from Piets to the chief of the Far East Department that those Indonesians mentioned in the news did not arrive in Bangkok even after the news had been released for more than ten days.<sup>40</sup>

Whether the news about Dr. Zain was true or false is not so important here. Considering this news together with the arrival of Mahdi, it clearly shows that an official Republican representative was scheduled to arrive sometime soon. The Dutch were also concerned about this and tried to interfere by communicating with the Thais.

The prospect of the recognition of the Republic by Thailand seemed very promising in 1947. Pridi seemed to be supportive of the recognition and the official representative of the Republic was on the way to Bangkok. Despite these facts, the Indonesians would shortly find themselves heartbroken.

On November 8, there was a coup by the Thai military. Pridi and his nominee lost their power. Khuang Aphaiwong, a royalist from the conservative Democrat party, was appointed to be the next prime minister. Two weeks later, this coup was endorsed by the Thai King who resided in Switzerland.<sup>41</sup> Although the Thai political scene had already changed and any contact with Pridi had been suspended due to the political uncertainty, Mahdi ignored the warning by the Indonesian Independence League and went to see the new prime minister. The result was disappointing. Khuang explained to Mahdi that Thailand could not grant the Republic recognition because his government also had to secure its own recognition by others, especially the Western nations. When Sudarsono arrived in Thailand days later, he too failed to secure any support from the Thai government.<sup>42</sup>

In an official answer to the government of the Republic, the Thai government expressed its sympathy towards the struggle for independence. However, Thailand as a member of the UN, claimed that it had to follow the resolutions of the organization. The Thai government stressed that Thailand was also in a difficult period, so it did not have time to study the current conflict in Indonesia. It also said the reception of the Indonesian delegation was not meant to be considered as official diplomatic protocol and that the granting of visa to Sudarsono should not be publicized.<sup>43</sup> This statement shows that Thailand, under the new government, used the

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<sup>40</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 350, Piets to DIRVO, 18 October 1947, 1296/0.201.22/72.

<sup>41</sup> Christ Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 142.

<sup>42</sup> Bajunid, "Indonesian Independence League";: 122; and Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 59.

<sup>43</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 350, Piets to Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - MinBuza), 29 November 1947, 1966/0.201.211/154.

UN as an excuse to stay silent on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. It had its own affairs to deal with.

However, the American advisor Patton shared his opinion with Piets that Thailand would be in a difficult situation after the new government had been recognized by other countries. In such case, it would be difficult for Thailand to negate the requests from the Republic. By contrast, Piets replied to Patton that the relations between Thailand and Indonesia were so insignificant that Thailand did not have any obligation to grant Indonesia recognition. If Thailand acted otherwise, it would be considered an unfriendly move towards the Netherlands and other states of the soon-to-be-founded United States of Indonesia.<sup>44</sup> It is not known exactly how people in the Khuang government thought of the Republic in late 1947.

Piets's reply to Patton was actually a direct instruction from the Dutch Foreign Office. On November 8, Piets received a telegram which instructed him to explain to the Thai government the political status of the Republic. He was also instructed to persuade the Thai government to leave Indonesian issues to the UN. Above all he should highlight the fact that the Dutch government would be affronted if Thailand were to recognize the Republic.<sup>45</sup> These instructions clearly show the Dutch attempt to break the Thai-Indonesian relations.

In December 1947, the issue of the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia was again put under negotiation. This was a result of an ongoing dispute which had started since the Police Action in July. The intense political situation between the two parties was not resolved even after their acceptance of the UN Security Council's cease-fire order. The UN, therefore, created a new mediator for the negotiations called the Committee of Good Offices. This committee arranged its first meeting on December 8 on an American troopship, Renville, which was anchored outside Jakarta. The Netherlands and the Republic eventually signed the Renville Agreement on January 17, 1948. This agreement allowed the Dutch to occupy the areas that they had seized from the Republicans during the Police Action. However, this agreement also promised that sovereignty would be transferred to the future United States of Indonesia within one year. Should the Dutch fail to do so, the committee assured Amir Sjarifuddin, the new prime minister of the Indonesian Republic, that the US would help by pressuring the Dutch.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, DIRVO to Piets, telegram, 8 November 1947.

<sup>46</sup> Agung, *Indonesian Foreign Policy*: 35-39; and Zainu'ddin, *Modern Times Indonesia*: 71.

## 1.2 The Strict Neutrality: Thai-Indonesian Relations in 1948

Over the course of 1948, Indonesian activists in Bangkok were joined by John Coast, a Briton who strongly sympathized with the Indonesian struggle for independence. He would become an important figure in Indonesian affairs in Thailand from mid-1948 until Indonesia received its sovereignty in 1949.

It should be noted that this thesis relies heavily on information from Coast's memoir because he was one of the few Republicans who worked in Thailand and recorded what he did during the revolution. As a result, some information in his memoir cannot be crosschecked with other sources. Coast might have exaggerated in his work, but the significance of his contribution to the Indonesian Revolution is uncontested. Given that there is a whole file of his activities in the archive of the Dutch legation in Bangkok, Coast must have played an important role. Evidence from the Dutch archives also indicates his proximity with Thai politicians.: "[T]hat Coast has a lot of Thai friends, some of whom were close to Phibun, is beyond doubt."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Darusman, a former staff member of the Indonesia Office in Singapore, later praised Coast's contribution, saying: "The Englishman's decision ... to join Indonesia's fight for independence was probably a loss to the British Foreign Service, but certainly a gain for Indonesia."<sup>48</sup>

Coast's passion for Indonesia began during WWII when he was a prisoner of war forced to work on the Siam-Burma railway. At the camp where he was interned, he met with several Dutchmen, Eurasians and Indonesians, and soon fell in love with Indonesian culture, especially traditional dances and music.<sup>49</sup> After the war he went back to London but was still passionate about Indonesia. Hoping that he would soon be deployed to the archipelago, he joined the Foreign Office to work in the Indonesian Information Section in September 1946.<sup>50</sup> One day he was informed that there was a position for secondary secretary at the British Embassy in Bangkok. Without hesitation, Coast decided to serve the Foreign Service in Thailand. In his view, working in Thailand would bring him closer to Jakarta than sitting in London.<sup>51</sup> After having met several Indonesian activists in Bangkok, Coast decided to resign from the British Foreign Service. While waiting for approval, he often visited Phibun, the ex-prime minister of

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<sup>47</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, Schürmann to MinBuza, 16 October 1948, 4787.

<sup>48</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 61.

<sup>49</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 3-5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*: 27.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*: 40.

Thailand during WWII, to develop a personal relationship which he thought would be valuable for the Indonesian cause. Coast eventually left the embassy on March 31, 1948, and moved into the house of Ishak Mahdi in Bangrak district. At this point, he said: “I was turning from an armchair pro-Indonesian into a protagonist in a sphere of action where I might well be swept off my balance in the tide of Indonesian nationalism.”<sup>52</sup>

His background in a diplomatic career may have enabled him to get into contact with various groups of the Thai elites. The Republicans might have been able to contact Pridi via the connection of Chaem Phromyong, a Muslim who was a close colleague of Pridi; however, Pridi was ousted and the Indonesians probably did not have another channel to approach other rings of the Thai elites without the help from Coast.

In April, Sudarsono decided to send Coast to meet Utoyo, the head of Indonesian representatives in Singapore. There he would receive further orders. Meanwhile, on April 6, there was once again a putsch in Bangkok. The same military group that had seized power in 1947 replaced Khuang with Phibun. The field marshal, thus, ascended to his second premiership after having stayed low-profile for a couple of years after the war. Coast did not fail to use the opportunity to strengthen his relationship with Phibun. Just before his departure to Singapore, he went to congratulate the new prime minister of Thailand.<sup>53</sup>

Back in Thailand, John Coast and Ishak Mahdi called on Phibun on June 10. During the meeting, they highlighted the proximity of Thai and Indonesian cultures, which share several Indian roots, and said to Phibun that any friendly act during the revolution would always be remembered by Indonesia. When asked what exactly the Indonesians wanted, Coast replied that they wanted a permission to open up an air route between Thailand and Indonesia. He also mentioned that Hatta understood the difficult position of Thailand in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. He said: “[Hatta] ... realized that an independent country like Siam which has long had diplomatic relations with colonial powers such as Holland, France, and my own country, would be politically embarrassed if asked to give diplomatic recognition to Indonesia now”.<sup>54</sup> This statement probably meant that the Indonesians, in mid-1948, had already abandoned their hope of gaining official recognition from Thailand. Instead their aim had shifted to obtaining unofficial support from Thailand.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid: 64-66.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid: 67.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 123-124.

Sometime between June and August 1948, Coast was appointed as official advisor of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>55</sup> During this period he produced reports about the political situation and future possibilities for the Republic in Thailand. These reports were found in Yogyakarta after the Dutch military occupied the city in 1949. They give us information on the strategies Coast used to approach and convince Thai officials. Moreover, they give information about relationships between Coast and several important personalities in the Thai political scene, as well as their attitude towards the Republic. Last but not least, they actually confirm the idea that, from mid-1948, Indonesian activists in Thailand were no longer concerned with the official recognition of the Republic by Thailand.

In his analysis of Thai politics after WWII, Coast stated that there were three different political groups on the scene. The first group was the military, which was the present government during the Indonesian revolution. The leader of this group was Phibun. The second group was the Democrat Party. This group was under the leadership of Khuang. The last group was that of Pridi and his followers. This group never came back to power but many of Pridi's followers were still in civil service under Phibun's regime. Nowadays scholars who study Thai politics generally agree with this structure.<sup>56</sup>

With this picture in mind, Coast developed different strategies to appeal to each group. For the military, Coast understood that their major concern was to avoid anything that would ruin the friendship between Thailand and the Anglo-Americans. At the same time, Coast was confident that whether Thailand was to help Indonesia or not was not the concern of the US and the UK as long as it did not affect them. However, the American and the British ambassadors would simply not help Indonesia by conveying their views towards this issue to Phibun. Although Patton had sympathy for the Indonesians, he would not help either. The remaining possibility was, therefore, to approach Phibun directly and persuade him that helping Indonesia would not ruin the friendship between Thailand and the Anglo-Americans.<sup>57</sup>

According to Konthi, the director general of the Western Politics Department, the Anglo-Americans were, in the beginning, not satisfied with the return of Phibun to Thai politics. They surely had not forgotten what Phibun had done during WWII. Because of this reputation with the Anglo-Americans, Phibun tried to please them by adopting a pro-western

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid: 142.

<sup>56</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr.344, Centrale Militaire Inlichtingen (CMI) Document no. 5253: 6; see also Baker and Pasuk, *History of Thailand*: 141.

<sup>57</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, "Part of Report of John Coast on Future Possibilities of Indonesian Office in Bangkok";: 1.

policy. He even compromised with the French who had border conflicts with Thailand after the war.<sup>58</sup>

Coast thought that Phibun and his military clique were snobbish so he appealed to this group by praising Thailand. He advanced the argument that Thailand, as the only country in Southeast Asia that had not been not colonized by Western powers, should lead other nations in the region to independence as well. He also stimulated the business instincts of the Thais. He argued that the Netherlands would soon give Indonesia its independence. Thailand, therefore, only had to give her hand for minor issues and for a short period. In return, Thailand would benefit economically from Indonesia's internal market of 70 million and its rich natural resources.<sup>59</sup>

The aforementioned meeting on June 10, 1948, between Phibun and Coast confirmed that Coast pursued his strategies accordingly with Thai elites. However, this does not mean that he managed to successfully influence the Thai government to grant whatever the Indonesians wanted. Although Phibun seemed to be convinced by Coast, another important person directly involved in foreign affairs was not. In his report, Coast stated that Prince Priditheppong Devakul, the minister of foreign affairs: "is a Rightist, Germany educated, ex-Army officer, who used to brag about his Cadetship friend, Hermann Göring. This man is ignorant, conceited, and a bully."<sup>60</sup> This indicates that the prince must have been opposed to Coast.

To appeal to the Democrat Party, Coast highlighted the non-communistic character of the Republic of Indonesia. He befriended the three leaders of this group. One of them was Khuang Aphaiwong and the other two were the Pramoj brothers: Seni and Kukrit. For Pridi's group, finally, no special tactics were needed. Some followers of Pridi, who were still in civil service or in the Thai government, were helping Indonesian activists in various ways. For example, Konthi Suphamongkhon, the director general of the Western Politics department, was helping with aviation issues, while Phairoj Jayanama, the director general of protocol, was helping with immigration issues.<sup>61</sup>

In mid-1948, the Thai government was not only approached by the Republicans but also by the Dutch representative. On July 1, J. Polderman, the Dutch charge d'affaires, called on Prince Priditheppong. He explained the situation of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict and tried

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<sup>58</sup> Konthi, *On The Foreign Policy*: 358, 447, and 451.

<sup>59</sup> "Part of Report of John Coast",: 2.

<sup>60</sup> CMI Document no. 5253: 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*: 7-8; and "Part of Report of John Coast,": 3.

to persuade the official that Thailand should not recognize the Republican government. He referred to the Renville Agreement that sovereignty over the archipelago would lie completely with the Netherlands until the United States of Indonesia came into existence and that the Anglo-Americans also agreed on this. Furthermore, he argued that the Republic was influenced by communism and controlled just a small part of the archipelago. People outside Java actually did not want to live under a Javanese authority, although they might well sympathize with the struggle of the Republicans.<sup>62</sup>

After the meeting, Polderman reported the Thai's stance to the Far East Department. He said that the Thai government would not take any step that could jeopardize the friendship between Thailand and the Netherlands. Nor would they undertake anything ahead of the UNSC in the Indonesian-Dutch conflict. Moreover, he reported that the Indonesian-Dutch conflict was not significant for the Thai government. The Thai government was more concerned with an important internal affair, namely, the return of the corpse of Prince Paribatra to Thailand. The Thai government prioritized this mission highly, because it could help raise support from Thai people who were generally still loyal to the royal family. To complete this mission, the Thai government needed cooperation from the Netherlands as the corpse was in Bandung, a city in west Java.<sup>63</sup> This report indicates that Thailand would not cause discomfort to the Dutch in regard to the Dutch-Indonesian conflict because it required Dutch help.

In 1948, there was another development in the Dutch-Indonesians conflict and the position of Thailand regarding the conflict can be seen in the event. In June, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), one of the UN bodies that focused on economic development, held its third session in India. At this meeting the Indian delegation submitted an application to admit the Republic of Indonesia as associate member of the commission. The Dutch delegation also did the same for the Netherlands East Indies.<sup>64</sup>

At this occasion, Thailand indicated its standpoint in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. On June 9, the Thai delegation gave a statement before the commission regarding the applications of the Republic and the Netherlands Indies. In this statement, it can be seen that Thailand tried exhaustively to balance its standpoint and stay neutral. The Thai delegation started the

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<sup>62</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, Memorandum of conversation by Polderman, 1 July 1948.

<sup>63</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, Polderman to DIRVO, 5 July 1948, 2785.

<sup>64</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 353, "Report of the proceedings of the fourth session of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE)"; and United Nations, *What the United Nations is doing: Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East* (New York: The Department of Public Information, 1949): 8-9.

statement by saying that “facts in the Indonesian question are not quite well known to us.” The rest of the statement was rather convoluted.<sup>65</sup>

On the one hand, the Thai delegation seemed to adopt the view that the Republic was *de facto* exercising authority over its territory. On the other hand, it also acknowledged that the Renville Agreement limited the Republic’s foreign affairs. However, the Thai delegation then indicated that the Thai government “has never been made officially cognizant” of the aforementioned agreement. Moreover, the Thai government held the view that the agreement only aimed to stop atrocities in Indonesia and did not identify the political status of the disputed parties. Then again, the Thai delegation insisted that it was not inclined to “believe that by admitting the Indonesian Republic to be a party to the Renville Agreement, the political status of the Republic may be considered thereby as recognized.”<sup>66</sup>

From the statement, it is obvious that Thailand tried to stay silent and neutral. The statement goes back and forth between supporting and not supporting the Republic. Eventually, the Thai delegation, claiming that it was instructed to follow the spirit and charters of the UN, excused itself from casting a vote.<sup>67</sup>

After a long discussion, the commission could not identify the political status of the Republic and thus could not make a decision on the question of membership. The consideration of two applications was therefore postponed to the next session. Meanwhile, the commission hoped the UNSC would make the status of the Republic clear.<sup>68</sup>

After the meeting, it was evident that the Dutch were pleased with the statement of the Thai delegation. On June 11, a letter was sent from the Dutch legation in Bangkok to the Thai foreign minister. In the letter, the Dutch legation expressed its appreciation for “the understanding shown by the Siamese delegate at the ECAFE-Conference for the Netherlands standpoint.”<sup>69</sup>

The statement of the Thai delegation shows that Thailand tried to avoid taking sides in the conflict. This neutral stance, however, supported the status quo that acknowledged Dutch sovereignty over Indonesia. In terms of diplomacy, Thailand therefore implicitly took the Dutch side. One may interpret further that Thailand saw its relations with the Netherlands as

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<sup>65</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 353, “The Indonesian Question (Statement by the delegate for Siam)”, 9 June 1948.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Report of the proceedings”; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 353, Memorandum, 0.201.211.00.

<sup>69</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 353, Polderman to the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), 11 June 1948, 2422/0.201.212.0.

being more important than those with the Republic. This was understandable because the Thai government in mid-1948 was expecting cooperation from the Dutch in bringing back the Thai prince's corpse, as mentioned earlier.

In this light, it was crucial for the Indonesian activists to strengthen the Indonesian-Thai relations in order to obtain future supports from Thailand. In August 1948, Coast and Mahdi came up with the idea to bring some Thai elites on a visit to the Republic. Four people were invited as guests of the Republican government: Kukrit Pramoj, Prapasee Sirivorasarn, Malee Panthumachinda, and Jim Thompson.<sup>70</sup>

Kukrit was one of the leading members of the Democrat Party and a parliament member. He was also the one who Coast claimed was his friend. Prapasee and Malee were journalists of *Nakornsarn* newspaper, which was a mouthpiece of Phibun's regime. Considering that the Dutch consul in Singapore called Prapasee a *privé-secretaresse* of Phibun and that Coast said she was the one who introduced him to Phibun in June 1947, she must have been very close to the Thai prime minister. The last person, Jim Thompson, was an American businessman.<sup>71</sup>

The trip to Yogyakarta took place between August 29 and 31. The company was introduced to Sukarno and Hatta. Coast himself did not record in his memoir what was discussed during the trip. However, the Dutch were informed that the aim of this visit was to discuss a secret trade agreement between the Thai and the Republican government.<sup>72</sup>

What the Dutch had been informed might be true, provided that Prapasee was close to Phibun. She might have been a messenger on his behalf. Prapasee could be a good choice for a representative to discuss anything in Yogyakarta without making any formal promises, since she was a journalist who held no position in the government. Moreover, trades between the Thai and the Republican government started in earnest after September 1948. More information on trades will be given in the next chapter.

If Prapasee was a representative of Phibun, it would make sense to invite her to the Republic. The question remains why Coast invited Kukrit. In my opinion, Coast may have had in mind that the Democrats could be back in power at any time. Should that happen, the

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<sup>70</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 162.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid: 55; NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Polderman to MinBuza, 29 September 1948; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, van Rijsewijk to DIRVO, 20 September 1948, 4383/0.201.212.202.1.

<sup>72</sup> Van Rijsewijk to DIRVO, 20 September 1948.

relationship between Kukrit and leaders of the Republic, which was to be formed during the trip to Yogyakarta, would benefit the Republic.

If Coast expected to impress the Thai elite, his effort was successful. This can be seen from a talk that Kukrit gave after the trip. *Bangkok Post*, one of Thailand's English language newspapers, reported this talk on September 20, 1948. According to the news, it seems that Kukrit had a very good impression of the Republic of Indonesia, its leaders, as well as its people.<sup>73</sup>

The second half of 1948 saw further progress for the Republican activists in Thailand in the establishment of an Indonesia Office in Bangkok. A set of Indonesia Offices were founded after the Linggajati Agreement had been ratified in March 1947. The first of this set was the office in Singapore. It was considered the first official establishment of the Republic on foreign soil. Unlike individual Indonesian representatives that were dispatched before 1947, Indonesia Offices had wider objectives. They did not only represent the government but also aimed to develop trade relations, present the Republican version of the conflict to the media, and provide guidance to the local Indonesian community.<sup>74</sup>

In Thailand, it is not known exactly when the Indonesia Office officially opened. At the least, such an office had actually been prepared for operation since June or July 1948. In a report that Coast made for the Republican government in July, he mentioned the plan to open a political office in Bangkok by registering at either the ministry of Interior or the police department. In his memoir, a similar story was told. He wrote: "through friends in the police we were allowed to register Ishak's house as the office of the Republic of Indonesia."<sup>75</sup>

In September, Mahdi was interviewed by a journalist from *Liberty*. He said the Republican government appointed him deputy representative and entrusted him with the duty "to make arrangements for the future Indonesia Office in Bangkok."<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the Indonesia Office in Bangkok must have been opened after September. The timing is interesting because the prince's corpse was transported to Thailand in September. The Thai government may have thought that it could make a little concession for the Republic after the transportation had been achieved.

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<sup>73</sup> NL-HaNA, BuZa / Verre Oosten, 2.05.52, inv.nr. 412, news clipping, "M.R. Kukrit Describes Java Visit", *Bangkok Post*, 20 September 1948.

<sup>74</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 45-46; and Cheong, *Indonesian Revolution*: 36.

<sup>75</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 127; and "Part of Report of John Coast", : 1.

<sup>76</sup> NL-HaNA, BuZa / Verre Oosten, 2.05.52, inv.nr. 412, Schürmann to DIRVO, 29 September 1948, 4454/82.

The existence of an Indonesia Office in Bangkok, however, did not mean that Thailand was about to establish an official diplomatic relation with the Republic. John Coast knew that Thailand would not allow the Republicans to register the Indonesia Office as a consulate or embassy. In his report, he wrote: “to open a political office in Bangkok the application to do so would probably get held up indefinitely somewhere between the Ministry of the Interior and the Police Department: for the results of such an office’s opening might cause embarrassment to the Siamese from the Dutch.”<sup>77</sup>

Evidence from Dutch documents in late 1948 also shares the idea that Thailand was not going to develop official diplomatic relation with the Republic. On November 10, C.W.A. Schürmann, the Dutch envoy, sent a report on the relations between Thailand and the Republic to the Dutch government. The report states that Thailand had a long tradition of being neutral in world politics. It says that the Thai government wanted to maintain friendship with the Netherlands so it would not deny the Netherlands’ sovereignty over the archipelago. Thereby, it would not recognize the Republican government. Nevertheless, the Thai government, thinking of its future benefits, still wanted to be friendly towards the Republic so it agreed to trade with the Republican government.<sup>78</sup>

Considering the report that was made by the Dutch legation and the fact that the Republicans could open Indonesia Office in Bangkok, one may describe the stance of Thailand in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict as opportunistic neutrality. On the one hand, the Thai government kept its friendship with the Netherlands because it needed the Dutch help. On the other hand, it did not stop the Republicans from opening an embassy-like office in the capital. In fact, it may have permitted the Republicans to do so suddenly after the Dutch government had already given the desired help. Moreover, the Thai government decided to develop trade relations with the Republic. These two actions show that the Thai government was aware of the possibility that the Republic would be Thailand's future neighbor.

The complicated neutral stance of Thailand can be further seen from what the Thai delegation did at the ECAFE meeting in December. On December 8, the commission discussed the applications for associate membership of the Republic and the Netherlands Indies again. This time the delegation from New Zealand proposed to accept both applications. While the delegates for Australia, Burma, China, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines supported this proposal, the delegates for the US and the Netherlands were against it. The Thai delegation

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<sup>77</sup> “Part of Report of John Coast”,: 1.

<sup>78</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, Schürmann to MinBuza, 10 November 1948, 5270/255.

received fixed instructions regarding this issue from the Thai government. Firstly, they should not bring the issue before the commission. Secondly, if the issue came into discussion, they should avoid giving any opinion. Thirdly, they should abstain from casting a vote on this issue. These instructions subsequently led to the same act that the Thai delegation had done in the last session in June. They abstained from the vote in order to stay neutral.<sup>79</sup>

Towards the end of 1948, it is fair to conclude that the Republic could not make much progress in wooing Thailand. The Indonesian activists had made some minor steps towards opening lines of communication with Thai elites and the Thai government, but so far they remained unable to persuade the Thai government to take the Republican side in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict.

### **1.3 The Opportunist: Thai-Indonesian Relations in 1949**

Since the Renville Agreement had been signed in early 1948 by the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia, negotiations between the two parties regarding the projected United States of Indonesia continued throughout the year. However, the negotiations came to a deadlock in December 1948.

On December 11, the Dutch government issued an ultimatum, offering the Republic two alternatives to choose from in order to force the Republic into resuming negotiations. The first option was that the Republic must liquidate its national army and subject all of the remaining armed forces under the Dutch command during the interim period. The second alternative was actually to reject the aforementioned option. Should the Republic choose this second alternative, the Dutch promised that the results would be “hardships and sufferings for the Indonesian people.”<sup>80</sup>

Two days later, Hatta, then prime minister of the Republic, wrote a letter to the Dutch requesting a resumption of negotiations. In his letter, Hatta gave attractive concessions. For example, he agreed to acknowledge Dutch sovereignty over the whole of Indonesia during the interim period. Hitherto, this generous concession had never been thinkable by the Republican leaders as it could make them lose support from fellow Indonesians.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “Report of the proceedings”; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 353, “Instructie Siamese delegatie ECAFE conferentie Lapstone”, 28 December 1948.

<sup>80</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 202.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid; and Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 218.

Yet, the concessions did not please the Dutch. On December 14, the Dutch made another proposal asking the Republic to let the Dutch government design the structure of future federal Indonesian states. Moreover, they requested absolute control over the appointment and discharge of Indonesian leadership and all armed forces in Indonesia. The answer from the Republic to this ultimatum was due on December 18, 1948.<sup>82</sup>

The deadline expired without any response from the Republican government. In the afternoon of the same day, D. Stikker, the Dutch foreign minister, informed the diplomatic representatives of the UK, France, Belgium, Canada, and the US that the Dutch government would proceed with necessary measures to restore peace and security in the archipelago. To the American diplomat alone, Stikker said the Dutch army would invade Yogyakarta within a matter of hours.<sup>83</sup>

The Dutch government launched its Second Police Action on December 19. On that day, Sukarno, the president of the Republic, was about to leave Yogyakarta for his meeting with Nehru in India. His plane was delayed in Singapore because the Dutch did not give clearance for flying to Indonesia. Sukarno was then captured together with Hatta and Agus Salim, the Indonesian foreign minister. In Jakarta, Sjahrir was also captured. These Republican leaders were then taken to Bangka, an island east of Sumatra. Finally, the Dutch army could easily occupy most Republican territories including the capital, Yogyakarta.<sup>84</sup>

Even though the Netherlands saw its second military offensive as a victory, other countries did not share this view. Several Western nations expressed their disapproval of the Police Action, including the US. The UNSC also announced its resolution on December 24, requesting the Dutch to cease hostilities and immediately release the Republican leaders and other political prisoners. Four days later, the UNSC, not having received any reply from the Dutch, issued another resolution to repeat its demands.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile in Thailand, Indonesian activists were also seeking support from the Thai government. John Coast and Ishak Mahdi visited several Thai leaders including Phibun, the prime minister, Phot Sarasin, the deputy foreign minister, and Sukich Nimmanhaemin, the assistant minister of education.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 203.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Mani, *Story of Indonesian Revolution*: 93; and Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 115.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 210.

<sup>86</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 234.

On December 22, *Thai Mai*, a Thai language newspaper, reported that Coast and Mahdi had called on Liang Chaiyakarn, the deputy interior minister. According to the news, Coast asked for sympathy and assistance from the Thai government as the Republic was facing a severe crisis. To persuade the Thai minister, Coast highlighted the willingness to help Indonesia expressed by the US, the UK, the USSR, and India. Liang, however, did not assure them that Thailand would support the Republic in this matter. In his reply, he said that Thailand, as a small country, had to “move with wariness in this matter.” Nevertheless, he promised to bring the matter into the cabinet meeting.<sup>87</sup>

Sometime between late December 1948 and early January 1949, Thakin Nu, the prime minister of Myanmar, suggested to Nehru that he should organize a forum to support Indonesia. Nehru consequently invited nineteen countries to join the conference in Delhi. These countries were Afghanistan, Australia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Nepal, New Zealand, Thailand, and Turkey (which declined to join).<sup>88</sup>

What is interesting regarding the relations between Thailand and Indonesia was the manner in which Thailand responded to this invitation. On January 4, 1949, Schürmann, the Dutch diplomat, reported on his meeting with Prince Priditheppong, the Thai foreign minister. He said that Thailand, despite being sympathetic to the Republic, would reject the invitation from Nehru. According to Schürmann, keeping the friendship that had long been established with the Netherlands was more important to Thailand than supporting the Republic diplomatically.<sup>89</sup>

Four days later, Thailand turned down the invitation by replying that the Thai government would wait for resolutions from the UNSC and would act accordingly. Thanks to Phibun and Prince Priditheppong, as Schürmann reported, the idea of sending Thai representatives to attend the conference in India was rejected, although some young officials recommended that Thailand should send a delegation to Delhi.<sup>90</sup>

This decision of the Thai government is understandable because the Dutch government had just extended its kindness to Thailand. Firstly, the Dutch government helped the Thai government in September 1948 in bringing back the corpse of Prince Paribatra. Secondly, the

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<sup>87</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, news clipping, “Indonesian Representatives See Deputy Interior Minister”, *Thai Mai*, 22 December 1948.

<sup>88</sup> Mani, *Story of Indonesian Revolution*: 100.

<sup>89</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, Schürmann to MinBuza, 4 January 1949.

<sup>90</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, Schürmann to MinBuza, 10 January 1949.

Dutch government had recently invited a Thai working group on economic affairs to visit the Netherlands. According to the Dutch diplomat, Prince Priditheppong was highly grateful for this invitation, so much so that he published a communiqué in the Thai media regarding his upcoming visit to the Netherlands.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, Phibun and Priditheppong were unhappy with India's attempt to become the dominant force in Asia. They were of the opinion that India's attempt to influence Southeast Asia was a threat to Thailand. They also thought that Thailand, as a country with a long history of being independent, should not let India take the lead. In their view, India was a newly independent country which was inexperienced even in governing itself.<sup>92</sup> From their opinions, it may be inferred that both these Thai leaders would feel embarrassed if they were to send a delegation to attend a conference arranged by India. Moreover, these opinions show that Phibun and Priditheppong tended to avoid involvement in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Not only because they wanted to please the Dutch, but they also did not share the spirit of fighting against colonialism in general.

The Republicans in Bangkok were obviously resentful. Coast reflected on this move of Thailand: "the Siamese Government, fantastically led by its Foreign Minister in the matter, was embarrassing us intensely by being so far the only one in Asia to refuse to send any representative to the Inter-Asian Conference..."<sup>93</sup> Yet, the Dutch diplomat was content with the act of the Thai government. To express the Netherlands' gratitude for Thailand being helpful regarding the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, Schürmann suggested The Hague prepare as grand as possible a reception for the Thai working group when they were to arrive in the Netherlands.<sup>94</sup>

The Netherlands' gratitude, however, did not last long. On January 18, a telegram was sent to The Hague saying the Thai government had changed its mind. Thailand decided to send Thanat Khoman, a Thai representative in India, to attend the conference as an observer.<sup>95</sup>

During a private meeting, Prince Priditheppong told Schürmann that he personally found it a shame but could not do otherwise because of the pressure from various sides. Several newspapers criticized the government's negligence of the problem of colonialism which other Asian countries were facing. They also had remarked that the government tended to take the

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<sup>91</sup> Schürmann to MinBuza, 4 January 1949.

<sup>92</sup> Schürmann to MinBuza, 10 January 1949.

<sup>93</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 234.

<sup>94</sup> Schürmann to MinBuza, 4 January 1949.

<sup>95</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, The Dutch legation in Bangkok to the government of the Netherlands East Indies, telegram, 18 January 1949, 235/0.201.110.202.

Dutch side in the conflict because of recent help from the latter. Moreover, a parliament member from the area where the majority population was Malay also tried to bring the Indonesian question into the parliament's discussion. Lastly, the Democrat Party, after having a talk among themselves regarding the Indonesian question, was of the opinion that the government should send an observer to attend the conference in India.<sup>96</sup>

Before their conversation ended, Priditheppong told Schürmann that the Thai observer was strictly instructed to be neutral and he hoped the Dutch government would understand the difficulties that the Thai government was encountering.<sup>97</sup> From the new decision and what the prince said, it can be concluded that the Thai government wanted to refrain diplomatically from the Dutch-Indonesian conflict by not attending the conference in Delhi. Although it was forced to change its decision, the Thai government still took the safest way. It only sent an observer who was instructed to avoid sharing opinions on the Indonesian question to the conference

The conference in New Delhi took place between January 20-23, 1949. The resolutions were then sent to the UNSC. They requested the Dutch to release the Republican leaders and other political prisoners immediately, to restore the Republican government in Yogyakarta, to withdraw troops from the Republican areas, to remove restrictions of trades, and to form an interim government by March 15, 1949. In addition, the actual date to transfer sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia was set at January 1, 1950.<sup>98</sup>

On January 28, the UNSC announced similar resolutions and asked the disputing parties to resume negotiations. The effort to bring the Dutch into dialogues with the Indonesians was eventually successful on April 14. The disputing parties reached an agreement called the Van Roijen-Rum Statements on May 7. However, the hostile situation in the archipelago was not settled. Guerrilla warfare was still going on between the Dutch and the Republican army. It was not until June 22, that the disputed parties made a consensus to ceasefire in Yogyakarta under the auspices of the UN Commission for Indonesia (UNCI), a successor body of the Committee of Good Offices. At this point, the Dutch promised to withdraw troops from Yogyakarta on June 24 and to convene the Round Table Conference by 1 August 1949. This conference was meant to be the final discussion concerning the transfer of sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 357, Schürmann to MinBuza, 20 January 1949, 259/17.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Mani, *Story of Indonesian Revolution*: 103.

<sup>99</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 214, 229, and 233-235.

Meanwhile in the first week of June, A.A. Maramis, the Republican foreign minister, had a stopover in Bangkok en route to Jakarta. The Indonesian activists brought him to see Phibun and the Thai minister of finance, Prince Viwat. The meetings with both Thai politicians were not official. Prince Viwat said he could not receive Maramis formally as Thailand had not yet recognized the Republican government. In any case, according to John Coast, these informal meetings were smooth and friendly.<sup>100</sup>

The Dutch legation in Bangkok was interested in these meetings of Maramis. It is obvious from Schürmann's letter to the Dutch foreign office that he was following the situation in Thailand closely. He visited Phibun and Prince Priditheppong. Given that Maramis came in the first week of June and the letter of Schürmann was dated June 14, the Dutch diplomat must have gone to see the Thais immediately after he found out that Maramis had visited some important Thai figures. Phibun told Schürmann that he had not done anything more than be a good listener to Maramis.<sup>101</sup>

In fact, according to what Prince Priditheppong told the Dutch diplomat, the visit of Maramis to Phibun was meaningless to the Thai government. He said: "The foundation of our diplomacy regarding Indonesia remains that we [Thailand] keep friendly relations with the Netherlands and that we will not recognize the Republic. The conversation between Maramis and Field Marshal Phibun means nothing and brings no changes to our attitude." Furthermore, the prince said he refused to meet Coast and Maramis himself because he did not see any necessity in listening to problems in Indonesia from an Englishman.<sup>102</sup>

Considering what the prince had said earlier in January together with the description of him by Coast, it seems likely that what Priditheppong said to Schürmann was something the prince really meant. In June, war between the Dutch and the Republican army was still going on. The Republic might fall anytime. Moreover, the Round Table Conference had not yet started. Priditheppong must have thought that it was not the right time to change Thailand's position. In other words, Thailand should maintain relations with the Dutch and not proceed any further with the Republic. Still, as Maramis' informal meetings with Phibun and Viwat show, the Thai government was cautious enough not entirely to give the Indonesian the cold shoulder.

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<sup>100</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 260.

<sup>101</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Schürmann to MinBuza, 14 June 1949, 2190/154.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Although the Round Table Conference was planned to begin on August 1, 1949, it was delayed. On that day the two parties only agreed to cease fire on August 10 in Java and August 14 in Sumatra. The conference finally started on August 23.<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile in Thailand, a cocktail party was arranged by the Indonesia Office in Bangkok on August 17. This event was a commemoration of the proclamation of Indonesian independence. Ishak Madi, the head of the Indonesia Office, together with his wife, sent invitations to several foreign legations in Thailand, including the Dutch one.<sup>104</sup> The party was set in the most prestigious hotel in Bangkok, the Oriental Hotel. The ball room was decorated with Thai and Indonesian flags. Mr. and Mrs. Mahdi were present, welcoming their guests. According to Schürmann, there were no more than 50 guests. Among them, there were some high-ranking officials from the foreign service ring such as the American ambassador, the Chinese ambassador, and the Chinese consul general. From the British legation, there were only three junior officials. People from the Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Burmese legation were also presented.<sup>105</sup>

From the Thai side, however, there were no signs of Phibun, the prime minister, or Prince Priditheppong, the foreign minister. The person with the highest rank who attended the party was Prince Wongsanuwat, the undersecretary of state. The rest were Konthi Suphamongkhon, Phairoj Jayanam, and the American advisor K. S. Patton.<sup>106</sup>

As a commemoration of the proclamation, this event must have been immensely meaningful for the Republicans. If the Thai government had planned to develop official relations with the Republic, Phibun and Priditheppong would have attended the party. However, they were not present. It may be concluded that the Thai government still maintained the same position in August 1949 as it had taken in June. However, it would soon change its position in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict.

Without any previous sign, shocking news was reported by *Liberty* on September 15, almost a month after the commemoration. The Thai newspaper stated that the Thai government had granted *de facto* recognition to the Indonesian Republican government. However, *Liberty* made a correction on the following day. It explained that there was a misunderstanding and that the Thai government had in fact not recognized the Republic. Although a correction was

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<sup>103</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 237.

<sup>104</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Schürmann to MinBuza, 19 August 1949, 3198/224.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

made, Schürmann did not easily let this news go. He visited Phot Sarasin, then deputy foreign minister, on September 17 and asked if the news contained any truth. Phot replied that the newspaper had merely made a mistake and that the cabinet had not yet made a decision regarding the recognition of the Republic, though there was a discussion on this issue. Schürmann, therefore, asked who brought this issue into the cabinet meeting. The Thai politician, however, refused to answer.<sup>107</sup>

The Dutch diplomat then took this opportunity to insist on the Netherlands' standpoint. He said the Netherlands would not appreciate a Thai recognition of the Republic. He also mentioned that Prince Priditheppong had always assured him that Thailand would maintain friendship with the Netherlands and that Thailand would follow guidelines from the UN.<sup>108</sup>

Phot's reply was rather strange considering the usual Thai attitude towards the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. He said Thailand certainly did not want to choose a party in this conflict; however, the government would have to recognize the party who was supported by the majority population. This may be seen as a shift of position for the Thai government.<sup>109</sup>

Phot's general approach to foreign policy should be noted here. In general, it seemed that he did not want to cause any discomfort to Thailand's neighbors. For example, in 1950, he refused the idea to recognize the American-sponsored Bao Dai government of Vietnam because it was only meant for fighting against communism and was not really supported by the Vietnamese people. He was afraid that the Vietnamese communists might win the war. In that case, Thailand would fall into a difficult situation concerning its relations with Vietnam. Phot even resigned when Phibun insisted on recognizing the Vietnamese puppet government.<sup>110</sup> This shows that Phot was concerned about the future relations between Thailand and its neighbors. Therefore, he wanted to support neighboring countries. In the case of Indonesia, the Thai official must have known from the presence of the American ambassador at the commemoration party that the US had already become moderately pro-Indonesian. Since the American stance in this matter suited his opinion, Phot must have thought that it was time to change the Thai's position.

There is another interesting thing about Phot Sarasin. On September 23, A.M.L. Winkelman, the Dutch consul general in Singapore, sent a copy of a letter written by Ishak

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<sup>107</sup> NL-HaNA, BuZa / Verre Oosten, 2.05.52, inv.nr. 412, Schürmann to MinBuza, 8 October 1949, 4002/286.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Konthi, *On the Foreign Policy*: 451,455, and 458.

Mahdi to the Dutch foreign office. The letter was sent to the Indian legation in Bangkok requesting a staff member there to send two encoded messages to Jakarta and The Hague on behalf of Mahdi. Both messages stated that Phot had officially expressed the Thai government's readiness to recognize the Republic.<sup>111</sup>

One month later, Winkelman received another copy of a letter written by Mahdi. The Dutch consul general did not fail to forward a copy of this letter to his superiors in The Hague. Just like before, Mahdi requested the Indian legation to send an encoded message to Yogyakarta. The message said that the presidential recognition letter from the Thai government had not yet arrived. Mahdi, therefore, wrote in his message that a new presidential letter should be sent to him immediately.<sup>112</sup>

At this point, it was obvious that the Thai government would definitely have granted the Republic of Indonesia its recognition if the presidential letter had come. The sudden change of Thailand's position in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict may have been caused by the change of Thai foreign minister from Priditheppong to Phot. Moreover, the Round Table Conference might have shown the promising future of the Republic. By October, H. Merle Cochran, an American diplomat who was the chairman of the UNCI, had brilliantly solved two major issues regarding the transfer of sovereignty: the future Dutch-Indonesian relation, and the debts of Indonesia.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, from September onwards, the Thai government must have expected that Indonesia was shortly going to become independent.

On December 16, 1949, the US officially recognized Indonesia. Three days later, an official letter from the Thai foreign ministry arrived at the Indonesia Office in Bangkok. The letter was signed by Phot Sarasin, who had recently been promoted to minister of foreign affairs. It says the Thai government had already granted the Republic of Indonesia a *de facto* recognition. The Dutch legation was also informed. At this occasion, John Coast wrote: "Ishak and I ... were also not especially interested in this formal recognition, for although the Siamese had indeed sometimes hindered us officially, or shown signs of almost European suspicion of the Republic, we had realized very fully how much practical help we had received from many

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<sup>111</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, Winkelman to MinBuza, 23 September 1949, VIII-B-2a/22393/506.

<sup>112</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, Winkelman to MinBuza, 24 October 1949, VIII-B-2a/24874/566.

<sup>113</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 241-244; and McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*: 299-300.

sections of the Siamese people.”<sup>114</sup> It seemed the Indonesians in Bangkok were satisfied. What is interesting is that the Thai recognition came shortly after the Americans’, suggesting that the Thai government followed the Americans on this matter.

#### 1.4 Summary

From the whole course of the Indonesian Revolution, it can be seen that there was a short period in 1947 in which Thailand was inclined to support the Republic. This period ended with a coup by the military. Since then Thailand officially stayed neutral until the very last episode of the Indonesian Revolution, in contrast to many other states in the region. It is true that Thailand avoided taking sides in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Yet, it had never denied the sovereignty of the Dutch over Indonesia. The Thai government under Phibun maintained its relations with the Netherlands properly. This might have been a result of the country’s policy to appease former Allied powers, the need of practical helps from the Dutch government, and the unpredictable future of the Indonesian Republic. This stance began to change when the Round Table Conference was going on. About ten days before the archipelago became independent, Thailand gave the Republic of Indonesia *de facto* recognition. This clearly shows the opportunistic nature of the Thai government. It endorsed Indonesia when it knew that the latter was certain to become its neighbor.

What the Indonesians thought about this delayed endorsement is difficult to ascertain. What happened between Thailand and Indonesia during 1945-1949 is not even reported at all in a commemorative book of diplomatic relations between the two countries that was published in 2011. In fact, the book marks March 7, 1950, as the beginning of the friendship between Thailand and Indonesia.<sup>115</sup> From this book, it seems that the delayed recognition of Indonesia by Thailand did not negatively affect the Thai-Indonesian relations in the years after 1950.

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<sup>114</sup> Lee, *War and Diplomacy*: 250; Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 285; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 354, The Dutch legation in Bangkok to DIRVO, telegram, 22 December 1949, 5239/0.201.212.202.00.

<sup>115</sup> Nana Yuliana, *Fostering Indonesia-Thailand Relations: after 60 years and beyond* (Bangkok: The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bangkok, 2011): 32-33.

## **Chapter 2 - Unmentioned Support: Unofficial Relations between Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia**

The absence of official diplomatic relations between Thailand and the Republic during the Indonesian revolution did not mean that Thailand was totally uninvolved in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. On the contrary, several important activities of the Republicans involved Thailand. To gain a better picture of Thailand's position in the conflict and to explain how Thailand attempted to square the circle of appeasing the Dutch while staying on friendly terms with the Indonesians, this chapter looks at how Thailand dealt with three major activities of the Republicans: the transportation of Indonesian Republicans by a Thai airline, the use of Thai airfields as bases in clandestine missions, and the trades between Southern Thailand and Sumatra. This chapter is divided into sections dealing with these three activities.

### **2.1 Gateway to the Outside World**

In April 1948, John Coast flew from Bangkok to Singapore to meet Utoyo, the head of the Indonesia Office in Singapore. There he received his first order as an activist of the Republic of Indonesia. Utoyo told him that there was only one direct channel that connected the Republic and the outside world; that was through the Yogyakarta-Manila flight. Utoyo therefore asked Coast if he could arrange charter flights from Thailand to the Republic and vice versa. These flights were meant for transporting Indonesian Republicans who would support the Republic's position on international stages. The charter flights were to be operated by Pacific Overseas Airlines Siam (POAS) from May 1948 until the end of December 1948. During this period, the Thai government was repeatedly pressured by the Dutch legation in Bangkok to prohibit POAS from operating flights to the Republic. Apart from a desultory warning, however, the Thai government did not try hard to stop POAS. The airline continued its flights to Yogyakarta until it was not possible to land there anymore after the Second Police Action.

After his meeting with Utoyo in Singapore, Coast went back to Thailand. Together with Ishak Mahdi, another Indonesian activist, he contacted several airlines based in Bangkok and found two interested companies which were both 25 percent owned by the Thai government. One of them was Trans Asiatic Airlines Siam (TAAS). The other company was POAS. The latter company's operation manager was an American, Sim Baldwin. As it turned out, POAS's offer was considerably cheaper than the offer from TAAS. Moreover, POAS's Dakota plane

had an extra petrol tank which enabled it to fly further. Coast and Mahdi, thus, took the offer of POAS.<sup>116</sup>

Before the first charter flight took off, Coast and Baldwin went to consult with Utoyo again for the exact plan. It was then clear that the plane had to go to Singapore first to fetch passengers and freight before it could proceed to the Republic. According to Coast, he informed Phibun of this flight. In reply, Phibun merely smiled – and the plane was permitted to go.<sup>117</sup> It may be speculated that Phibun thought it would be the only flight and did not really know about aviation formalities regarding the Dutch-Indonesian conflict.

The first POAS charter flight to the Republic took off from Bangkok on May 13, 1948. The plane was a Dakota with the registration number PC-103 and was flown by David Fowler. The next morning, after being loaded with passengers and freight, it took off again from Singapore and flew to Sumatra. In theory, foreign planes could not enter the Indonesian archipelago without permission from the Dutch authority because they held sovereignty over Indonesia. Foreign planes could only request clearance for the airports designated by the Dutch. The Republican airfields could not be landed on by foreign planes.<sup>118</sup> Fowler was aware that a problem would arise if he were to ask for clearance for Pekanbaru, an area under the Republican's control. Therefore, he decided to request clearance for Bangkok instead. It seemed that the air traffic control in Singapore was satisfied with all the plane's documents. The plane was then allowed to fly to Bangkok. However, according to a letter by the Dutch consul in Singapore, the POAS Dakota PC-103 suddenly changed its destination from Thailand to Indonesia without any announcement.<sup>119</sup>

The plane finally landed in Bukit Tinggi, a west Sumatran town. After some cargo had been unloaded and some passengers had exited, PC-103 proceeded further to the capital of the Republic of Indonesia, Yogyakarta.<sup>120</sup> In Yogyakarta, Coast and Baldwin discussed future plans with the Air Commodore Suryadarma. A rough draft of a contract was made by the three to be submitted to the vice president, Hatta. Baldwin then said he would have to consult with

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<sup>116</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 74-75.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*: 76-77.

<sup>118</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, "Instructions and procedures for unscheduled flights to and via the Netherlands East Indies v.v."

<sup>119</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to Suvabhand, 11 June 1948; and Winkelman to DIRVO, 16 June 1948, 2645.

<sup>120</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 84-87.

his colleagues at POAS. While Baldwin was flying back to Thailand with the PC-103, Coast stayed in Yogyakarta to meet other Republican leaders.<sup>121</sup>

On May 25, 1948, Coast left Yogyakarta for Sumatra where he was ordered by a Republican colonel to ask the Thai government for landing rights in Songkhla, a southern city in Thailand. Due to some confusions and delays, Coast arrived back in Bangkok on June 5. After the business trip to the Republic, Coast and Mahdi continued their work. They went to see the Thai prime minister on June 10 and asked for permission to operate regular charter flights between Thailand and the Republic.<sup>122</sup>

Although Coast wrote in his memoir that “Phibun made no objections at all,” the matter might not have been as easy as he presented it. In a report Coast drafted for the Republican government, he stated that Phibun hesitated because he was afraid of Anglo-American reactions. However, after Coast had repeatedly assured him that the British did not intend to interfere in what was not their business, Phibun eventually agreed to turn a blind eye to this matter and left it to be dealt with on a departmental level.<sup>123</sup>

Consequently, Coast and Mahdi went to the Ministry of Communications to discuss the possibilities of establishing an air route between Thailand and the Republic. According to Polderman, the Dutch charge d’affaires, the Ministry of Communications forwarded the issue to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>124</sup> Yet there is no evidence of a final decision from the Thai government regarding the use of Thailand as a base for charter flights to and from the Republic. There might have been no official decision on this matter at all. Thai officials may have informally and orally permitted the Indonesians to do whatever they wanted if it did not cause troubles to Thailand. This can be seen from Coast’s report. He wrote that the Minister of Communications and the head of the Civil Aviation Board were friendly to POAS and were willing to let the charter flights go to Indonesia.

In my estimation, POAS flights could not cause serious problems to the Thai government, if there were ever problems at all. The government held only 25 percent share in POAS. With such a relatively small stake, it could easily claim that POAS was a private firm and that the government was not liable for POAS’s problems. If no problem arose, the government could simply profit from the charter flights. Moreover, individual Thai

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid: 96.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid: 125.

<sup>123</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, CMI Document no. 5253: 4.

<sup>124</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 16 June 1948, 2494/0.201.212.3/47.

shareholders would profit as well. Among these people, there may have been individuals who could influence the government. For instance, the minister of communications' nephew was also active in the company.<sup>125</sup> In this respect, it is possible to say that POAS, through personal connections between its shareholders and politicians, pressured the government into permitting charter flights for the Indonesians. Since Phibun had already informally given a green light to the Indonesians, the Thai government simply let POAS operate its flights without interfering.

The next task for Coast and Mahdi was to request permission to land and refuel their charter plane at Songkhla airfield to avoid stopovers in Singapore. This airfield in Southern Thailand was exclusively used by the government-owned Siamese Airways. Despite some protest from Siamese Airways, since POAS was its rival company, future POAS charter flights were allowed to land and refuel in Songkhla. Coast wrote in his memoir that General Chai Pradipasena, the manager of Siamese Airways, finally made peace with him, yet he did not mention in his memoir why General Chai granted this concession.<sup>126</sup> The reason may be inferred from another document also written by Coast. In his report about aviation in Thailand, Coast stated that General Chai was interested in providing charter flights and arms transportation to Indonesia. He wrote: "General Chai, to Ishak Mahdi alone, made certain highly mercenary and suspect offers of arms-running to Indonesia."<sup>127</sup> Thus, it can be concluded that the permission for POAS to land and refuel at the airfield in Songkhla was granted because General Chai wanted to keep a friendly relationship with the Indonesian activists for his future profits. In other words, this concession was made possible out of the personal interests of a Thai official.

The second flight was again allowed to take off from Thailand without difficulty and the contract between POAS and the Republican government was signed in the last week of June 1948. The Dutch Far East Department received a telegram from Singapore stating that POAS PC-103 left Singapore on June 27 with clearance for Bangkok. Again, the plane did not fly to the requested destination but to Yogyakarta via Songkhla. According to the contract, a POAS plane would fly to Yogyakarta via Bukit Tinggi every fortnight.<sup>128</sup>

At this point, the Dutch legation in Bangkok could not tolerate more "illegal" flights between Thailand and the Republic. Therefore, Polderman visited Suvabhand Bidhyakar, the

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<sup>125</sup> CMI Document no. 5253: 3.

<sup>126</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 127.

<sup>127</sup> CMI Document no. 5253: 3.

<sup>128</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 127; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Schuurman to MinBuza, 28 June 1948, CLI/8242/409.

director general of the Division of Transport and the head of Civil Aviation Board. During their conversation, Suvabhand promised that an instruction regarding unscheduled flights would be sent to all airlines in Thailand and that unscheduled flights would have to request permission from the government before taking off. Suvabhand said this measure would stop future flights to the archipelago. The instruction was sent to all airlines as promised.<sup>129</sup> This action was suspicious as it contradicts what Suvabhand had said to Coast earlier.

In this particular period, the Dutch legation also pressured the Thai government through the Thai Foreign Office. A letter was sent to Konthi Suphamongkhon, the director general of the Western Politics Department, on July 23. It complains that POAS flights had circumvented certain regulations and kindly asked the Thai authority to stop such flights.<sup>130</sup> However, Konthi must have ignored the letter. He was one of the few Thais who helped the Indonesians out of a personal ideology. John Coast mentioned him in relation to this matter: “Konthi is entirely on our side and has not yet even acknowledged a technical protest about POAS...” The reason why Konthi helped the Republic was simple. He was against colonialism and his ideology can be seen clearly in his memoir: “The era of colonialism is over. It would be excellent if Thailand could help neighboring countries to obtain their independence. ... I always proposed this idea when I worked at the Western Politics Department.”<sup>131</sup> The Dutch attempt to pressure through him was therefore fruitless.

Eventually, the measures to stop POAS did not last long. There were protests from airlines which had interests in providing charter flights. In the case of POAS, it argued that the Thai government could not control it because the government was not the major shareholder.<sup>132</sup> Because of the pressure from airlines, Suvabhand recalled the instruction on August 11, 1948, and unscheduled flights resumed thereafter.<sup>133</sup> Because of the failure to stop POAS, Polderman warned the Thai government that the Dutch government would take a strong measure against these illegal flights and would not be held responsible for any damage caused by the measure.<sup>134</sup> But even though the Dutch had put such pressure on the Thai government, it

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<sup>129</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 7 July 1948, 2834/1.201.272.0/55; and Suvabhand to KLM, 10 July 1948, 365/2491.

<sup>130</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to Konthi, 23 July 1948, 3131/1.201.723.0, 368/146; and Polderman to Patton, 23 July 1948, 3132/1.201.723.0,

<sup>131</sup> CMI Document no. 5253: 4; and Konthi, *On Foreign Relations*: 447.

<sup>132</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 26 July 1948, 3149/1.201.723.0.

<sup>133</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 16 August 1948, 3540/1.201.723/73.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

appears that POAS made another flight on August 29 without disruption. This time it even brought a notable Thai politician and two Thai journalists to the Republican capital (see chapter 1).

It is hard to know what the Thais were really thinking at the time. However, some conclusions may be drawn from this story. At the departmental level, it can be seen that the Thai foreign ministry ignored protests from the Dutch because Konthi, the staff who dealt with aviation matters, sympathized with the Indonesians as a result of his anti-colonial ideology. Moreover, the Civil Aviation Board must have been in a difficult situation. It could not issue an instruction that would restrict all airlines from operating charter flights just because it wanted to stop POAS. At the governmental level, as mentioned earlier, the cabinet must have considered POAS a private company. Furthermore, the cabinet may have been influenced by politicians who had a stake in the company. Ultimately, the Thai government was probably of the opinion that POAS flights were not part of its responsibility. Therefore, it could ignore the Dutch protests on this matter. No other measure to stop POAS was introduced again.

The Dutch must have also noticed the nonchalance of the Thais at some point. John Coast once reflected on this: “[B]ut judging by the number of notes and memoranda and photographs that Polderman had sent to the Siamese Foreign Ministry, the Dutch in Bangkok had begun to realize that the Siamese were not to be easily frightened off this aid to Indonesia.”<sup>135</sup> Consequently, the Dutch started to intercept POAS flights that went to Indonesia.

In the middle of September 1948, a POAS plane landed on Bukit Tinggi at dawn. There a Republican official informed Coast and his crew that he had sent a radio message to Jambi stating that the plane would arrive at ten o’clock. With surprise, Coast asked the official whether he had sent the message in clear. “Yes, in clear” replied the official. Coast suddenly knew that this official had just told the Dutch when and where to spot the plane.<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, David Fowler, the pilot, decided to fly further to Jambi. The plane landed safely. A few minutes later, two Dutch B-25 Mitchell Bombers came in and circled over the airfield. Reinforcements were sent in continuously from then until dusk to ensure that the charter plane could not take off. Eventually, the plane could proceed to Yogyakarta at midnight.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 162.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*: 197.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*: 198.

Despite warning and interception, in the POAS's perspective, it could not stop flying to Indonesia. In 1948, POAS was in extreme need of funds and charter flights sponsored by the Republic of Indonesia were its main source of income. Since January 1948, the company faced a financial crisis because of mismanagement. Before January 9, Luang Rob Rukij was chairman of the board of directors and managing director of POAS. He was also chairman of the board of directors at Bangkok Bank. POAS's bills were thus paid by the Bangkok Bank's overdrafts. However, Luang Rob resigned because of disagreements with the board of directors. Since then POAS's overdrafts were no longer honored by Bangkok Bank. Consequently, the company was short of petrol supplies and its scheduled flights ceased their service.<sup>138</sup> Provided that POAS was in a serious financial situation, it is understandable that POAS strived to keep its highly profitable Bangkok-Yogyakarta route available. According to a confiscated document, the Republicans paid 500 Straits dollars for each charter contract plus 1,000 Straits dollars per day for accommodation.<sup>139</sup>

The Indonesian Republicans used this service until December 1948. The last charter flight took off from Bangkok on December 16, 1948, and reached Yogyakarta on the following day. The plane left the Republican capital just one day before the Dutch launched their Second Police Action. After Yogyakarta fell into Dutch hands, POAS had no other choices but to cease their service for the Republic. It appears that POAS did not resume the service in 1949.<sup>140</sup>

## 2.2 The Mysterious Aircrafts in Songkhla

Apart from semi-official Thai charter flights, there were several aircrafts which flew clandestinely between the Republic and the outside world. For example, there were the Republic-Myanmar route and the Republic-Philippines route. These aircrafts were mostly piloted by former British, American, and Australian air force officers. Their service was on a personal commercial basis. They were commissioned by representatives of the Republican government for transportation of either men or freight. This thesis will only trace the aircrafts which came to Thailand. As appears from the sources, these aircrafts began to make flights to Thailand in late 1947 and stopped in the third quarter of 1948. During this period, Thailand

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<sup>138</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, news clipping, "POAS Directors are sued by a colleague", *Liberty*, 21 January 1948; and "No cash, No petrol, so planes cannot fly", *Liberty*, 26 January 1948.

<sup>139</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, DIRVO to MinBuza, 10 Juli 1948, 3033/1.201.7230.

<sup>140</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 219-225.

was involved in these aircrafts' business in two ways. Firstly, Thailand was a stopover from where Republican activists could travel further to other destinations. Secondly, Thailand was a place that the Republican-commissioned aircrafts could use as a temporary base to refuel, and load cargo during their missions. The Thai government certainly knew that these aircrafts entered the country. In fact, some Thai officials were involved in allowing or supporting them to do so. Undoubtedly, the Dutch legation in Bangkok reported these flights to the Thai government several times. However, apart from promising the Dutch that they would do something, the Thai government did not undertake any strong measure against these flights throughout the period in which these flights were operating.

In contrast to other charter flights, which mostly dealt with the transport of people, the main purpose of these illegal flights seems to have been smuggling. During the Revolution, the Republicans needed to smuggle goods like opium and weapons in and out of the Republic. A question remains why the Thai government was not willing to curtail these activities even though they were aware of them.

The first flight of this kind came to Bangkok on October 10, 1947. A green two-engined Dakota plane suddenly landed on Don Muang airfield in the north of Bangkok. Thai airfield officials who had not previously been informed about its arrival ran to the plane as it came to a standstill. Four people came out of it. One American and three Indonesians formed its passengers. They told Thai airfield officials that they had come from Yogyakarta to hand messages to the chief of staff of the Thai Royal Air Force and the director of Civil Aviation.<sup>141</sup> In his memoir, Coast wrote about this event that the passengers were detained by the Thai immigration police for a while before they were allowed to go into the city. According to Coast, Phya Prachit, the minister of communications, was the person who set the Indonesians free from immigration police.<sup>142</sup> It was fortunate that these Indonesians had come before the Thai military coup on November 8, 1947 (see chapter 1). Pridi, the statesman who controlled the government, was more sympathetic towards the Indonesian struggle for independence than his successors. Had they come after the coup, the situation could have been much more complicated.

Later, it became known that this Dakota was the first registered Republican plane. Its registration number was RI002. The plane was piloted by Bob Freeberg, an American who had started to conduct illicit flights between Manila and the Republic for commercial reasons. The

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<sup>141</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, news clipping, "Three Indonesians arrive by plane from Yogya", *Liberty*, 14 October 1947.

<sup>142</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 59.

Dakota RI002 did not fly to Thailand regularly. Its main tasks were to transport some lightweight cargoes like vanilla beans and cinchona barks out of the republic to generate revenue for the fledging government.<sup>143</sup>

Nevertheless, this aircraft was sometimes involved in transporting people as well. On June 5, 1948, RI002 made another landing in Thailand. This time it brought seven passengers to the Thai southern province of Songkhla. What is interesting is that the passengers proceeded on their journey further into Singapore. Malayan Security Service informed the Dutch consul that these people traveled without appropriate papers and that they could easily buy visas to enter Malaya. The Dutch consul general suspected that these Indonesians were involved in purchasing weapons for the Republic.<sup>144</sup>

Towards the end of 1947, there was another landing of a mysterious plane on Songkhla airfield. *Seriphab*, a Thai newspaper, reported on December 15, 1947, that a two-engined plane made an unexpected visit to Songkhla with eight passengers including a pilot. Apart from suspicious answers, the airfield officials could not get any information from its Indonesian passengers. The report states further that the passengers had spent a night in the city before they boarded the same plane and took off. The plane, however, came back in an hour and the passengers spent another night in Songkhla. On the following day, six of the passengers took a train to the Thai-Malaya border while another two flew the plane somewhere. The newspaper also stated that the Thai authorities were later informed that approximately 1,064 grams of gold had been disposed by the passengers of this mysterious plane.<sup>145</sup> Provided that the passengers of this unidentified plane came to Thailand to travel further into Malaya, there is a possibility that this mysterious trip to Songkhla was made by Dakota RI002.

From these cases, it can be assumed that Thailand was used as a transit place. Indonesian activists could bypass difficulties that could have occurred if they had gone directly to Singapore without proper travel documents. It should also be noted that, at least according to both the news report and the letter of a Dutch diplomat, the Thai authorities in Songkhla did not display hostile reactions towards these flights. Wade Palmer, another pilot who used to fly to Thailand, once said he could land on Songkhla airfield without trouble by bribing the local

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid: 115; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, "Freeberg Gone but Indonesia Still Has Two Foreign Fliers-of-Fortune", news clipping, *Bangkok Post*, 23 November 1948.

<sup>144</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, Van Rijsewijk to DIRVO, 24 June 1948, 15032/208.

<sup>145</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, news clipping, "Mysterious Plane Visits Songkhla to Dispose Off Gold," *Seriphab*, 15 December 1947.

officials with a few American dollars.<sup>146</sup> The Dakota RI002 might have done the same. In this respect, it could land on Songkhla because the local authorities were corrupt.

Beside Dakota RI002, there were at least two other aircrafts that often came to Thailand. One of them was an Avro-Anson with the registration number VH-AGK. On July 24, 1948, Polderman, the Dutch charge d'affaires, once reported several landings of the Avro-Anson on Songkhla airfield. It was piloted by Wade Palmer, an ex-pilot of the British Royal Air Force. According to Coast, Palmer lived in Bukit Tinggi (West-Sumatra) and mainly made internal flights within the archipelago.<sup>147</sup> This may be the reason why his name rarely appears in the documents of the Dutch legation in Bangkok.

Another aircraft was a Catalina (a small seaplane) with the registration number VH-BDP. Richard Cobley was the pilot of this plane. Cobley was a major in the British Signal Corps during WWII. He was demobilized in Myanmar in 1947. In February 1948, he joined a group of Australians and Americans who owned the Catalina. With this group, he started flying between the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and other places in Southeast Asia. Later, the Americans left but the Australians still worked with Cobley.<sup>148</sup>

There are many records on this Catalina VH-BDP in the archive of the Dutch legation in Bangkok. The reason is simple. This aircraft was involved in transporting one of the most important cargoes out of the archipelago. These cargoes were opium, a product which generated a remarkable amount of revenue for the Republic. The struggle for independence was an expensive project. Throughout the period between 1945 and 1949, the government of the Indonesian Republic was in need of money to build and maintain its military, as well as to support all of its activities abroad. At the beginning, crop products like rubber and sugar were the main source of the government's income. However, it became more difficult to trade these products in 1947 because of the Dutch blockade. This pressured the Republican government to search for an alternative product. Opium came into its consideration for two reasons. It was lightweight and valuable. These two advantages meant that a small quantity of opium, which was easy to transport, could make a considerable amount of money for the Republic.<sup>149</sup>

Large amounts of opium were carried out of the Republic by speedboat. For example, 500 kilos of raw opium were shipped to Singapore in March 1948. A.A. Maramis, the

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<sup>146</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, Schürmann to DIRVO, 16 August 1948, 3540/1.201.723/73.

<sup>147</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, Polderman to DIRVO, 24 July 1948, 3140/1.201.272/62; and Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 83.

<sup>148</sup> "Freeberg Gone", *Bangkok Post*.

<sup>149</sup> Robert Cribb, "Opium and the Indonesian Revolution", *Modern Asian Studies*, 22 (1998): 712.

Republican minister of finance, asked a young Chinese Indonesian, Tony Wen, to supervise this opium transaction since Wen had connections with Chinese businessmen in Singapore. Wen's connection allowed the Republic to trade directly with Singapore, bypassing the middlemen in Jakarta and Semarang, both of which were in the Dutch-occupied territory.<sup>150</sup>

Later, in the middle of 1948, opium appeared to be taken out of the archipelago by plane. This is where Coblely and his Catalina entered the scene. Coblely and his crew were commissioned to transport this valuable product. Wen was still involved in the trade. In June 1948, when Coast and Coblely met each other for the first time in a hotel in Bangkok, the latter said that he was working with a group of Chinese who were in touch with the Indonesians in East Java. It appeared later that the Indonesian colleagues in East Java were those from an independent Air Force and the Ministry of Finance.<sup>151</sup> At this point, it is clear that Coblely worked with Wen and Maramis.

According to Robert Cribb, the Catalina carried opium from Lake Campurdarat in East Java to Singapore. Wen would wait for the plane in Singapore to deal with the opium. This kind of flights made by the Catalina was more elaborately reported in a letter from the Far East Department to the Dutch legation in Bangkok. It says that the Catalina would carry opium, which was wrapped in rubber sheets, from Java to a place at sea not far from Singapore. The opium would then be loaded onto a barge. After having transferred the opium, the Catalina would fly empty to Songkhla and wait for cargoes to be readied for the return flight. The return cargo would be loaded onto the Catalina somewhere on the sea near Singapore.<sup>152</sup> The Dutch intelligence service was right. Coblely once told Coast a similar story when they met each other in Jambi in October 1948.<sup>153</sup>

However, Coblely's Catalina did not only go to Songkhla, which it used as a temporary base. Coblely and his Catalina also flew to Bangkok. He landed at least three and maybe four times in Bangkok between June and July 1948. His first landing in Bangkok was without permission. On June 9, the Catalina suddenly made a water landing at Klongtoei, a district in central Bangkok. Coblely gave as an excuse that his plane was running out of petrol; It seemed that a similar excuse was also used several times when pilots who worked for the Republic wanted to land on Songkhla airfield. This time, the Thai authorities did not do anything with

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid: 714-715.

<sup>151</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 126 and 164.

<sup>152</sup> Cribb, "Opium and the Indonesian Revolution", : 715; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, DIRVO to Polderman, 24 July 1948, 9896/58.

<sup>153</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 198.

Cobley and even approved a request for a landing on Songkhla airfield. According to the border patrol, the plane had been loaded with tires before it left Bangkok on June 14.<sup>154</sup> For the first landing, it was possible that the Thai authorities allowed him to land because of the technical excuse. Yet, it will be shown below why he could repeatedly land in Bangkok without troubles.

On July 28, 1948, an unidentified document was drafted and signed by a person named “Cowan.” Coast mentions the name “McGowan” three times in his memoir. If this Cowan was the same person as McGowan, he would then be another American pilot who conducted a gun-running business in the Philippines. This person also wrote another memorandum for the Dutch charge d’affaires. Both documents report similar information in connection with a flight to Bangkok made by Cobley. As of now, it may thus be inferred that the document dated 28 July 1948 was also a memorandum made for Polderman.<sup>155</sup>

Both memoranda report a Cobley flight to Bangkok on July 28. According to these documents, it was Cobley’s third flight to Bangkok. Again, he landed on water at Klongtoei. This time, however, he landed legally with a permit requested from the Thai authorities by a staff of the Bangkok-based Borneo Company. It appears that the application for permission for landing was not arranged by Borneo Company alone. Another firm called Siameric Company was also involved in the matter.<sup>156</sup>

An application for landing made by two companies may sound ordinary. Yet, there was an interesting network behind this application for landing on the Thai water. Cobley and his crew undoubtedly made flights here and there for commercial reasons. They certainly did not work only for the Republic of Indonesia but for whoever hired them. In Thailand, Cobley had an agent, the P&M Company. This company was involved in a transaction of arms between a Thai party and Vietnamese nationalists in 1946.<sup>157</sup> The manager of P&M Company was a royal descendant, Pongamorn Kridakorn. He was closely associated with another member of the Thai Royal Family, Theprit Devakul who was the manager of Siameric Company.<sup>158</sup>

Now it is clear that Cobley was able to land legally in Bangkok because of a blessing from these two members of the Thai elite. It is not known exactly what interests Pongamorn

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<sup>154</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 7 July 1948, 2934/1.201.272.0/55.

<sup>155</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Memorandum by Cowan, 28 July 1948; and Undated memorandum by Cowan.

<sup>156</sup> Memorandum by Cowan, 28 July 1948; and Undated memorandum by Cowan.

<sup>157</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Schürmann to DIRVO, 13 May 1949, 1775/24.

<sup>158</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Schürmann to DIRVO, 23 December 1948, 6257/137; and Memorandum by Cowan, 28 July 1948.

and Theprit had with Cobley. However, it appears that every time before leaving Bangkok, Cobley would load his Catalina with heavy duty tires.<sup>159</sup> It may be assumed here that P&M Company and Siameric Company were probably involved in shipping goods into or out of the Republic.

Cobley's network was not limited to these two companies. He also had a connection with Siamese Airways which may have enabled him to land on Songkhla airfield without troubles. In that time, only flights of Siamese Airways and Royal Thai Air Force could use that airfield. Siamese Airways was mainly owned by the Thai government, but there were also individual Thai shareholders. Two of the shareholders were import-export firms associated with Prince Rangsiyakorn Apakorn. In 1948, Prince Rangsiyakorn was an acting minister of defense and held a rank of group captain in the Royal Thai Air Force. What is more interesting regarding the network of Cobley was that the prince was a brother-in-law of Pongamorn, the manager of P&M Company.<sup>160</sup> It was plausible that Pongamorn may have utilised his personal connection with Rangsiyakorn to enable Cobley's Catalina to land on Songkhla airfield several times without disruption from the airfield authority. So far it may be concluded that Cobley could use Thailand as base because some Thai elites were involved in the business and misused their authority for their own personal gain.

Cobley's flights certainly annoyed the Dutch legation in Bangkok. In fact, when Polderman went to see the director general of the Thai Division of Transport and the head of Civil Aviation Board, it was also because of this matter (see 2.1). However, it seems that the Thai authority did not do anything with flights such as Cobley's during the period between June and September 1948. The question is why the Thai government did not do anything.

Beside the problem of corruption some other reasons can be drawn from the concerns expressed by two Dutch diplomats in Bangkok. Schürmann said Songkhla was very far from Bangkok and therefore was difficult to control by the central authority. In fact, there were no staff of the Civil Aviation Board in Songkhla at all.<sup>161</sup> What Schürmann said basically reflects the state's incapability to enforce law and order in the South. Yet, the Thai government might still have done nothing even if it had had the ability to control the southern provinces

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<sup>159</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 7 July 1948, 2934/1.201.272.0/55; and Undated memorandum by Cowan.

<sup>160</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Schürmann to DIRVO, 23 December 1948, 6257/137.

<sup>161</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Schürmann to DIRVO, 22 October 1948, 4896/96; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 365, Schürmann to DIRVO, 28 October 1948, 5020/101.

completely. According to Polderman, the Thai government in 1948 was facing a Muslim insurgent group in the South. Therefore, it did not want to worsen the situation by taking strong measures against the Indonesians.<sup>162</sup>

After several complaints from the Dutch, the Thai authority began to make a move. But the move seemed disingenuous and came too late. The earliest action from the Thai government came in October 1948. Schürmann wrote a letter to The Hague saying that the Thai authority in the southern provinces promised to chain any plane that came into their areas illegally. He also mentioned that the Thai Civil Aviation Board would ground Cobley's Catalina should it come to Thailand again.<sup>163</sup> This promise could be seen as merely symbolic because no staff of the Civil Aviation Board were working at the Songkhla airfield. It may be concluded that the Board only wanted to assuage the Dutch without having any real intention to address their concerns.

In any case, it seems that Cobley made his last flight to Songkhla in September 1948. *Kiattisakdi*, a Thai language newspaper, made a report of this flight. It says an unidentified aircraft landed on Songkhla Lake on September 13.<sup>164</sup> In October 1948, Cobley's Catalina was in Jambi (Sumatra) waiting for spare parts. Coast met him once and told him that the authority in Singapore knew about the smuggling of opium into the island. In reply, Cobley said: "Then I've got to stick it out in Indonesia until this blows over, because from what you say it's not safe for me to land again in Singapore, Siam is doubtful, while Rangoon and Australia are obviously out of the question."<sup>165</sup> As there are no further reports about Cobley's flights, it may be concluded from what he said above that he stayed low-profile in Jambi until he died on December 29, 1948, during the Second Police Action.<sup>166</sup>

Bob Freeberg, another pilot who worked for the Republic, had already disappeared in October 1948. Cobley was the last pilot who flew between Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia, his death thus marking the end of these clandestine flights.

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<sup>162</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, Polderman to DIRVO, 16 August 1948, 3526/0.201.110.202/70.

<sup>163</sup> Schürmann to DIRVO, 22 October 1948.

<sup>164</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 368, news clipping, "Mysterious aircraft landed on Songkhla Lake," *Kiattisakdi*, 29 September 1948.

<sup>165</sup> "Freeberg gone", *Bangkok Post*; and Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 199.

<sup>166</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 313.

### 2.3 Trades between Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia

The Indonesians' need for money and strategic materials during the war of Independence led to trades between the Republic and other countries not only through clandestine flights but also by other means. Although Singapore was its main partner in trades – or in what the Dutch called “smuggling” – with the Republic because of its networks of Chinese merchants,<sup>167</sup> the Republic also traded with other countries such as Myanmar, India, the Philippines, and Thailand. As can be found in historical sources, trades between Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia started in the last quarter of 1946 and lasted until November 1949. During this period, the Republic exported several products to Thailand. Most important were the trades of raw rubber. Other important products were sugar and petrol, as well as opium.

By selling these products, Republican agents were able to collect money for the acquisition of necessary materials. Yet, in some cases, the Republic bartered goods with Thailand instead of using hard cash. In turn, Thai traders exported weapons, American goods, and rice to the Republic of Indonesia. Several Thais and Westerners residing in Thailand were involved in these trades. In general, trades were done by individuals or private companies. However, there was at least one case in which the Thai government itself was the trader.

Among all the necessary materials during the Indonesian Revolution, weapons were probably the most important thing for the fledging Republican government. It is shown in a work by H. Bing Siong that the Republicans started out their revolution with an advantageous position regarding the number of arms at their disposal. The first stocks of arms were obtained from the Japanese troops in the archipelago which capitulated in August 1945. As time passed, however, more arms were needed because the Dutch captured arms and military equipment from the Republicans. The Republicans were thus forced to acquire arms from outside.<sup>168</sup>

After WWII, Thailand had a large over-supply of arms. These stocks came mainly from two sources: the Japanese troops, and arms supplies from the Allies. After the Japanese troops had surrendered, the Royal Thai Army was appointed by the Allies to disarm Japanese soldiers. According to the Allies, in September 1945 there were more than 100,000 Japanese soldiers in Thailand. Their weapons were seized and kept in arms dumps throughout the country waiting for destruction. Many of these arms, however, entered the market by either arms traders or

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<sup>167</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 11.

<sup>168</sup> H. Bing Siong, “The Indonesian need of arms after the proclamation of independence”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 157 (2001); and Hans Wagner, “Where did the weapons come from?”, Paper presented at the Asian Studies Association of Australia Sixth National Conference, University of Sydney, 1986: 1.

corrupt military officials. Just a couple of months before the war ended, the Allies had also delivered large supplies of arms to Thailand. The amount of these supplies is estimated at 175 tons in total. These supplies were meant to be used by the Free Thai Movement, an underground resistance movement founded by Pridi Banomyong for fighting against the Japanese. Yet, with the war suddenly over, these arms were kept in secret depots of the Free Thai Movement. Later they were taken by some former Free Thai officers into the arms market as well.<sup>169</sup>

This overwhelming amount of over-stocked arms in Thailand was certainly attractive for whoever was looking for war materials. In early 1946, Suryono Darusman, an Indonesian activist in Singapore, started to look for sources of weapons. He was then joined by two other Indonesians, one of whom was Ishak Mahdi, a man who later became representative of the Republic in Bangkok. Another person was an officer of the Indonesian Army Intelligence, Bagdja Nitidiwirya. In June 1946, they entered into an agreement with a Singaporean Chinese who could obtain arms and military gears from the Changi Naval Base in Singapore. The cargoes finally arrived in Java in September 1946.<sup>170</sup>

During the same period of time, these three Indonesians must have made contacts with Thai people as well. On December 29, 1946, Mahdi reported the progress of his mission to Abdul Karim, the secretary general of the Bank of Indonesia. He told Karim about an agreement he made with a high ranking Thai official regarding the shipping of arms into the Republic and the selling of Javanese sugar.<sup>171</sup> The Indonesians may have planned to pay for arms using the money from the sugar trade just as they had done with the aforementioned deal in Singapore.

This Thai official was Luang Suchitra, the former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Education in 1945 and lecturer at Chulalongkorn University. He and some staff from the Thai Navy secretly provided the Republic with a stockpile of US-made weapons worth 1,750,000 Straits dollars. When the cargoes were ready for shipping, they paid for flights and four-week accommodation for the three Indonesian activists so that they could come to Bangkok and check the cargoes. Unfortunately, this deal fell through because of the Dutch blockade.<sup>172</sup> From the fact that this group of Thai officials did not sell weapons on behalf of

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<sup>169</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999): 184-185.

<sup>170</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 25-27.

<sup>171</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, "Summary of documents made by Izak Mahdi, Suryono Darusman, and Bagdja Nitidiwirya", 6 April 1947, CMI Document no. 5493.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

the government, it may be assumed that they misused their authority in accessing arms depots for their personal profit.

A new attempt to buy arms in Thailand came in 1947. Oemar Selamat, a Javanese colonel in the Republican army, printed a large quantity of counterfeit 100 baht banknotes in Singapore. The total value of these fake bills was two million baht. Selamat had fled from Singapore before the police raided his place in August.<sup>173</sup> It is not known when he came back to Singapore, but in October 1947, Chamnong Brusuwongse, a member of the Indonesian Independence League, went to see him in Singapore regarding the shipping of arms.<sup>174</sup> It was likely that Selamat planned to pay for arms with counterfeit Thai banknotes. However, in December, he was arrested in Penang before any transaction occurred. According to the Dutch intelligence service, the arms trade was carried out by Chamnong and would be paid with gold instead of counterfeit banknotes. It is not known whether this deal finally succeeded or not.<sup>175</sup>

There is also an interesting story about Chamnong. When he was dealing in the arms trade, he had a letter signed by several politicians in Pridi's leftist party. The letter addresses Hatta, the vice president of the Republic. It says:

The fighting spirit of all Indonesian people is always tolerable in Siam. We know already ... that Indonesia is badly in need of something which is very important and we have arranged everything ..., remember war arrangement must always be prepared. We beg to introduce you ... Chamnong Brusuwongse is from our party. He can be trusted ....<sup>176</sup>

From the above mentioned letter, it is clear that Oemar and Chamnong were in contact with some Thai leftist politicians for weapons. It is difficult to know the real reason behind the offer. However, from the content of the letter, it may be concluded that personal profit was not the only reason, as in the case of Luang Suchitra. The anti-colonial idea also played a part in this offer.

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<sup>173</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Winkelman to DIRVO, 18 November 1947, 25899/226.

<sup>174</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Memorandum by Polderman, 19 June 1948.

<sup>175</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Eschauzier to Dutch legation in Bangkok, 10 February 1948, P.S. 4/1575/12.

<sup>176</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Memorandum by Polderman, 19 June 1948.

While some officials in the Thai government were involved in these cases of arms trafficking, agreements were not made under the name of the government. There is one case, however, in which an agreement was reached between the Republican government and the Thai government. The discussion of this deal may have started in August 1948. During the period of August 29-31, four people from Thailand visited Sukarno and Hatta in Yogyakarta. The Dutch legation in Bangkok was informed that they went there to make a secret trade agreement (see Chapter 1).

This trade agreement originated from the Indonesia Office in Penang. On September 8, 1948, Dutch intelligence reported that a staff member of the Indonesia Office in Penang had a discussion with the Thai consulate in Penang about trade. The Republic wanted to barter petrol from Aceh for rice and American goods. From the report, it appears that the Thai government would take care of transport and necessary cash advances.<sup>177</sup> More information on this deal was obtained through an Indonesian spy, a certain Hardjo. The Dutch Consulate in Singapore sent him to infiltrate the Republicans in Penang. From this spy, the Dutch learned that the Thai Consulate gave an Indonesian trafficker, Syahrif Lubis, a travel document and an introduction letter which he could hand to Thai officials in Phuket. On October 25, Lubis departed from Penang to Phuket.<sup>178</sup>

There was another interesting attempt to traffic arms in 1948. This attempt can be seen as confirmation that arms trade mostly occurred out of an economic motive rather than an ideological one. On August 14, Polderman, the Dutch charge d'affaires in Bangkok, told the chief of the Far East Department that a "well known businessman" in Bangkok, as a middleman, would like to sell a stock of weapons owned by the Free Thai Movement to the government of the Netherlands East Indies. According to Polderman, the seller was "afraid" that this stock of weapons may fall into Republican's hands. In any case, Polderman received a negative answer from Jakarta on August 26.<sup>179</sup>

As I have written earlier, four people from Thailand made a trip to Yogyakarta between August 29-31, three of them were Thai and undoubtedly had something to do with the Thai government. The fourth person was an American businessman who owned a silk company in

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<sup>177</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Eschauzier to Dutch legation in Bangkok, 1 October 1948, 13469/93.

<sup>178</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, van Rijsewijk to Dutch legation in Bangkok, 18 October 1948, 4962; and van Hulst to Procureur-Generaal bij het Hoogge echtshof van Indonesia, 26 October 1948, 5054.

<sup>179</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 359, Polderman to DIRVO, 14 August 1948, 3523/0.201.900/69; and Van Baarda to Dutch legation in Bangkok, 26 August 1948, PS/10822/81.

Bangkok, Jim Thompson. One may ask why a businessman who sold silk fabric was also in the group. However, as it appeared, Thompson was not just a businessman. During WWII, he was recruited to work in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the war-time American intelligence agency. As an OSS agent, Thompson worked with the Free Thai Movement. After the war, ex-OSS officers including Thompson still had close relationships with Pridi and the Free Thai Movement.<sup>180</sup> Considering Thompson's profile and that the period in which a businessman visited Polderman and got his offer rejected coincides with the period in which Thompson was in Yogyakarta, it seems likely that Thompson was the one who had called on Polderman in mid-August. If this suspicion is right, Thompson may have turned to the Republicans after his offer to the Dutch had been turned down. In this case, it means that Thompson was looking to sell arms to any party willing to pay the right price, regardless of ideology.

Nevertheless, these cases were just a small part of the whole trade activities of the Republic. Major trades were done between the Republic and Singapore through extensive networks of Chinese merchants. Yet, trades between the Republic and Thailand increased after the Second Police Action. This was because the center of trades in Sumatra had moved to Aceh, which is closer to Phuket than Singapore. Moreover, it became more difficult to trade with the British colonies since the British, under Dutch pressure, stepped up their control of trades with the Republic.<sup>181</sup>

The staff of Indonesia Office in Bangkok probably started to approach Thai officials in Phuket in March 1949. Ishak Mahdi and John Coast visited Udom Bunyaprasob, the governor of Phuket, to ask for permission to trade. According to Coast, Udom did not object their request and also introduced the two Republicans to officials in the Customs office.<sup>182</sup>

After the Indonesian Republicans in Bangkok had contacted the Thai authority in Phuket, the next step was carried out by a trading company in Aceh. In April 1949, Aceh Trading Corporation (ATC) introduced John Lie, a major in the Indonesian Navy, to the military governor of Aceh because he would be the person who transported goods to and from Phuket. John Lie together with Sunar Suraputra was appointed by the Navy on May 3 to take up trade activities outside the Republic. Later, on May 19, the military governor of Aceh sent

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<sup>180</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Polderman to MinBuza, 4 January 1949, 0209/0.201.212.202.1; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, "Activites Americaines au Siam en 1948," B/2.

<sup>181</sup> Yang, *Chinese Business*: 240; and Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 29.

<sup>182</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 256.

a letter to the governor of Phuket saying that Indonesian Republicans would bring goods worth 70,000 Straits dollars to Thailand and would, in turn, purchase goods worth the same value for the Republic.<sup>183</sup>

ATC was one of the branches of a big trading company called Central Trading Corporation (CTC), which was established in 1948 at Hatta's initiative. This company was a military trade organization.<sup>184</sup> John Lie first came to Singapore in August 1947 and worked as a blockade-runner. He transported goods with his speedboat between Republican ports and Singapore and Malaysia. Later, he had to move his base from Penang to Phuket because of the strict control by the British authorities.<sup>185</sup>

While the process of contacting the Thai authority in Phuket was still ongoing during April and May 1949, goods from Aceh had already arrived. According to Twang Peck Yang, a large amount of Indonesian rubber was being re-exported from Phuket starting in April. The Dutch consulate in Singapore also reported that John Lie appeared in Bangkok for the third time on May 15 after he had brought 50 tons of rubber to Phuket on behalf of ATC. In Phuket, Lie was also about to bring weapons that were sold to him by some Thais back to Aceh.<sup>186</sup> According to Usman Adamy, the general manager of ATC, the company could earn a lot from the trades with Phuket. In April 1949, ATC had at its disposal capital worth one million, with a profit of several hundred thousand Straits dollars.<sup>187</sup>

It is seen here that goods were transported from Aceh to Phuket by John Lie, the blockade-runner. However, Lie made a statement that a shipping firm should be set up because of the lack of means for transportation. He said, in 1949, that there were goods in Aceh worth a million Straits dollars waiting for transportation. It may not have been possible for him to transport these goods alone. Consequently, Sunar Suraputra, a major in the Indonesian Navy, and John Lie set up a shipping firm called Blue Ribbon Shipping Company (BRSC) to solve this problem.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, Winkelman to Dutch legation in Bangkok, 21 June 1949, VIII-H-7/13790; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, Machtiging van Kol. R. Subijakto, 3 May 1949, 193/SUM/KSAL.

<sup>184</sup> Yang, *Chinese Business*: 261.

<sup>185</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 29.

<sup>186</sup> Yang, *Chinese Business*: 240; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, News report from the Dutch Consulate in Singapore, 25 May 1949, 23. B/3.

<sup>187</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, News report from the Dutch Consulate in Singapore, 22 August 1949, 12. C/2.

<sup>188</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, "Republikeinse wapentransactie met het aangrenzende buitenland," CMI Document No. 9573: 4, 31 October 1949; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, News report from the Dutch Consulate in Singapore, 5 September 1949, 15. C/3.

This shipping company was partly financially supported by ATC and partly by the American Indonesian Corporation (AIC). The latter firm was a joint venture between the Indonesian Republican government and Matthew Fox. Fox and the Republicans reached an agreement in late 1947. AIC was founded according to the agreement and was meant to monopolize all trades of the Republic. Fox would receive a commission of 7.5 percent for every ton of goods that was sold and purchased by the Republic. To sponsor the shipping company, Fox appointed one of AIC's staffs to work as advisor for BRSC. In the beginning of September 1949, Lie also asked AIC for a loan which he used to finance BRSC.<sup>189</sup>

Surprisingly, a Thai firm was involved in this business as well. After AIC had been set up, John C. Lee, the vice president of the company, flew to Bangkok where he stationed his headquarters. From there he could fly to other major cities in Southeast Asia. Yet, a branch of AIC was not established in Bangkok. Lee stated that AIC adopted "the policy of appointing local firms as agents and thus permitting them to share in trade profits." A Thai company called Bangkok Brokerage Company (BBC) was appointed as agent in Thailand.<sup>190</sup> Thus, this company was the one who actually handled trades with the Indonesians for AIC.

What was interesting about BBC was that several shareholders were members of the Thai elite. Among them were Prince Viwat, the minister of finance; Phot Sarasin, the vice foreign minister; Prince Vimvathit Rabhibhadhana, the director general of Revenue Department; and Thawi Bunyaket, the ex-prime minister. The Dutch diplomat expressed what he thought of this company. He said: "through this connection (BBC), Fox can get in with main figures in Thai political and financial circles."<sup>191</sup>

AIC and BBC must have been excellent business partners. When Matthew Fox arrived in Bangkok on January 6, 1950, an elaborate Chinese feast was provided for him by people from BBC.<sup>192</sup> At this point, it is understandable why trades with the Republic went on without troubles from the Thai government. Thai politicians, civil servants, and royals who owned the brokerage firm definitely did not want anything to hinder the Thai-Indonesian trades, for it could adversely affect their substantial commissions. In other words, personal economic

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<sup>189</sup> CMI document no. 9573: 4; Gerlof D. Homan, "American business interests in the Indonesian Republic, 1946-1949", *Indonesia* 35 (1983): 128-129; and NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 343, News report from the Dutch legation in Bangkok, 12 October 1949, 13. B/3.

<sup>190</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, news clipping, "Bangkok to be base for \$550,000 project," *Bangkok Post*, 12 March 1949.

<sup>191</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, Schürmann to MinBuza, 25 March 1949, 1165/79.

<sup>192</sup> Coast, *Recruit to Revolution*: 291.

interests motivated the Thai elites to support the Thai-Indonesian trades even though goods like weapons may have been involved.

Eventually, trades between Thailand and the Republic came to an end. Since negotiations between the Netherlands and the Republic were going well and Indonesia was promised its independence, Machsoes, the head of Indonesia Office in Penang, thought that there were no reasons to continue the illicit trade with Thailand. Therefore, he came to Bangkok in November 1949 to liquidate the import-export business between Sumatra and Phuket.<sup>193</sup>

## 2.4 Summary

Although Thailand did not support the Republic diplomatically, it played three other crucial roles during the Indonesian revolution. As this chapter has shown, POAS, a Bangkok-based airline, operated charter flights between the Republican capital, Yogyakarta, and Bangkok. Therefore, Thailand was a significant channel that bridged the Republic of Indonesia to the outside world. Thailand was also used as a temporary base during some clandestine missions of the Indonesians. Republican aircrafts usually came to Southern Thailand for various reasons. For example, they refueled and waited for further commands at Songkhla airfield. Last but not least, Thailand was another notable trade partner of the Republic alongside Singapore. Trades with Thailand generated substantial revenue out of which the Republic could pay for needed materials.

Surprisingly, the Thai government never took strong measures against the activities of the Indonesian Republicans in Thailand. It simply turned a blind eye to the Indonesians. In this respect, it may be concluded that Thailand, while not officially supporting the Republic through diplomacy, tacitly aided the Republic through other means. Whether the Thai government took this stance because it expected the Republic to be Thailand's future neighbor is difficult to ascertain. Yet, three simpler explanations may be drawn from the sources. Corruption seems to be the most important contributing factor why the Thai government did not interfere with activities of the Republicans. Several members of the Thai elite, including heads of various government departments, high ranking civil and military officials, as well as royal members, were involved in businesses that were related to activities of the Republicans. These people could definitely influence the government to overlook the Indonesians. The second reason lies in the fear of the Thai government. In 1948, there was an insurgency by the Thai Muslim

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<sup>193</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Thailand, 2.05.246, inv.nr. 344, News reports between 16-18 November 1949, 14. B/3.

population in the southern provinces. The Thai government was afraid that strong measures against the Indonesians might worsen the situation in the South. Ideology comes in third place. In my opinion, it was probably the least important reason that made the activities of the Republicans possible. Nevertheless, it cannot be entirely factored out. Konthi Suphamongkhon, who was in charge of aviation, for instance, permitted Republican charter flights even though the Dutch complained about them; and he did so at least in part because he was staunchly anti-colonial.

## Conclusion

On the road to independence, the Republic of Indonesia did not rely only on physical wars with the Dutch, but also on diplomacy. Throughout the four-year long conflict there was a long process of negotiations between the Netherlands and the Republic. Several important moments in this process were arbitrated by Western countries. These decisive roles of mediators have led scholars who work on the Indonesian Revolution to focus primarily on the roles and the positions of Western countries. Consequently, the existing literature on the topic has largely overlooked the attitudes of countries in Southeast Asia towards the conflict, even though they would become the future neighbors of the Republic of Indonesia after the conflict had passed. This thesis aims to bring attention back to the region where Indonesia is located. Its objective is to examine the positions and roles of Thailand during the Indonesian Revolution. To this end, it asks how both official and unofficial relations between Thailand and the Republic developed when the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was going on.

The first chapter of this thesis looks at Thailand's process of granting recognition to the Republic of Indonesia. It appears there was a short period in 1947 in which Thailand, under a leftist government, sympathized with the struggle of the Indonesians and was about to recognize the Republican government – which would have made it one of the earliest countries to do so. However, the plan was halted by a military coup in November which put a rightist government into power. After the coup, Phibun, the ex-prime minister who took Thailand into WWII on the Axis side, was appointed by the army as prime minister again. To rebrand himself, Phibun became mindful of the attitudes of former Allied powers, especially the US and the UK, in terms of their foreign policies. The Thai government therefore adopted a policy of neutrality in world politics. Regarding the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, the Thai government officially recognized the sovereignty of the Dutch over the Indonesian archipelago and maintained friendly diplomatic relations with the Netherlands until the very end of the conflict. On the world stage, the Thai delegation was always instructed to stay neutral by avoiding casting votes or expressing opinions on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Nevertheless, the Thai government began to change its position during the final round of negotiations, the so-called Round Table Conference. Suddenly, just about ten days before the Netherlands transferred sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia, Thailand granted a *de facto* recognition to the Republic of Indonesia.

In the second chapter of this thesis, attention is shifted from official diplomatic relations to unofficial relations between Thailand and the Republic, i.e., the trades and the movements

of people between the two countries. While Thailand and the Republic of Indonesia did not establish diplomatic relations with each other until late, some of the activities of the Indonesian Republicans were conducted in or involved Thailand. Because of its central location in the region of Southeast Asia, Bangkok was chosen to be the place that connected the republican capital, Yogyakarta, to the outside world. The Republicans in Bangkok opened an air route between Thailand and the Republic by arranging charter flights with the Bangkok-based airline POAS. The charter flights, which brought people to and from the Republic, were in operation from mid-1948 until the end of that year. Although the Dutch legation in Bangkok complained about these flights to the Thai government, there was no effective attempt from the latter to stop POAS's operation. The only attempt to stop POAS occurred in July 1948. The Thai Civil Aviation Board sent out instructions for charter flights to airline companies in Bangkok. But a month after, the board recalled their instructions and never introduced any other measure again.

Thailand was not only a bridge connecting the Republic to the outside world, but it was also a place where pilots who worked for the Republic could make a stopover during their missions. During the Indonesian Revolution, the Republic sold large amounts of opium to generate revenue. Some of the opium was transported to Singapore by planes. After unloading the opium, the Republican planes would fly further to Songkhla, a province in the south of Thailand. There, their planes would be refueled with the help of Thai airfield staff. Republican planes could wait in Songkhla until their returning cargoes were ready at a rendezvous location somewhere outside Thailand. Then they would pick up their cargoes and fly back to the Republic. Sometimes the republican planes also flew to Bangkok to pick up cargoes. Despite the fact that Republican planes had no landing rights, the Thai authorities did not cause them troubles. In fact, there was tacit support from some Thai elites.

Trading was another activity that involved Thailand. During the Indonesian Revolution, the Republic mainly traded with Singapore, but some deals were struck with Thailand as well. The early deals made in 1946 and 1947 were trades of weapons. Some Thai civil and military officials were involved in these trades for their personal interests. It appears the Thai government did not interrupt trading activities. There was even a case where the Thai government negotiated an agreement with the Republic to barter goods for petrol.

Nevertheless, trades between Thailand and the Republic remained insignificant until after the Second Police Action, when the centre of the Republican trades moved to Aceh, which was close to Phuket, an island in the south of Thailand. Trades between Thailand and the Republic thus increased. The headquarters of American Indonesian Corporation was located in Bangkok. The company was a joint venture between Matthew Fox, an American businessman,

and the government of the Indonesian Republic. This company had a monopoly in trades between the Republic and other countries. In Thailand, it appointed a company owned by several Thai elites to handle its business.

Similar to the other cases mentioned earlier, the Thai government did not restrict trades between the Republicans and Thai people. The Republic of Indonesia could generate income and purchase necessary materials from Thailand up to the point when it obtained its independence.

From the two chapters of this thesis, it can be concluded that Thailand developed limited diplomatic relations with the Republic and did not support the Republic's position in the international arena. Nonetheless, Thailand had important unofficial roles in the Indonesian Revolution. For instance, Bangkok was one of a few places that linked the Republic to the outside world. Songkhla was used as base during clandestine missions of the Republicans and Phuket was an important trade center when the Republic could hardly trade with Singapore or Malaya. Thanks to unofficial and indirect support from the Thais, these activities could be done successfully.

From these empirical findings, one may characterize the position of Thailand in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict as a hypocritical neutrality. This is because Thailand pretended to be neutral by avoiding its participation in the conflict. However, it appears Thailand did not strictly act according to the definition of "neutrality". On the one hand, Thailand officially acknowledged the Netherlands' sovereignty over the Indonesian archipelago almost throughout the entire period of the Indonesian Revolution. In this respect, it can be seen that Thailand actually supported the Netherlands and thereby was not really neutral. The reason why Thailand acted this way was threefold. Firstly, Thailand under Phibun's government wanted to please former Allied powers, especially the UK and the US. This is because Phibun wanted to erase the picture of him allying with the Axis powers during WWII. Since the Netherlands was also a member of the Allies, Phibun may have adopted the same policy on this issue. Secondly, since Thailand had never been colonized, Phibun and his government did not really sympathize with the fight against colonialism and did not share the same spirit that other countries in Asia may have had. Without a strong ideology against colonialism, there was no reason for Thailand to officially support the Republic, especially as long as there was a possibility that the Republicans could be crushed at any time. Thirdly, the Thai government had no choice but to keep a friendly relationship with the Dutch at least because of one practical reason. The Thai government needed help from the Dutch in bringing back the corpse of a Thai

royalty from Bandung to Bangkok. Thanks to Dutch help, the corpse was eventually transported to Thailand in September 1948.

On the other hand, unofficial support that Thailand gave the Republicans during the conflict suggests that Thailand did not completely take the Dutch side. While the Thai government did not establish diplomatic relations with the republican government at the early stage, it did not prevent the Indonesian activists from carrying out their missions in Thailand. In most cases, the Thai authorities simply turned a blind eye to whatever the Indonesians did in the country. Several activities actually received tacit support from the Thai authorities as well. There were various reasons behind this conduct. Firstly, Thailand had a problem with the Muslim population in the southern provinces during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. There was an insurgent group that wanted to separate their provinces from the country. The Thai government was afraid that strong measures against the Indonesians could stir dissent among the population and would, in turn, worsen the situation in the South. Secondly, several high ranking civil servants, military officials, and politicians found that they could gain personal benefits from trading with the Indonesians or giving them tacit support. Lastly, some Thai civil servants sympathized with the struggle against colonialism. These people were followers of the former leftist prime minister, Pridi Banomyong. Although Pridi was ousted, some of his followers still worked for the Thai government. For example, Konthi Suphamongkhon, the director of the Western Politics department, helped the Indonesians by not obstructing with the illegal flights to and from the Republic.

In addition to the hypocritical neutrality, one may also characterize the stance of Thailand in the conflict as opportunistic because it changed its position according to the situation. In December 1949, the Thai government suddenly gave the Republic of Indonesia a *de facto* recognition about ten days before the Dutch transferred its sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia. Since the Dutch-Indonesian negotiations were going well, the Thai government must have calculated that Indonesia would soon become an independent neighbor. Therefore, it began to open a formal diplomatic channel with the Republic before the Republic gained sovereignty. Yet, the political status of Indonesia was still uncertain enough to the Thai government that it made the move tentatively by not giving a *de jure* recognition to the Republic. At the same time, it did not yet recognize the United States of Indonesia. This move actually corroborated the idea that the Thai government was opportunistic because it only tried to establish formal contact with the Republic when the latter was already enjoying full support from other nations. It should be noted that the supportive stance of the US towards the Republic

in the latter stage must have been one reason why Thailand decided to shift its own position on the issue.

The study of Thai-Indonesian relations suggests similar characteristics of the Thai foreign policy during 1945-1950 as shown in the existing literature on the topic. In general, this thesis agrees that Thailand adopted a policy of neutrality before it fully aligned with the US in 1950. This can be seen from the way in which Thailand developed its diplomatic relations with the Republic and the Netherlands. The fact that Thailand under the Pridi regime was working towards recognizing the Republican government corroborates Shad's argument of Thai sympathy towards the struggle against colonialism during 1945-1947.<sup>194</sup> The suspension of recognition and the limited diplomatic relations between Thailand and the Republic in 1948 indicated that Thailand shifted to a more pro-Western stance. Moreover, Phibun's concern over the US attitudes actually shows that the US became important in the thinking of Thai foreign policy from 1948 onwards. These findings corroborate the argument that Thailand was moving closer to the West over the course of 1948-1950.<sup>195</sup> However, the study of Thai-Indonesian relations also shows that Thailand did not completely stop giving unofficial support to the Republic, even if it officially took a pro-Western stance. This fact suggests a contradiction between the official and the unofficial level of Thai foreign policy during the Indonesian Revolution.

This thesis also agrees with the existing literature of the Indonesian Revolution that the US was an important factor in settling the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. In addition to making members of the UN bodies support Indonesia and pressuring the Dutch to give Indonesia independence, the findings of this thesis show that Thailand developed both official and unofficial relations with the Republic according to the stance of the US.<sup>196</sup> This can be clearly seen when Phibun allowed the Republicans to open the Bangkok-Yogyakarta air route because he thought such flights were not of US concern. The fact that Thailand was mindful of the attitude of the US implies that the US must have been powerful in world politics after WWII.

While the literature of the Indonesian Revolution tends to over-stress the roles of Singapore in giving Indonesia unofficial and indirect support in the form of trades, this thesis obviously shows that Singapore was not the only location that offered such support.<sup>197</sup> Thailand

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<sup>194</sup> Shad, *Thailand's foreign policy*: 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid: 6; and Fineman, *Special Relationship*: 66.

<sup>196</sup> Taylor, *Indonesian Independence*: 397; McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*: 304; and Gouda, *American Visions*: 36.

<sup>197</sup> Darusman, *Singapore and the Indonesian Revolution*: 72; Cheong, *Indonesian Revolution*: 1; and Yang, *Chinese Business*: 203.

played a crucial part as trade partner and aviation center. For instance, Bangkok was the headquarters of American Indonesian Corporation (AIC), the firm that tried to monopolize the trades of the Republic with other countries. The existence of AIC actually suggests a wider Southeast Asian trade network in which Myanmar and the Philippines were also included.

However, the case of Thai-Indonesian relations contradicts with Crowl's argument regarding the structure of world politics. According to Crowl, Indian and Australian support for the Republic paved the way for a cooperation among the newly emerging countries. This cooperation aligned neither with the US nor the USSR. However, Thailand did not assist the Republic because it shared the solidarity among newly emerging countries. As mentioned earlier, Thailand did not really sympathize with the struggle against colonialism because it had itself never been colonized. Illegitimate private gains of the Thai elites were the real drive behind the Thai support. Moreover, the stance of the US was an important factor in the making of Thai foreign policy. Therefore, the Thai support should not be seen as an example of the cooperation among newly emerging countries. In contrast, the Thai support was a result of Thai alignment with the US.<sup>198</sup>

As previous literature on the Indonesian Revolution has given attention mainly to Western countries, this study of how Thailand and Indonesia developed their relationship may be seen as an initial step towards shedding light on the positions of countries in Southeast Asia. To conclude, the stance of Thailand in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was a hypocritically neutral one. While the pro-Western policy made Thailand support the Netherlands diplomatically by acknowledging the latter's sovereignty over the Indonesian archipelago, corruption and internal affairs made Thailand give tacit support to the Republic. On top of that, the attitude of the US was a crucial factor that determined the Thai actions during the Indonesian Revolution.

Nevertheless, this thesis is not yet a conclusive study. Its limitations lie in the shortage of Thai sources. Most of the materials used in this thesis are from Dutch archives and inevitably contain the Dutch perspective. In order to fully understand the positions and roles of Thailand, future research would need to examine documents from the Thai authorities, to better understand the motivations and trains of thought of the important Thai actors.

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<sup>198</sup> Crowl, "Indonesia's Diplomatic Revolution", : 239.

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