

Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict – between August 1945 and December 1949 – within the American media. In contrast with the popular belief of a consistent and principled anti-colonialist approach, current research establishes that the terms in which the press portrayed the conflict were not only developing over time but, in addition, were to a great extent dependent on pragmatic interests rather than idealistic beliefs. Studying media coverage parallel to U.S. policy-making will furthermore show that the press provided the parameters for the State Department's actions.

War of double standards

The representation of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the American print media, 1945-1949

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List of Abbreviations

E.C.A.	European Cooperation Administration
G.O.C.	Good Offices Committee
N.A.T.O.	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
N.I.U.	Netherlands Indonesian Union
N.Y.T.	New York Times
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.S.C.	United Nations Security Council
U.N.C.I.	United Nations Committee for Indonesia
U.S.I.	United States of Indonesia
W.P.	Washington Post

I. Introduction

In May 1949 Dutch intelligence in the Republic of Indonesia reported on ‘objectionable American activities’, elaborating that ‘certain American journalists are regarded as pro-Indonesian.’¹ In response to this announcement, the intelligence services briefly considered to expel all American journalists from the archipelago. The U.S.-based public relations firm Swanson & Co, however, declared that American journalists, being distrustful of every government imposing constraints, could under no circumstance accept a restriction to their privileges or freedom of movement. The government in the Netherlands had to respect this proposition since, as the agency articulated, American public opinion was of profound importance to The Hague.²

The complex Dutch-Indonesian conflict, transpiring between 17 August 1945 and December 1949, had more players than the two directly opposing parties. The Netherlands conceived of the archipelago as indispensable for its own prestigious and economic survival; and the Indonesian nationalists, certainly after living through Japanese occupation, stiffened their resolve to obtain unconditional independence. In the immediate post-Second World War era, however, the leading powers of the United States and the Soviet Union – and notably the Cold War fought between the two – determined much of the international relations. The United States in particular had a profound impact on the developments and outcome of the Dutch-Indonesian dispute.³ Accordingly, the Netherlands and the Indonesian nationalists vied for American sympathy, expecting that, if backed by Washington, they would be able to realize their aims.

¹ L. Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog, Militairen versus media in Nederlands-Indië, 1945-1949* (Zutphen 2013) 305.

² Idem.

³ H.W. van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië. De val van het Nederlandse imperium in Azië* (Amsterdam 2001) 371-382.

As above anecdote reveals, the press was an essential medium through which both parties endeavored to win United States' approval. Current research sets out to determine what terminology was used to portray the Dutch-Indonesian conflict and how these depictions evolved overtime. This thesis will additionally argue that the American media to a large extent determined the parameters of the State Department's foreign policies and, consequently, the developments and final outcome of the conflict. Thus, whereas the historian Louis Zweers in his recent publication *The censored war* contends that 'the world press assumed an anti-Dutch attitude'⁴, and that American correspondents insisted on the claim that European colonialism was all but a bygone practice, this research intends to establish that the reportage was far from unequivocally and continuously opposed to either the Netherlands' conduct of affairs or colonialism writ large. In the same vein this research is at variance with Odd Arne Westad's assumption, coined in his landmark political analysis *The global cold war*, that 'after World War II any attempts to defy local nationalism by bankrupt, inefficient European governments...simply did not make sense to Washington.'⁵ Westad continues that, in the case of the Netherlands, 'the Truman administration was quick to pull the plug on whatever aspirations its government may have had to settle its colonial problem by force.'⁶ The media, however, illustrate that the contrary was true. Even after the Dutch launch of a military operation, the U.S. government was reluctant to take a stance in the debate – let alone act decisively on the Netherlands' aggression.

⁴ Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog*, 187. Translation from Dutch: '(Inderdaad) had de wereldpers een anti-Nederlandse houding aangenomen.'

⁵ O.A. Westad, *The global cold war. Third world interventions and the making of our times* (Cambridge and New York 2005) 112-113.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 114.

II. Methodology

To sensibly structure and analyze four years worth of newspapers is a daunting task. Political scientist Kai Oppermann, who examined the construction of public images within the written media, provides a practical solution. Although his study is of a different nature and grounded within a different discipline (i.e. political science), his *modus operandi* and justification of sources is nonetheless transferrable. Oppermann limits himself to the study of two media outlets: namely, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, arguing that these newspapers are, and have been, the two foremost opinion leaders within the field of foreign affairs. The *New York Times* is not only the daily with the most extensive foreign affairs coverage: the newspaper also functions as a major agenda-setter for other print media, and has proved to be influential in guiding American public opinion. The *Washington Post*, in turn, is allegedly the second most important source for (local and national) media outlets in terms of foreign affairs coverage. Equally notable is that, over the years, the *Washington Post* has demonstrated to have a disproportionate impact on decision-makers in the American capital.⁷

Hence this project, too, will be limited to a study of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, in the confidence that, although it might not cover the entire spectrum of opinions, these two media sources will represent the most substantial share of (U.S.) input and perspectives on matters of foreign policy in general and on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict specifically. The current research's findings will be a fair indicator of the overall pattern in the media reporting on the issue.

When proceeding to the methods of analysis, one should distinguish between and make use of both a quantitative and a qualitative study of sources. A quantitative

⁷ K. Oppermann, 'The public images of Britain, Germany, and France in the United States', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9:4 (2012) 305-325.

examination of the two media outlets will contain a survey of when heightened attention towards the Dutch-Indonesian conflict occurs; with which events or political discussions this intensified attention correlates; how the interest in the subject fluctuates; and a comparison of the relative attention paid to the Dutch-Indonesian episode in *The New York Times* on the one hand and the *Washington Post* on the other. These modes of quantitative analysis are fruitful in establishing the salience of a topic and to what extent the conflict is ‘primed’. Priming constitutes the (unconscious) impact of a communication in terms of directing attention to a subject or perspective such as a foreign policy. It helps determine ‘what gets to the “top of the head”’.⁸

It is only thereafter that we will turn to the qualitative component of analysis, studying, in addition to its frequency, the actual contents of the coverage. The most coherent manner in which to review the reporting on the conflict is by determining the dominant ‘frames’ in which the events are made intelligible. A frame can be understood as the central organizing idea or storyline within a mode of communication, which serves as a conceptual tool that people rely upon in order to convey, interpret and evaluate information. ‘Frames’ as Powlick and Katz summarize, ‘help receivers of information define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.’⁹ The public must, in one way or another, be receptive to the framework in which a narrative is molded. Zweers, for example, refers to the (pro-Indonesian) frame of anti-colonialism, appealing to the – alleged – American ideal of self-determination. But a frame does not necessarily correspond with a perceived shared value: a frame, to name just some examples, can also constitute a certain

⁸ J.H. Aldrich, ‘Foreign policy and the electoral connection’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006) 486.

⁹ P.J. Powlick, and A.Z. Katz, ‘Defining the American public opinion/foreign policy nexus’, *Mershon International Studies Review* 42:1 (1998) 36.

historical conjuncture; a national interest; or a deep-rooted fear and a concomitant call for domestic security.

In the succeeding chapters, all commencing with a brief outline of events as recounted in Kahin, Reid and Vickers, this thesis will thus proceed to examine the salience of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the two American media outlets, and the frameworks within which the conflict was presented.¹⁰ These findings, in turn, will be analyzed in parallel with the U.S. foreign policies vis-à-vis the Dutch-Indonesian question, as drawn up by McMahan, Gouda and Zaalberg, and Roadnight.¹¹

The succeeding chapters will be divided into three – chronologically ordered – sections: the first section covers the Indonesian proclamation of independence, on 17 August 1945, until the departure of the British troops in November 1946; the following section, commencing in December 1946, treats the timespan from the Linggadjati agreement until the eve of the second Dutch aggression; and the third section continues with the second military operation and concludes with the ‘official’ Indonesian independence in December 1949. This chronological examination of sources will shed light on the developments in the media attention with regard to the dispute.

¹⁰ G. McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca 1952); A. Reid, *The Indonesian national revolution, 1945-1950* (Hawthorn and Melbourne 1974); A. Vickers, *A history of modern Indonesia* (Cambridge and New York 2005).

¹¹ R.J. McMahan, *Colonialism and cold war. The United States and the struggle for Indonesian independence, 1945-1949* (Ithaca and London 1981); F. Gouda and T.B. Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US foreign policy and Indonesian nationalism, 1920-1949* (Amsterdam 2002); A. Roadnight, *United States policy towards Indonesia in the Truman and Eisenhower years* (Hampshire and New York 2002).

1. August 1945 – November 1946

1.1 Historical context

The Indonesian proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender, caused considerable consternation – fronted by The Hague – among the international community. Information about and comprehension of the situation in the Dutch East Indies was remarkably restricted. Indonesian nationalism, which in fact had been occurring for decades and again gained momentum during the 1940s, was played down in the Netherlands as a byproduct of Japanese occupation – a narrative heedlessly adopted by the Allies. The Hague denounced the frontmen of the Indonesian Republic (notably Sukarno and Hatta) as collaborators, and the Dutch government lent no credence whatsoever to the aptitude of the nationalist leadership.¹²

In August 1945, the Dutch and British governments reached a consensus concerning the prospect of a transitional phase in which the *de facto* command of the Netherlands East Indies would reside with Allied forces.¹³ The British Southeast Asia Command was assigned with the tasks of disarming and repatriating the Japanese; liberating and evacuating the Allied internees; and the maintenance of law and order across the region during this period of transition.¹⁴ In their attempt to counterbalance the Republican leadership, Dutch officers erected federal governments in the regions where the Republic was not in power, venturing to restore – if only in part – the prewar *status quo*. The Dutch governor general Hubertus van

¹²Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 42-43.

¹³ M. Frey, 'The Indonesian revolution and the fall of the Dutch empire. Actors, factors and strategy', in M. Frey, R.W. Pruessen and T.T. Yong ed., *The transformation of Southeast Asia. International perspectives on decolonization* (New York and London 2003) 87.

¹⁴ Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 45-46.

Mook, yielding to a strategy of decentralization, advocated for the ‘rapid consolidation of an economically important area with a population which is still well disposed.’¹⁵

Meanwhile the objective of self-determination had taken root in Indonesia, but disagreement over how sovereignty was to be obtained divided the nationalist community. The European-educated elite, who had managed to establish a Republican government with the tacit permission of the Japanese occupier, was willing to compromise and give their consent to a transitional period of cooperation with the Netherlands. This route of diplomacy stood in sharp contrast with the struggle ideal of non-cooperation. A diversity of struggle groups, assembled along regional, religious and ideological lines, aimed for immediate independence through (guerrilla) warfare. The Javanese cities of Surabaya and Bandung – among a dozen other regions – became the sites of explosive conflict.¹⁶

1.2. American views

The U.S. State Department proved unable to generate much sympathy for the Indonesian nationalist movements in the months following the capitulation of Japan. The government’s outlook on the Indonesian question was determined by in the first place domestic interests and, not unimportantly, perceived Dutch-American ties. American stakes in the Netherlands East Indies were twofold: the United States nurtured a close commercial relationship with the area, having, as the then Secretary of State Cordell Hull depicted, ‘a substantial interest in the maintenance of the principle and practice of equality of opportunity and enterprise’ through the 250 million dollar worth of investments in the region.¹⁷ The archipelago was

¹⁵ Van Mook quoted in Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 104-105.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 23-31.

¹⁷ Hull quoted in Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 2.

furthermore of strategic interest, providing not only a sizable market for American export products, but being also an indispensable source of commodities as rubber and tin.

In addition to the above origins of American national interest in the Southeast Asian region, the bond between the Netherlands and the United States proved of equal importance in the manner the U.S. dealt with the Dutch-Indonesian question. The Dutch people had been regarded as a formidable ally during the Second World War, and a bold source of resistance against German subjugation; but president Roosevelt's heritage, rooted partly in the Low Countries, gave also rise to the sense of a natural alliance. More pivotal, however, was the fact that the U.S. was currying favor on the continent in its tenacious attempt to guard Europe against the expansion of communism.¹⁸

Another factor, apart from American stakes in the Netherlands East Indies and the idea of Dutch-American amity, was the blunt naiveté – or rather blinkered view – that persisted in the United States, undoubtedly enforced by domestic interests and the conception of interlinked fates. The U.S. State Department was blinded by the vague pledges made by Dutch Queen Wilhelmina and the notion that 'the prosperity of [the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies] is indivisible.'¹⁹ Confidence in the Netherlands' sincere and progressive outlook towards their subjects in Indonesia obscured that, in fact, Dutch colonialism was more conventional than the United States at the time would have liked to believe.²⁰

The reliance on Dutch accounts about the state of affairs in the Netherlands East Indies stemmed from the absence of American intelligence in the region and inevitably resulted in a fairly distorted perspective. The United States underestimated the prevalence of

¹⁸ Gouda and Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 19.

¹⁹ Queen Wilhelmina quoted in P. S. Gerbrandy, *Indonesia* (London and New York 1950) 26-28.

²⁰ McMahon, *Colonialism and cold war*, 63-65.

Indonesian nationalism and the impact the Japanese occupation had had on both the widening and deepening of the nationalist' movement.

The U.S. State Department surmised that American objectives in Indonesia would be best served in a solid and constant environment. A revival of European imperialism, and the consequential restoration of Dutch sovereignty in the Netherlands East Indies, would assumedly safeguard this aspiration of permanent stability. Reinforcement, however, of Dutch colonial control, was irreconcilable with the United States' championed ideal of 'self-determination for all people', emanating from the American revolution and embedded in the popular terminology of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point speech and the more recent Atlantic charter. Thus, the U.S. State Department felt coerced to announce that the 'United States policy is one of non-intervention in the Indies but favors, in principle . . . self-government as the [eventual] goal.'²¹ The U.S. pronouncement of non-intervention, by which the Truman administration sidestepped the responsibility for the implementation of a – with the Indonesian nationalists – unpopular stratagem, translated into subcontracting the regulation of their official policies to London, via the British-led South East Asian Command.²²

The coverage of the Dutch-Indonesian question was relatively limited in the period between August 1945 and November 1946; the amount of articles in the *New York Times* added up to 467 with an average of twenty-nine news-items a month, which number lies well below the four-year average of forty-five monthly pieces. The peak of attention within this timespan arrived between October 1945 and February 1946, when the median number of articles fluctuated between forty-seven and sixty-five items each month. The amount of front-page articles for the entire period was sixty-three, and the distribution of these items

²¹ Ibidem, 8.

²² Gouda and Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 30.

correlated roughly with the overall body of articles concerning the Dutch-Indonesian issue, reaching its summit between October and December 1945, with an average of ten monthly accounts featuring on the front-page.

Two *New York Times*' correspondents visited Java over the course of this sixteen-month period. The first to land in Indonesia was the reporter Ralph Coniston, who provided, between December 1945 and February 1946, nine articles from his temporary base in Batavia (current-day Jakarta). In October and November 1946, when coverage of the Dutch-Indonesian situation again steadily intensified, the journalist Robert Trumbull produced seventeen stories on location. Most items during this period, however, were fashioned by the news agencies *United Press* and *Associated Press*, who in turn relied heavily on British and Dutch intelligence or spokesmen in the region.

Within the same timespan the *Washington Post* published only one third of the amount of articles appearing in the *New York Times*. While the four-year average amounted to approximately fifteen articles per month, over the course of this first stage of Dutch-Indonesian conflict the average hovered around ten monthly items – with some heightened attention between October and December 1946. The zenith of interest in the Indonesian question occurred in October 1945, when the *Washington Post* issued thirteen cover stories.

Not only was this daily's coverage of the Indonesian question limited; due to the absence of *Washington Post* correspondents in the region all information derived from secondary sources, predominantly the *United Press* and *Associated Press*. Given that the *New York Times* acquired most of its items from the same news agencies, the narrative and terminology in both newspapers are virtually identical – save for the contribution of the latter's Java-based reporters. The qualitative examination within this chapter will therefore be limited to the *New York Times*' contents. Only one (*Associated Press*) correspondent whose

articles were published by the *Washington Post* reported directly from the region. Ralph Morton appeared a mere three times in the American daily, with one article devoted to the killing and terrorizing by Javanese ‘extremists’; in another, he expressed his disquiet over American economic interests in the archipelago; and the third item was published under the very telling heading of ‘Java rebels: not boys, but look it’.²³

Against the backdrop of the United States’ tacit approval of the Netherlands’ *status quo ante*, it is hardly surprising that the proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945 by the Indonesian nationalist leadership passed unnoticed in the (major) American print media. Neither on the 18th of August, nor during the subsequent days did this – for Indonesia very memorable – day receive a paragraph of attention.

The first time the Dutch-Indonesian question – although very implicitly – was mentioned in the *New York Times* was on 10 September 1945, when the American correspondent to Japan W.H. Lawrence reported on (Dutch) Allied soldiers who, after taken captive by Japanese forces in the Netherlands East Indies, lost their lives during the Nagasaki bombings. The framework was very much determined by the Second World War binary: the spectrum comprised the victimized Allies on the one side, and Japanese ‘bestiality’ on the other, without a remark on the large (native Japanese) majority of casualties.²⁴

A more direct allusion to the Dutch-Indonesian problem was made on 22 September 1945 in an article titled ‘No. 1 problem of Asia’. The item was the poster child for Washington’s position at the time. It started with the idea that Japan ‘destroyed the myth of invincibility of the white man’, and that the problem of imperialism must be solved ‘to the

²³ R. Morton, ‘British troops rush to quell Java uprisings’, *Washington Post*, 18 October 1945; ‘Java’s uprisings involves U.S. firms, trade’, *WP*, 28 October 1945; ‘Java rebels: not boys, but look it’, *WP*, 2 December 1945.

²⁴ W. H. Lawrence, ‘Atom bomb killed Nagasaki captives’, *New York Times*, 10 September 1945.

satisfaction of these [Southeast Asian] peoples, if there is to be real hope of peace and progress in that area of the world.’ The author then proceeded with stating that, at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, the international community reached a successful compromise: the Netherlands promised to ‘educate’ the Indonesian peoples towards partial self-rule, which could eventually culminate in a dominion status. As the author explained, all people have a right to freedom, but sovereignty cannot and should not be obtained overnight. The ‘perfect example’ was the way the United States dealt with the Filipinos, who were gradually instructed in the conduct of self-government, but who remained attached to the United States with a great number of strings. ‘And’, as the reporter propagated, ‘what a reward of loyalty and cooperation was harvested [from the Philippines] in the years of war!’²⁵

The actual spur of attention on Indonesia commenced, as stated earlier, in October 1945, and lasted until February 1946. The first months of coverage were determined by the explosive situation in the Javanese cities of Surabaya, Semarang and Bandung. The struggle was generally portrayed as warfare between ‘native extremists’²⁶ whose nationalism was fabricated and fuelled by the Japanese occupier, and the ‘righteous, Allied troops’ who took up arms only in self-defense, but who had the overall peaceful mission to restore ‘law and order’.²⁷

Especially in the first three weeks of October, the correspondents evoked the idea that the ‘Javanese rebels’ were waging a ‘Holy War’. The Indonesian paper *Merdeka* was reported to have appealed to the Moslem population in support of the ‘so-called Indonesian Republic’, as the newly proclaimed state was persistently – and almost mockingly – referred

²⁵ ‘No. 1 problem of Asia’, *NYT*, 22 September 1945.

²⁶ Other oft-used terms to denote the ‘extremists’ or ‘extremism’ were: ‘terrorists’, ‘savage attacks’, ‘Javanese hotheads’, ‘unruly mobs’, etc.

²⁷ For example: ‘British threaten attack in Java, as Surabaya mob kills generals’, *NYT*, 31 October 1945.

to in the *New York Times* accounts.²⁸ Sukarno's name first surfaced mid-October, when he was denoted as the 'Japanese appointed head of the' again 'so-called Indonesian Republic.'²⁹ According to the British general Christison, Sukarno was the person responsible for the violent insurgencies.³⁰ In these early days of the revolution the correspondents were unable to differentiate between the Indonesian Republic and its leadership on the one hand and the diffuse, heterogeneous struggle groups on the other. All nationalist tendencies were equated to an infantile and Japanese-inspired disobedience.

Only from late October onwards, when news about negotiations between the conflicting parties gained momentum, was the Republican leadership invested with a degree of credibility. 'The Republic' was still preceded by 'so-called', 'self-proclaimed', or in some instances plainly 'unrecognized'; but Sukarno and Hatta were considered as fairly apt and well disposed representatives. The torchbearers of the Indonesian Republic made an effort to distinguish themselves from the 'rebellious contingents' – and not without success. Sukarno was reported to have taken 'disciplinary action against dr. Moestopo', the instigator of the insurrection in Surabaya, and had ordered the cessation of all opposition directed against the Allies.³¹

The Indonesian leadership proved willing to cooperate with the British Southeast Asian Command, emphasizing that not the Allied forces but the Dutch administration was the Republic's chief opponent.³² The Brits, in turn, announced that they intended to employ a 'hands-off policy' in Indonesia: Prime Minister Attlee and his government were stated to have no 'desire to be unnecessarily involved in the administration or in the political affairs of

²⁸ For example: 'Destroyers assist Surabaya advance', *NYT*, 13 November 1945.

²⁹ 'Allies take over Batavia as rebels call for Holy War', *NYT*, 15 October 1945.

³⁰ 'Hostages seized by rebels in Java', *NYT*, 18 October 1945.

³¹ 'British threaten attack in Java, as Surabaya mob kills generals', *NYT*, 31 October 1945; 'British order Raf into Java clashes', *NYT*, 1 November 1945.

³² *Idem*.

non-British territory'. Attlee claimed to recognize the existence and ambitions on the Indonesian independence movement, while being 'careful about accepting its claims at their face value.'³³

News items in *The New York Times* frequently underlined British support for a swift settlement of disputes, but simultaneously conveyed that the United Kingdom regarded the Dutch sovereignty in the region, at least in the foreseeable future, as self-evident.³⁴ This somewhat ambiguous stance was the product of Great Britain's reluctance to wage a war for the Netherlands' sake; while the other side of the coin was that, would London urge for a – to the nationalists' agreeable – resolution, the perpetuation of the British colonial possessions would expectedly be compromised.

Whereas the three main players – Indonesia, Great Britain and the Netherlands – continued to be the focal point of media attention, in November 1945 the United States was attributed with a minor but unwelcome part by the correspondents reporting on the Indonesian question. The media commented that Sukarno had appealed to the U.S. government to prevent Dutch forces from operating American equipment. A reporter feared that 'Asiatic goodwill' towards the U.S. would be endangered in the case the State Department failed to adopt a straightforward position.³⁵ The follow-up to this item arrived on 14 November when journalist Lawrence wrote that Washington refrained from taking a stance in the Indies dispute. The U.S. State Department, however, had no reason to question the Netherlands' sovereignty. According to Lawrence it was deemed evident that Japanese

³³ 'Hostages seized by rebels in Java', *NYT*, 18 October 1945.

³⁴ For example: R. A. Coniston, 'British to stiffen their Java forces to restore order', *NYT*, 9 December 1945.

³⁵ 'Ultimatum served by British in Java', *NYT*, 9 November 1945.

forces were infiltrating the nationalist movements, which fact uprooted Republican claims to authority.³⁶

Aside from the American involvement in the conflict, mid-November marked the arrival of a new face on the platform of the Republican leadership. Sutan Sjahrir – whose name, as if by way of comic relief, was spelled differently daily (Sultan Sharir; Sjahira; Sultan Charir; Sultan Sjharir; etc.³⁷) – was portrayed as a ‘moderate leader’ and a suitable *liaison* for the continuation of peace talks. While Sjahrir tried to distance himself from the struggle branches of the nationalist movement, the situation in Java grew progressively more precarious with the struggle groups still holding sway over vast sections of land.³⁸ British intelligence, as quoted in the *New York Times*, declared that ‘the gloves are off’.³⁹

In December the *New York Times*’ correspondent Ralph Coniston made his entrée. Coniston’s reports dealt chiefly with the ‘hopeful’ negotiations between van Mook and the new Republican cabinet headed by Sjahrir; but he also paraphrased the General Mountbatten as having stressed that his operations in Indonesia followed the lines laid out by Foreign Minister Bevin, who recognized ‘Netherlands’ sovereignty in the Indies’.⁴⁰ The British troops would reinstate ‘law and order’ as to allow the commencement of constitutional reforms, in which the Republic would be granted a measure of self-government within the parameters of a broader Netherlands Kingdom. With hindsight, Mountbatten’s communiqué comes across as a perfect repetition of U.S. State Department aims: the limited degree of ‘native administration’ would suffice to maintain the ideal of self-determination, while in fact the Netherlands could retain authority and thereby safeguard American interests.

³⁶ W. H. Lawrence, ‘US avoids stand in Indies dispute’, *NYT*, 14 November 1945.

³⁷ For example: ‘Raf attacks foes in Surabaya again’, *NYT*, 12 November 1945; ‘Destroyers assist Surabaya advance’, *NYT*, 13 November 1945.

³⁸ ‘Soekarno shelved by Indies Republic’, *NYT*, 14 November 1945.

³⁹ ‘Brutality mounts in fighting Java’, *NYT*, 25 November 1945.

⁴⁰ R. A. Coniston, ‘British to stiffen their Java forces to restore order’, *NYT*, 9 December 1945.

Within the same month the United States was drawn back into the discourse. The *New York Times* quoted Sjahrir who, noticing the U.S. bias towards the Netherlands, reproached the State Department for its failure to assume a neutral position in the dispute.⁴¹ As the *New York Times* allotted an increasing amount of its contents to the tense situation in Indonesia, the U.S. government must have felt forced to – at last – issue an official statement. The public announcement arrived on 20 December, when the State Department ‘called upon the Dutch and Indonesian leaders to resume negotiations’ in hopes of a ‘peaceful resolution’.⁴² The Netherlands responded three days later with the, in retrospect, hollow declaration that ‘nothing would be left undone’ to come up with a solution to the ‘Indonesian problem’.⁴³

At the dawn of 1946 the United States was unable to maintain its stance of pretense neutrality, despite efforts to appear as a bystander. The Indonesian question reappeared on the front cover – but now within the context of the United Nations Organization (U.N.O.). The fact that the establishment of the United Nations was set in motion by the United States rendered a posture of aloofness problematic.

The Soviet Union employed the forum of the United Nations Security Council (U.N.S.C.) to request an investigation into the Indonesian situation, charging the British forces with, firstly, interfering in the country’s internal affairs; denying the native population their right to self-determination; and as a consequence posing a threat to international stability. *New York Times*’ correspondent Reston reported on the – lack of – American participation in one of these U.N.O. conferences: ‘[Secretary of State] Mr. Byrnes told reporters that he was all for discussing the Indonesian problems before the Security Council.

⁴¹ ‘World news summarized’, *NYT*, 16 December 1945.

⁴² ‘World news summarized’, *NYT*, 20 December 1945.

⁴³ ‘World news summarized’, *NYT*, 23 December 1945.

Then he promptly flew off in President Truman's plane ... leaving Edward Stettinius Jr. [the U.S. delegate to the Security Council] to deal with these political hot potatoes.⁴⁴

The correspondent sympathized with Byrnes' limited interest in the allegations as, according to Reston, no one took the Soviet charges serious: 'the true reasons for the British actions in Indonesia', sounded his conclusive remark, 'are generally understood here'.⁴⁵ The U.N.S.C. had confidence in the 'liberality' of the Netherlands and the British, and 'a commission of inquiry would not lead to any useful end.'⁴⁶ This was precisely the stance taken by Stettinius, claiming that an investigation 'might prejudice or retard negotiations'.⁴⁷ The *New York Times* reporter Ralph Coniston wrote a couple of articles in the same period, articulating that 'to the nations of the world, the U.S. included, the Netherlands administration constitutes the only legal government in the Indies.'⁴⁸ He reminded the American public that President Sukarno was 'avowedly and undeniably' a Japanese collaborator and later invoked Queen Wilhelmina's speech as proof of the Netherlands' willingness to grant the Indonesian leadership some 'internal autonomy'.

From late February until September 1946, articles on the Indonesian question were scarce. Interest flared up again in October when, after months of unrewarding negotiations, the discussing parties seemed to be moving towards a provisional solution. Correspondent Robert Trumbull delivered regular updates on these 'peace talks', reporting that, while the 'armed clashes' continued, both the Netherlands and the Republic appeared willing to make concessions. The essential impediment was the influence of 'extremists' on either side of the

⁴⁴ J. B. Reston, 'UNO adopts plan for atom control by unanimous vote', *NYT*, 25 January 1946.

⁴⁵ J. B. Reston, 'Britain welcomes Soviet UNO charges', *NYT*, 23 January 1946.

⁴⁶ J. B. Reston, 'Russia is accuser', *NYT*, 11 February 1946.

⁴⁷ J. B. Reston, 'US fights inquiry in Indonesia by UNO', *NYT*, 12 February 1946.

⁴⁸ R. A. Coniston, 'Java with fifty millions is a hotbed of revolution', *NYT*, 13 January 1946.

conflict, who impeded the establishment of an effectual agreement.⁴⁹ Yet Trumbull remained confident that the Indonesian demand for self-determination could be reconciled with the Netherlands' insistence on a transitional period of interdependence. The Dutch government had to yield to Republican presence in Java but it demanded, as Trumbull put it, 'some say in the running of the enterprise in which they invested.' The Netherlands was, in other words, prepared to 'grant' the Republic a measure of authority, given that the latter would safeguard Dutch investments in the archipelago – which the journalist believed to be a fair transaction.⁵⁰ As the laborious truce talks continued Trumbull noted that within the American public discourse the Dutch-Indonesian negotiations were referred to as a 'comic opera', as if the parleys were but a farcical intermezzo.⁵¹

On 14 November Trumbull announced that an agreement was reached in Cirebon, denoting the truce optimistically as a 'masterpiece of compromise'. The outdated practices of colonialism would dissolve while the continued existence of the Queen's profitable empire could be secured. The Hague was willing to recognize the Republic's hegemony in Java, Sumatra and Madura; and the Republican and Non-republican Islands – the latter still under sovereignty of the Netherlands – would together form the United States of Indonesia (U.S.I.). This federation would, in turn, be linked to the Netherlands Indonesian Union (N.I.U.). Matters of mutual interests – like foreign affairs, defense and economics – would be dealt with through negotiations between the U.S.I. and the N.I.U., which, as Trumbull stressed, secured 'the interests of foreign business'.⁵²

⁴⁹ R. Trumbull, 'Java settlement held to be urgent', *NYT*, 10 October 1946.

⁵⁰ R. Trumbull, 'Compromise held feasible in Java', *NYT*, 18 October 1946; 'Peace in Indonesia not yet attained', *NYT*, 13 October 1946.

⁵¹ R. Trumbull, 'Fighting reported on Java, Sumatra', *NYT*, 24 October 1946.

⁵² R. Trumbull, 'Dutch empire pact drops colonialism', *NYT*, 14 November 1946.

American media coverage in this first stage of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was, to briefly recapitulate, determined by two events: the first being the months of increased fighting; and the second concerned the negotiations within the context of the U.N. The Indonesian nationalists – whether it concerned the Republican leaders or the struggle groups – were consistently portrayed as inane imitators of the Japanese, which, according to the correspondents, translated primarily to violent extremism. Tokens of sincere aspirations for self-determination were habitually ignored. The allies – both the Netherlands and Great Britain – were considered as righteous players: their intention was to restore law and order, and to mentor the native population to eventual self-governance in the vein of the United States' conduct in the Philippines. The reluctance of Washington to take a stance was invigorated by the popular image of the Indonesian dispute, in which the outcry of the nationalists, according to the American correspondents, could not be taken at face value. Only when the Indonesian question was taken to the (American-supported) institution of the United Nations and media attention consequently proliferated, the Administration felt coerced to issue a statement.

2. December 1946 – December 1948

2.1 Historical context

The accord reached in Cirebon in November 1946 – known as the Linggadjati agreement – raised hopes for the conclusion of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict after months of armed confrontations and fruitless negotiations. After the treaty was ratified in March 1947, however, the balance of power during the transitional period was still unresolved. Historian Wim van den Doel sketched the situation aptly with his comment that two different agreements had been signed: the Indonesian leadership assented to the construction of a sovereign federal state in which the Republic would assume the dominant position, envisaging a loose collaboration with the Dutch in an essentially symbolic association. The Hague on the other hand anticipated the creation of a solid union that would encompass a wide range of political responsibilities, with the Republic being a subordinate partner.⁵³

Conditions for peaceful negotiation disintegrated with the departure of the British command. Dutch troops moved into the major cities previously guarded by the Allied forces and presumed sovereignty in Borneo and East Indonesia.⁵⁴ Military pressure increased, and the Indonesian Republic was recognized *de jure* by Egypt and other members of the Arab league. These swelling tensions intensified with the financial hardships suffered by the Netherlands. Thus, paradoxically, when the Republic approved Linggadjati on 25 March 1947, policymakers in The Hague conceived of intervention as imperative. In order to enable the continuance of their power in Java and Sumatra, the Netherlands aimed to access the islands' resources and resolve the economic crisis by releasing commodities worth millions of guilders.⁵⁵

⁵³ H.W. van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië, De val van het Nederlandse imperium in Azië* (Amsterdam 2001) 213.

⁵⁴ Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 110.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 111.

The disingenuously named ‘police action’, the alleged objectives of which were to suppress disorder and enforce the terms of Linggadjati, commenced on 20 July 1947. Dutch forces spearheaded by General Spoor moved swiftly across the islands, seizing major economic assets while attempting to bring the Republic to its knees.⁵⁶ The Netherlands, however, had miscalculated the approval of the international community. The events were brought before the U.N. Security Council, which called upon the conflicting parties to immediately cease hostilities. As their troops had already managed to secure most of East and West Java – along what became known as the ‘van Mook line’ – the Netherlands agreed on the cease-fire order. The truce nonetheless proved illusory and warfare along the van Mook line continued.⁵⁷ The Security Council then decided on the establishment and arbitration of a Good Offices Committee (G.O.C.) that could assist in brokering a settlement. The Committee consisted of Belgium, appointed by the Dutch; Australia, nominated by the Indonesian Republic; and the United States, agreed upon by the Belgian and Australian envoys.

The wide gulf of mistrust between the Netherlands and the Republic remained. The American representative to the G.O.C. Frank Graham, who feared another Dutch offensive, held the conviction that the two sides had to be coerced into a settlement. Graham’s idea materialized with the ratification of the – according to Reid – synthetic Renville agreement in January 1948. The treaty, drawn up by the U.S., openly favored the Netherlands. It legitimated the van Mook line, while the Indonesian premier Sjarifuddin received nothing more than the false assurance of plebiscites in the annexed regions.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 112.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 113-114.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 114.

The 'police action' had put a major economic strain on the Indonesian Republic, playing into a surge of political polarization. The Soviet-backed communist opposition, being extremely critical of the Republic's approval of the Renville agreement, reverted to the hard line of 'one hundred percent freedom'. By March 1948 the left wing of the Republic's political spectrum was united under the People's Democratic Front, who advocated for the nationalization of the economy and close cooperation with the Soviet Union. Sukarno and Hatta, reclaiming the Republican leadership after the resignation of Sjarifuddin's government in January 1948, objected to an alignment with the Kremlin.⁵⁹

August 1948 marked the re-arrival of Musso, a veteran leader of an abortive 1926 communist uprising in Indonesia. Musso unified the opposition under the banner of the Indonesian Communist Party, and insisted on an alliance with the Soviet bloc.⁶⁰ The following month, communist cadres captured installations in Madiun, killing pro-Republican officers and proclaiming a People's Front Government. Sukarno responded fiercely by declaring war on the rebels. He denounced the events in Madiun as 'sinister plans' to replace the Republic by a Soviet-led government. The suppression of the rebellion, accomplished by the end of September, proved an immense success for the Republican leadership. Sukarno and Hatta's fierce opposition to communism, in combination with their prompt and decisive counteractions, had greatly strengthened their standing in the face of the international community.⁶¹

Meanwhile the Netherlands attempted to further extend the United States of Indonesia by erecting puppet governments in a number of federal states. Dutch Prime Minister van Beel announced that he wanted to erase the Republic from 'the political and

⁵⁹ Frey, 'The Indonesian revolution and the fall of the Dutch empire', 97.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 97-98.

⁶¹ Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 146.

mental map of Indonesia', and claimed that action would be required – launching a second 'police action' on 18 December 1948.⁶²

2.2 *American views*

In April 1947 the U.S. State Department made the symbolic gesture of extending *de facto* recognition to the Indonesian Republic, yet the tacit acceptance of the Netherlands' sovereignty in the East Indies remained unchallenged. The Truman administration's top priority was to stabilize the archipelago's economy and considered Dutch authority as crucial to this end. When negotiations stalled on the issue of the allocation of power during the transitional period, the State Department intervened on behalf of the Netherlands. The American government sent an *aide-memoire* to the Republic to resume peace talks on the basis of the Dutch interpretation of Linggadjati, coaxing Sjahrir to accept *de jure* sovereignty of the Netherlands in June 1947.⁶³

The first 'police action' hardly stirred the State Department's attitude towards the Netherlands' legitimacy in Indonesia. The Truman administration had vowed to commit itself to the defense of Europe and regarded the Netherlands as one of the continent's most stable elements. The reinstatement of the economic ties between the metropole and the East Indies was seen as an essential stage in the protection and strengthening of the Netherlands, and with it the European community.⁶⁴

The State Department – desperate to cultivate its own schemes and avoid Soviet entanglement – endeavored to prevent the Security Council from interfering in the archipelago. The U.S. government complied with The Hague's assertion that the situation in

⁶² Van Beel quoted in Frey, 'The Indonesian revolution and the fall of the Dutch empire', 100.

⁶³ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 28-30.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 32.

Indonesia was an 'internal affair', which would obstruct U.N. intervention. However, as condemnatory voices swelled, the Administration felt constrained to present a resolution that would underline U.S. approval of the Council's involvement in the Dutch-Indonesian affair while securing a hand in its advancements. The subsequent establishment of the Good Offices Committee provided for the American objectives. The Committee's impact would be restricted by its advisory role; the United States, holding a seat in the committee, was able to direct developments; and the Kremlin was effectively sidelined.⁶⁵

The January 1948 Renville agreement, displaying plain favoritism towards the Netherlands by sanctioning their military gains, affirmed the State Department's policy of reinforcing European dominion while simultaneously attempting to preserve, as Roadnight stated 'the fiction of U.S. non-involvement by stressing the part played by the G.O.C. ... in the negotiations'.⁶⁶ Even when The Hague, within days of the treaty's validation, planned to install a Federal Interim Government detrimental to the Renville agreement, the State Department remained reticent.⁶⁷ The Australian representative to the Security Council remarked that America's inclination to release Indonesia's resources onto the world market took precedence over consolidating Indonesian independence.⁶⁸

When the developing world was drawn into the Cold War competition, U.S. foreign policy became less absorbed with Europe. Southeast Asia, and Indonesia in particular, attracted the State Department's interest for primarily strategic reasons. The head of the Department's policy planning staff George Kennan noted that the archipelago was 'the most

⁶⁵ Gouda and Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 172-173.

⁶⁶ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 40.

⁶⁷ McMahon, *Colonialism and cold war*, 211-212.

⁶⁸ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 41.

crucial issue of the moment in our struggle with the Kremlin', and that 'we should develop [Indonesia] as a politico-economic counterforce to communism in the Asian landmass'.⁶⁹

At the same time the U.S. government began to realize that its trust in The Hague's sincerity with regard to promoting America's best interests in Indonesia was misplaced. U.S. intelligence in the region in addition to the State Department's representative to the G.O.C both had to contend that the Netherlands could not be relied upon when it came to securing a compromise with the Indonesian Republic; without a settlement, economic rehabilitation would certainly prove impossible.⁷⁰

While faith in Dutch reliability was crumbling, the Administration's confidence in the Indonesian leadership grew. The Republic had, with the suppression of the Madiun rebellion, positioned itself squarely in the anti-communist camp, while its leaders proved capable of providing the basis of a firm government. The State Department thus agreed that this time around pressure had to be applied to the Netherlands. On 7 December 1948 an *aide-memoire* reached the Foreign Ministry in The Hague, which presented the framework for a political settlement and identified the subsistence of the Republic as essential. The document noted that renewed military action would exhaust the Dutch resources and might obstruct the continuance of Marshall Plan aid.⁷¹

Media interest in the Dutch-Indonesian problem intensified substantially between December 1946 and December 1948. *New York Times'* items averaged forty-six articles a month – an increase of over fifty percent when compared with the period between August 1945 and November 1946. Publicity during these two years was, in addition, to a greater extent centered on a couple of major events. In July and August 1947 attention proliferated,

⁶⁹ Kennan quoted in *ibid*, 42.

⁷⁰ Gouda and Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 202.

⁷¹ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 50-53.

with respectively 179 and 202 *New York Times* items on the Indonesian issue. Interest flared up again in December 1948, when the newspaper devoted 159 articles to the conflict. The twenty-two remaining months within this timespan had a record of between fourteen and seventy monthly items on the Indonesian question. Strikingly however, the number of cover articles decreased both relatively and absolutely: a mere fifty-eight reports appeared on the first page over the course of these twenty-five months, with twelve items in July 1947; thirteen items in the subsequent month; and eighteen front-page articles in December 1948.

Washington Post reportage on the Indonesian question remained slight when juxtaposed with the *New York Times*. Nonetheless, the average amount increased from ten to fourteen *Washington Post* articles on the conflict each month – a surge comparable to the relative growth of reportage in the *New York Times*. Moreover, moments of heightened attention ran parallel to the other daily's peaks in news coverage. July 1947 counted forty-one items on the Indonesian topic; in the month that followed articles totaled sixty-eight; and in December 1948 the sum of articles on the conflict equaled fifty-six, versus an average of eight items during the other months of this approximately two-year-period. Especially with respect to the amount of front-page articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* cover attention to the question was high. The phase between December 1946 and December 1948 comprised sixty-six front-page items, with thirteen in July 1947; sixteen in August 1947; and fifteen in December 1948.

Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post* had a correspondent positioned in the Indonesian archipelago over the span of these two years. Both newspapers relied for their information from the Indies on United Press and Associated Press reportage. These news agencies, in turn, depended to a large extent on Dutch and Indonesian communiqués, since the Dutch-Indonesian front lines were effectively cordoned off for press agents. The

lack of eyewitnesses' accounts resulted in an at times ludicrous news output: correspondents had often little choice but to reiterate the sharply contrasting statements of the antagonizing parties.

Front-page coverage of the Indonesian issue started when the Dutch embarked on the first 'police action'. The military operation caused a noticeable shift in the newspapers' tone. Articles appearing in the first three weeks of July – before the beginning of the Dutch military campaign – conveyed a hesitant optimism, as a compromise was still held feasible and belief in Dutch righteousness stood strong.⁷² A *Washington Post* item of 2 July designated the policy adopted by the Netherlands as 'liberal and farsighted', whereas the Republican 'extremists', who were under the spell of Sukarno –whose 'chief claim to fame', according to the author Sumner Welles, was that he had 'accepted a high Japanese decoration' – obstructed the restoration of commercial activity. The chaos in Java, moreover, would provide fertile soil for 'Moscow's agents': and therefore Dutch guidance was deemed not only beneficial but also imperative.⁷³

The first items on the military operation, appearing from 20 July onwards, were still inclined towards the Netherlands' perspective. Official statements issued by the Dutch Governor General van Mook dominated the news agencies' accounts. Van Mook claimed that the limited 'police actions' were The Hague's last resort, since the Republic continued to violate the terms of the Linggadjati agreement. General Spoor, playing to the United States' commercial interests, asserted that the Netherlands was not waging a war but that the operation was required for economic rehabilitation; the Republic's 'scorched earth tactics' allegedly endangered the foreign industrial plants and infrastructure in Indonesia.⁷⁴ The

⁷² 'Compromise in Indonesia', *NYT*, 9 July 1947; 'Activity increases in Dutch Indonesia', *NYT*, 14 July 1947.

⁷³ S. Welles, 'Crisis in Indonesia', *WP*, 2 July 1947.

⁷⁴For example: 'Dutch war in Java said to be ordered', *NYT*, 20 July 1947.

Dutch troops had the ‘responsibilities’ of stabilizing the explosive situation and guaranteeing the restoration of law and order. Van Mook and the Dutch ambassador to the United States van Kleffens repeatedly emphasized that the operating forces encountered little opposition, as the majority of the native population welcomed the Dutch soldiers with enthusiasm.⁷⁵ Numerous accounts added that the Dutch elite military unit *in situ* had enjoyed training by and received military equipment from the U.S. marines at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina – as if to say that America emphatically supported intervention.⁷⁶

Reporters, however, became increasingly wary of censorship. They noted that their correspondence was subject to meticulous scrutiny and that all available information was channeled through communiqués.⁷⁷ If initially the ‘so-called Republic’ was placed between inverted commas, now the ‘police action’ was submitted to this treatment of skepticism.⁷⁸ The correspondents underlined the grave dissonances between Dutch and Republican intelligence. As the Netherlands voiced its rhetoric of limited-scope actions and ‘no resistance worth mentioning’, Indonesian intelligence referred to a full-scale colonial war and stiffening opposition. When Spoor reported, on 27 July, that Dutch victims amounted to thirty-two killed, fifty wounded and seven missing, General Sudirman affirmed that the opposing army suffered at least 9000 casualties.⁷⁹

When the boundary between truth and fiction faded American criticism rose. The media expressed the United States’ regret regarding The Hague’s unilateral decision to resort to military intervention before all peaceful means had been exhausted. Correspondents began to question the employment of U.S. armaments in Indonesia, which, in combination

⁷⁵ ‘First phase of the military action over’, *WP*, 26 July 1947.

⁷⁶ F. Kuhn, ‘Rich resources threatened by ‘scorched earth’ policy’, *WP*, 22 July 1947.

⁷⁷ ‘Netherlands wages full colonial war’, *WP*, 22 July 1947.

⁷⁸ ‘The war in Indonesia’, *NYT*, 24 July 1947.

⁷⁹ S.S. Swinton, ‘Indonesians’ main force in pincers’, *WP*, 27 July 1947.

with critical voices in Congress, may have pressured the State Department to announce that the United States had not ‘furnished any war material’ since V-J Day.⁸⁰ The *New York Times* quoted the Indian president Nehru, who fiercely criticized Dutch intervention and, as The Hague had attempted before, appealed to the economic interests of the United States while arguing for Indonesian independence. Nehru contended that the continuation of Dutch aggressions would not only endanger peace but would also stand in the way of worldwide economic recovery.⁸¹ The *Washington Post* of 20 July printed a passionate speech by the Indonesian Deputy Prime Minister Gani, in which he proclaimed that ‘it is unthinkable that the world should allow a nation like the Dutch, who themselves were oppressed by Hitler’s Germany, to use force’. Gani continued with an appeal to ‘the common sense of the Dutch people and of the world, which we know believes in the Atlantic Charter.’⁸² Sukarno, in a *New York Times* article of 25 July, similarly petitioned to the ‘fundamental ideals’ of the United States. He made the comparison that ‘just as your American ancestors fought 170 years ago for your liberty and independence, so are we Indonesians fighting for ours’ and he delivered a plea to ‘President Truman and ... the people of the United States to stand by the principles of justice and right for which you fought so valiantly only two years ago.’⁸³ Thus, interestingly, both the Netherlands’ and Republican spokesmen were clearly trying to win the favor from the American press – apparently deeply concerned about what the public would read and think, and what political action this could provoke.

In addition to the anticipated deterioration of the economic situation in the Indies; the wariness with regard to Dutch rhetoric; and the international appeals to the American principles of freedom and democracy, reporters commented on the dangers the operations

⁸⁰ F. Kuhn, ‘Rich resources threatened by ‘scorched earth’ policy’, *WP*, 22 July 1947.

⁸¹ R. Trumbull, ‘India will protest on Indonesia in U.N. today’, *NYT*, 29 July 1947.

⁸² ‘Indonesia’s plea to the world’, *NYT*, 20 July 1947.

⁸³ ‘Indies chief asks peace move’, *NYT*, 25 July 1947.

posed in the face of the expanding Soviet power. The 'police actions' would certainly be exploited by U.S.S.R. propaganda to the discredit of the entire western world. It was essentially for this reason that the media called on the State Department to bring the Indonesian affair before the U.N. Security Council, for if another country failed to do so, 'Soviet Russia may do it in her favorite ... role as a friend of "oppressed" colonial peoples.'⁸⁴ The *New York Times* asserted that the situation called for 'bold and decisive action, preferably by the U.N', as the time had long past that the two parties could reach a peaceful solution among each other.⁸⁵ Thus whereas the State Department was still reluctant to attend to the recourse of the Security Council, the press already marshaled the U.S. government in that direction.

Although the Dutch role in the Indonesian affair started to attract some disparaging opinions, the first military operation did not completely turn the tables on the Netherlands. London-stationed *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews pinpointed the quintessential American attitude by declaring that 'the feeling is that there is much of right and wrong on both sides and that the Dutch have been very patient on the whole'. Matthews further contended that in U.S. government circles, no disposition existed that depicted 'the Indonesians as pure white and the Dutch as pure black.'⁸⁶ A *Washington Post* account by the journalist Barnet Nover contained a similar import: The Netherlands had indeed antagonized world opinion by succumbing to the temptation of using military force in order to achieve political ends, but the right was never on one side. It was, according to the author, in the interest of the world population that fighting ceased as promptly as possible, since the products of this 'fabulously rich area' were needed by everyone. With this purpose in mind

⁸⁴'US considers taking Java war to UN', *NYT*, 23 July 1947.

⁸⁵'The war in Indonesia', *NYT*, 24 July 1947.

⁸⁶H.L. Matthews, 'Chagrin in Britain', *NYT*, 22 July 1947.

the ‘enlightened plan of an Indonesian federation’ should be implemented – signaling that, in spite of the Dutch blunder, the correspondents were still convinced that the Netherlands’ presence in the archipelago would fulfill U.S. objectives.⁸⁷

In August 1947, American press coverage was dominated by the question whether the U.N. Security Council had to be clothed with the task of mediating the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Australia, India and Russia called for U.N. intervention, but van Kleffens was perseverant in his claim that the council had no legitimacy to interfere in domestic affairs. The *New York Times* correspondent Thomas Hamilton reported from the U.N. congregation at Lake Success that the United States was susceptible to van Kleffens argument, who had contended that the council had no more right to become involved in the Netherlands’ ‘police action’ than in ‘a dispute between the U.S. government and one of the forty-eight states.’⁸⁸ The U.S. representative to the Security Council Johnson had, in addition, been ‘disturbed’ by the ramification of the Australian appeal to the U.N., which stipulated the conflict as a breach to international peace. Hamilton thus concluded that the State Department’s position vis-à-vis the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was shifting. Whereas the United States had viewed the Dutch military action with ‘obvious disapproval’, the U.S. representative ‘referred today to the “so-called” republic, and opposed the [Australian] demand...that an Indonesian representative receive the right to state his case in the council on the same footing as the Netherlands’ representative.’⁸⁹ This ambiguous government stance was again underlined in a *New York Times* item of 2 August 1947. The Netherlands, the article conveyed, had set itself in the wrong by resorting to military action, yet there was ample reason to question ‘the power of the Indonesian government to enforce its decisions

⁸⁷B. Nover, ‘Strife in Java’, *WP*, 26 July 1947.

⁸⁸T.J. Hamilton, ‘US plan approved’, *NYT*, 1 August 1947.

⁸⁹Idem.

against the hotheads in the camp.’⁹⁰ Three weeks later the newspaper paraphrased Johnson, commenting on ‘the incompetence and inability of the Indonesian government’, and the Indonesian people’s need for proper police protection.⁹¹ The Dutch military operation might have been an unnecessary muscle-flexing move but Republican inaptitude and inferiority were still widely perceived as axiomatic. With this line of thought, the United States implicitly consented to continued Dutch authority.

U.S.-Indonesian relations further cooled when Sjahrir refused to accept the American offer of good offices. ‘How’, voiced Sjahrir rhetorically ‘can there be free negotiations when one party stands with a pistol pointed at the head of the other?’⁹² The U.S. emissary Johnson was accused of circumventing the Security Council’s authority, in order to settle the conflict on terms advantageous to the United States and the colonial powers. The Netherlands, France, the U.K. and the U.S. were eager to prevent the council from creating a commission for the arbitration of Dutch-Indonesian differences, as the establishment of such a body ‘might set a precedent for similar U.N. action in other colonial disputes’.⁹³

Frictions between the Western powers and the Soviet Union continued. The Soviet representative to the Security Council Gromyko charged the Netherlands with behaving ‘as if this organization did not exist at all’ and attacked the United States on the grounds that it attempted to ‘force’ its good offices on the Indonesian Republic. Johnson, in turn, replied that the Soviet representative was probing to ‘use the council as a propaganda forum in the usual Soviet method.’⁹⁴ Washington and Moscow used the pretext of the Indonesian dispute

⁹⁰ ‘The case of Indonesia’, *NYT*, 2 August 1947.

⁹¹ A.M. Rosenthal, ‘UN renews its Java order’, *NYT*, 27 August 1947.

⁹² T.J. Hamilton, ‘Indonesia rejects US bid’, *NYT*, 20 August 1947.

⁹³ *Idem.*

⁹⁴ *Idem.*

to ameliorate their respective positions in the international community. They fought their Cold War through the institution of the Security Council.

Johnson's favorable disposition towards the Netherlands harvested the approval of some, but evoked incomprehension in others. A *Washington Post* item written by Marquis Childs denounced the 'stubbornness of the Dutch', and their 'white imperialism'. The author warned that the military invasion had been a 'handsome gift to the communists', who could 'make full use of it in their drive to annex Asia's millions.' Beyond the resulting chaos, 'the jackal of totalitarian communism' was waiting to take over. Childs ended on the note that, although the U.S. had won the world war, it had not yet won world peace.⁹⁵ *New York Times* correspondent Foster Hailey supported Child's assumptions. He stated that 'anti-white' sentiments in Asia had been fuelled due to the Netherlands' 'small and grudging' concessions. Hailey presented the manner in which the United States had 'guided' and 'burgeoned' the nationalist movement in the Philippines as the most liberal and appropriate conduct of affairs with respect to imperial possessions.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, both newspapers provided the stage for an impassionate discussion that transpired in a series of 'letters to the editor' between a pro-Netherlands camp and its anti-Dutch opposition. The former argued that the European power brought economic, scientific, educational, and moral progress to the Indonesian native population, while the latter feared the loss of American prestige in Asia. The press once again constituted the mouthpiece for stimulating the U.S. government to report to the U.N. *New York Times* reader Ernest Power wrote on 21 August 1947: 'If a man is murdering his wife in his own house the

⁹⁵ M. Child, 'Washington calling', *WP*, 5 August 1947.

⁹⁶ F. Hailey, 'All Asia deeply stirred', *NYT*, 24 August 1947.

police have no right to interfere, says Holland with reference to Indonesia. Does the Security Council agree? If not, urgent measures should be taken.⁹⁷

After more than a year of relative quiet, the Indonesian question surfaced again in December 1948 when the Netherlands launched the second 'police action'. With this violation of the American-mediated Renville agreement, the U.S. State Department was quick to denounce the Dutch move. Washington held the belief that the 'surest way' to stimulate communism would be through military intervention, and that the U.S.S.R. would gratefully exploit the action to 'occupy a new propaganda beachhead' in the region.⁹⁸ In addition to the conviction that the Netherlands' intervention would foment communism rather than avert it, the State Department as well as the media expressed concern over the fact that the Dutch had taken measures in spite of the U.S.-mediated Renville agreement and the Security Council's mediation. The broken promise would deal a hard blow to the 'western prestige in the east' and the authority of the United Nations.⁹⁹

The media were struck by the Administration's sudden 'tough attitude'.¹⁰⁰ While the Dutch ambassador van Kleffens persisted in his rhetoric of the threat of communists permeating the Republic, the U.S. delegate to the Security Council did not hesitate to identify the Netherlands as culprit. Many articles, however, still depicted U.S. intervention as too timid. The *Washington Post* reporter Child claimed, on 21 December 1948, that the American stance lacked 'constructive and positive purpose'. The *New York Times* accused the State Department of intervening 'eighteen months too late'.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ E.E. Power, 'Indonesia and the security council', *NYT*, 21 August 1947.

⁹⁸ 'Dutch denounce truce', *WP*, 19 December 1948.

⁹⁹ T.J. Hamilton, 'Indonesian says fight will go on', *NYT*, 31 December 1948.

¹⁰⁰ 'US blames Dutch in UN', *WP*, 21 December 1948.

¹⁰¹ M. Childs, 'Washington calling', *WP*, 31 December 1948.

The United States suspended the economic aid earmarked for the recovery of the Dutch East Indies as a token of its disapproval. However, funds to the Netherlands continued. The rationale was that if the Dutch were eliminated as a recipient of recovery grants the ‘surrounding Marshall Plan structure would be shaken as by an earthquake, and with it our security policy.’¹⁰² The Netherlands constituted a keystone of the economic and military security systems in Europe that were vital to the United States and, according to the *New York Times* journalist Sulzberger, ‘it would appear fairly certain at this stage of post-war history that the U.S. remains determined to restore Western Europe to a healthy condition regardless of what tragedies loom in Asia.’¹⁰³ In addition, both *New York Times* and *Washington Post* correspondents continued to emphasize the ‘stout ties of blood’ and the political sentiments that united the two trans-Atlantic countries.¹⁰⁴

Thus, the second phase of the Dutch-Indonesian question initiated a number of remarkable trends in the American reportage. Firstly, the media reflected the endeavors of both Dutch and Indonesian communiqués to frame their respective positions and aims within (anticipated) United States’ interests. The spokesmen of either party expected that if they could persuade the American public of the advantages of their schemes the State Department would follow suit.

The Netherlands’ government, moreover, lost some of their moral high ground as the press scathed The Hague for embarking on another ‘police action’ in defiance of the U.S.-mediated Renville resolution. Criticism was essentially pragmatic rather than idealist. The Netherlands’ move, the media presumed, would affect American prestige; play into the hands of the communist expansion; and would additionally endanger plans for (European)

¹⁰² A. Krock, ‘Capital in a dilemma’, *NYT*, 26 December 1948.

¹⁰³ C.L. Sulzberger, ‘Java crisis disconcerts US’, *NYT*, 27 December 1948.

¹⁰⁴ A. Krock, ‘In the nation’, *NYT*, 23 December 1948; F. Kuhn, ‘Java war can undermine Atlantic pact’, *WP*, 26 December 1948.

economic recovery. The Dutch were still perceived as a good-natured ally but they had to ensure not to harm U.S. foreign policy schemes. The media's pragmatic view equally manifested itself in its representation of the Indonesian Republic. The Republican government was no longer regarded as utterly unqualified, but the Indonesian desire to exist independently from the Netherlands – which was considered beyond American interests – found very little resonance. Indonesian inferiority, moreover, remained a conspicuous theme, expressed in the allusions to the Netherlands' mission of 'educating the native population' – in the manner with which the United States had cultivated the Philippines.

3. January – December 1949

3.1 Historical context

The second military aggression resulted in, as Reid described it, an ‘unmitigated disaster’ for the Netherlands.¹⁰⁵ The Hague had gambled on the strategy of convincing the Security Council that the Indonesian Republic could not be considered a significant partner for negotiations. Circumstances proved rather the reverse.

In spite of their imprisonment by the Dutch, the Republican leaders had refused to budge on their beliefs. Their uncompromising mentality endowed them with an aura of martyrdom and gave great impetus to their popularity. The guerrilla movement, in addition, gained momentum and received wide support from the Indonesian population who displayed an increasing solidarity with the freedom struggle. And, lastly, the resignation of various administrations and leaders in Dutch-supported federal governments – realizing, with the launch of the second ‘police action’, that The Hague intended to annihilate the Republic whose government the federalist leadership had regarded as a counterbalance to the Dutch sphere of influence – constituted the final blow to the Netherlands’ stature.¹⁰⁶

The Hague, well aware that its position vis-à-vis the Republic and its reputation within the international community were disintegrating, presented the Security Council with the progressive-sounding ‘van Beel plan’. The plan furnished the council with a blueprint for the forthcoming Round Table Conference, which would constitute the platform for negotiations on a prompt transfer of power. However, this Dutch grand scheme amounted to yet another attempt to avert the *de jure* sovereignty of the Republic. The Security Council, refusing to compromise on the issue of restoring the Republican government, rebuffed The Hague’s proposal.

¹⁰⁵ Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 159.

¹⁰⁶ Vickers, *A history of modern Indonesia*, 111.

The economic, military and diplomatic predicament of the Netherlands rendered its unyielding attitude impossible. Negotiations resumed at the Batavia Conference in April 1949 and the resulting Roem-van Roijen agreement, ratified on 7 May 1949, effected the restoration of the Republican leadership to their quarters in Jogjakarta. The subsequent Round Table Conference, set in motion in late August, ended the conflict's intermittent impasse. On 27 December The Hague transferred unconditional sovereignty over the former Netherlands East Indies to the Federal Indonesian Republic. The new Federal Republic's constitution delineated two-third of its legislative seats to federal representatives but 'no federal politicians could compare in stature with Sukarno and Hatta'.¹⁰⁷

3.2 American views

The Hague's recourse to military action in December 1948 formed a turning point in U.S. policy regarding the Indonesian dispute. The Hague had angered the State Department by pursuing its own agenda despite the American-mediated Renville agreement. This inconsiderate move had, according to the Truman Administration, not only impaired the prestige of the United Nations and the United States, but also jeopardized U.S. foreign policy objectives.¹⁰⁸

As condemnatory voices rose – both domestically and in the international arena – the Administration decided to suspend Marshall Plan aid apportioned to the recovery of the Netherlands East Indies. This 'tough line', however, was little more than a façade. Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett told the British Ambassador Franks that the Economic Cooperation Administration's (E.C.A.) suspension of financial assistance was an attempt to

¹⁰⁷ Reid, *Indonesian national revolution*, 162.

¹⁰⁸ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 56.

divert demands in congress calling for a halt of funding to the Netherlands itself, and ‘canalize the rising tide of popular indignation’.¹⁰⁹

Thus the shift in the State Department’s approach did not mark a sudden conversion to an idealistic support for the nationalist movement; rather, it was the result of a persistently pragmatic outlook. The director of the office of United Nations Affairs Dean Rusk contended that at the end of the day, Washington was ‘pursuing [its] own interests and policies.’¹¹⁰

At this point in time the Truman Administration’s primary concern was the containment of communism, especially since a communist victory in China was looming. The State Department became convinced that the restoration of the moderate Republican leadership was imperative in maintaining stability and preventing the further spread of communist ideology in Southeast Asia. Washington concluded that its long-term economic and diplomatic objectives would best be served by promoting political independence.¹¹¹

Whereas hitherto the State Department had succeeded in restricting the influence of the Security Council to a mere advisory function, henceforth the U.S. government intended to employ the Council for assertive intervention. Thus, at the dawn of 1949 the U.S. delegation to the United Nations marked its departure from their government’s passive attitude by circulating a draft resolution to the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, while sharply criticizing the Netherlands’ intransigence over the reestablishment of the Republic.¹¹² Washington’s viewpoint was invigorated by the fact that the Netherlands-backed federal cabinets handed in their resignation, ‘uniting’ as Roadnight asserted ‘all shades of Indonesian

¹⁰⁹ Lovett quoted in *ibidem*, 58.

¹¹⁰ Rusk quoted in *ibidem*, 60.

¹¹¹ Contrast with Westad, who claims that the U.S. ‘felt that a handover of power to the Indonesians could not happen fast enough’ after the Madiun rebellion in September 1948. See: Westad, *The global cold war*, 113-114.

¹¹² Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 63.

opinion behind the UN resolutions and making it easier for the Truman Administration to insist on Dutch compliance.¹¹³

On 23 March 1949 the U.N. Security Council passed a motion formulating a preliminary conference in Batavia, on which occasion the arrangements of the Round Table Conference and the release of the Jogjakarta government would be negotiated. If The Hague failed to comply with these measures, the U.S. was prepared to withhold the Netherlands' membership to the prospective North Atlantic alliance. The Batavia Conference and the ensuing Roem-van Roijen agreement – mediated by the American emissary Merle Cochran – demonstrated that Washington's stringent attitude was urging the Netherlands towards a final settlement.

Three issues dominated the Round Table Conference, opening on 23 August 1949. The Indonesian leadership was worried that the Netherlands-Indonesian Union would curtail the Republic's sovereignty, yet the two most acute areas of disagreement concerned the amount of debt Indonesia would assume from the Netherlands East Indies and the future of West New Guinea – an area the Netherlands wanted to retain, chiefly as a matter of prestige. Cochran, intent on installing a moderate nationalist leadership and *ipso facto* isolate the threat of communism, presented a solution that left the Republic's sovereignty unhampered by interference from The Hague. However, the settlements to the remaining matters reflected the sympathy the State Department still felt towards their European ally.¹¹⁴ The U.S. representative persuaded Indonesia to accept the lion's share of the Netherlands East Indies' debt, and they equally had to acquiesce in the postponement of a resolution concerning the future of New Guinea. Having agreed on these questions, the conference closed on 2 November 1949 and the transfer of power to the Republic of the United States

¹¹³ Ibidem, 65.

¹¹⁴ Gouda and Zaalberg, *American visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 305.

of Indonesia, supervised by the U.S., ensued on 27 December 1949. The State Department overtly identified the birth of an independent Indonesia as its personal diplomatic success.¹¹⁵

The last phase of the dispute saw again a significant increase in media interest. The *New York Times* published a total of 758 items on the conflict in 1949, averaging sixty-three articles per month or over two articles a day. This constituted almost a fifty percent rise in attention again in comparison with the previous period. News coverage on the Indonesian affair reached its zenith in January 1949 with a record of 173 news items – averaging almost six daily articles referring to the Indonesian question. The mean number of articles in the remaining eleven months floated between forty-one and seventy-four items. Front-page articles added up to forty-seven items over the span of the entire year and displayed a similar curve in the level of attention as the complete number of articles, with a heightened interest of fifteen cover stories in January which amounted to almost a third of all front-page items on Indonesian published over the course of 1949. A second apex of attention occurred in December, when nine accounts concerning the events appeared on the first page.

Washington Post coverage on the conflict in this last stage of the Dutch-Indonesian affair nearly doubled with respect to the previous two years. The average number of items rose from fourteen to a little over twenty-three articles each month, the sum being 279 articles in 1949. Attention peaked – analogous to the *New York Times* – in January, with a total of 59 articles. During the rest of this period interest amounted to between eleven and thirty-one items a month. Front-page stories remained stable with respect to the first years of the conflict, the monthly average always fluctuating between two and three front-cover items. The pinnacles of page-one attention diverted slightly from those of the *New York Times*, with heightened interest not only in January and December but also in April 1949, at a

¹¹⁵ Roadnight, *United States foreign policy towards Indonesia*, 71-73.

time that U.S. government debates on the matter of the continuance or discontinuance of Marshall Plan aid to the Netherlands and Netherlands East Indies were in full swing.

The *New York Times* sent two reporters to the East Indies during 1949. Correspondent Robert Trumbull, who had visited the archipelago before, provided regular updates on the Indonesian dispute in the early months of 1949. Later on, in the summer of the same year, the *Times* journalist Bertram Hulen accompanied a press journey organized by the government in the Netherlands – an operation designed to ‘illuminate’ the American public on the situation in the Indies. Aside from news originating in the Southeast Asian region, for the American public much of the body of articles concerning the Dutch-Indonesian affair sprang from the debates in the U.N. Security Council in New York, the political meanderings in Washington and the communiqués deriving from the Dutch political capital where the *New York Times* correspondent David Anderson was situated.

The *Washington Post* continued to rely on the larger press syndicates for their reportage on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Not just news deriving from the Indonesian archipelago, but also coverage of the debates transpiring in The Hague and the U.N. were predominantly based on accounts from United Press and Associated Press sources. This dependence on external agents engendered a fairly flat and uniform news output, which often built on the articulations of government officials, yet was devoid of any extra layers of analysis or reflection. Only the *Post* reporter Ferdinand Kuhn, who was stationed in Washington, published a small number of articles that referred to the U.S. government’s musings on the Indonesian dispute. Kuhn turned out to be the perfect messenger of the State Department’s rhetoric presented to the outside world. *Washington Post* columnist Drew Pearson, however, offered with his polemical pieces some depth to the debates, as did the constant supply of impassioned ‘Letters to the editor’.

The January reportage of the *New York Times* was dominated by disparaging remarks on the ineffectiveness of both the U.N. Security Council and the U.S. government with regard to the impasse in the peace talks and the Dutch violation of the cease-fire order. The reporters stressed the view shared by Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan and Ceylon that the Security Council could not possibly condone the Netherlands' use of force and that the U.N.'s failure to solve the Indonesian question would be disastrous to the potency of the Security Council.¹¹⁶ The Philippines – humiliatingly, as the Truman Administration lauded its fair conduct and friendly relations with the former colonial area – accused the United States of ‘compounding twice over the unhappy blunder of the U.S.S.R.’ in its failure to call in earnest for troop withdrawals.¹¹⁷

The denigrating comments on the United Nations' and the State Department's inaction had little ground in idealism. The Dutch ‘police actions’ and the subsequent inability or unwillingness of the world powers to react adequately and bring forth a durable settlement was feared to damage the stability of all colonial areas in Asia and add to the immediate strengthening of the international communist line. The situation, Trumbull commented, had handed the communists two ‘made-to-order’ weapons: the first was anti-imperialist propaganda, primarily directed at the United States and Great Britain; and the second constituted the creation of new tensions in Southeast Asia and the accentuation of old ones, like the contrast between ‘ruled versus ruler, non-whites versus whites, and coolie workers versus well-fed employers’ – disparities which in the same manner could be

¹¹⁶ ‘Dutch report end of fighting in Java’, *NYT*, 1 January 1949; ‘Burma to dispatch Indies expedition’, *NYT*, 3 January 1949; G. Barrett, ‘U.N.’s Indies body suggests it quit’, *NYT*, 8 January 1949.

¹¹⁷ G. Barrett, ‘U.N.’s Indies body suggests it quit’, *NYT*, 8 January 1949.

exploited by the communists to garner converts.¹¹⁸ Thus Trumbull, as did other correspondents, expected a heightened possibility of 'leftist consolidation' in Indonesia.¹¹⁹

And *New York Times* reporters foresaw a second repercussion: Dutch aggression in the Indies and the subsequent Western powers' inertia would increasingly drive a wedge between Asia on the one hand and Europe and the United States on the other. The majority of the Asian continent perceived the Netherlands' action as a veil for the restoration of colonialism and intended to make a collaborative fist.¹²⁰ The Asian conference of 20 January would, in the eyes of the journalists, plant the seeds for 'powerful regional growth' – to the detriment of diplomatic and economic American interests.¹²¹ The 'hungry world markets' were longing for Asia's raw materials and, as *New York Times* correspondent Trumbull wrote, the 'general world prosperity' would be disturbed by the hurt relations between Asia and the West.¹²²

The newspaper accounts provided the impetus for a solution to the continuing deadlock. The formation of an Asian bloc and the reinforcement of communism, the press agents concluded, could only be halted through the 'concerted efforts of the United Nations and the United States'.¹²³ Mid-January the State Department proposed that the Security Council authorize a new commission to determine the areas that could gradually be returned to the Republican administration and presented a working paper concerning the Federal Interim Government, general elections for the native population and the release of the

¹¹⁸ R. Trumbull, 'Asian unrest seen as result of acts by Dutch in Java', *NYT*, 10 January 1949.

¹¹⁹ 'Dominions suggest British Java shift', *NYT*, 9 January 1949; R. Trumbull, 'Asian unrest seen as result of acts by Dutch in Java', *NYT*, 10 January 1949; R. Trumbull, 'Threat of communism growing across Asia', *NYT*, 16 January 1949.

¹²⁰ C. Wolf, 'Crisis in Indonesia', *NYT*, 2 January 1949.

¹²¹ *Idem*; R. Trumbull, 'Asian unrest seen as result of acts by Dutch in Java', *NYT*, 10 January 1949; 'Asian lands urge free Indies in '49', *NYT*, 21 January 1949.

¹²² R. Trumbull, 'Indonesian crisis is drain on Dutch', *NYT*, 13 January 1949.

¹²³ C. Wolf, 'Crisis in Indonesia', *NYT*, 2 January 1949.

Republican leadership.¹²⁴ At the end of the month the Security Council, with the active support of the United States, ratified a resolution that put an end to the impasse; and not long after, the Administration decided to suspend financial aid originally allocated to the Netherlands East Indies. Although these constructive measures cannot be ascribed to the merits of the popular press alone, the media – considered to also represent public opinion – must have played their due part.

The communiqués issued by Dutch officials since the commencement of the conflict in 1945, and designed for primarily American consumption, decreased in effectiveness since the G.O.C. had discovered a couple of grave incongruences between issued statements and observed conditions in the archipelago.¹²⁵ Foreign minister Stikker, however, still claimed in the 23 January *New York Times* to ‘foresee only chaos if the resolution is allowed to stand as it is now.’¹²⁶ Thus, in June 1949 the *New York Times* correspondent Bertram Hulen, accompanied by a congregation of a dozen American journalists, arrived in the Indonesian archipelago as a guest of the Netherlands government. The Hague’s last resort to regain the United States’ goodwill amounted to an orchestrated press journey with the aspiration of rendering American public opinion – and consequently U.S. government – favorable to the Netherlands’ conduct in the Indies.¹²⁷ The United States’ consent was, evidently, a prime consideration for the policy-makers in The Hague.

The effort of the junket’s coordinators to convey the indispensability of Dutch leverage in Indonesia and, accordingly, convince the State Department to resume Marshall Plan aid soon appeared to bear fruit. Correspondent Hulen, receptive to his host’s

¹²⁴ T. Hamilton, ‘US asks UN to set Indies area to be evacuated by Dutch forces’, *NYT*, 15 January 1949; A. M. Rosenthal, ‘US, 3 others ask UN for freedom of Indies in 1950’, *NYT*, 22 January 1949; A. M. Rosenthal, ‘UN approves plan for free Indonesia’, *NYT*, 29 January 1949.

¹²⁵ R. Trumbull, ‘Close guard kept on Indies leaders’, *NYT*, 17 January 1949.

¹²⁶ D. Anderson, ‘Stikker says Netherlands has already pledged steps now urged upon her’, *NYT*, 23 January 1949.

¹²⁷ Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog*, 317-323.

arguments, obediently echoed Dutch rhetoric in his *New York Times* contributions. The reporter defined communism as the ‘hard core of resistance’ to order in the archipelago, and quoted van Roijen – clearly appealing to the allegedly American ideal of self-determination – when he contended that the cooperation between the Netherlands and Indonesia would inspire a ‘positive program of democratic government’.¹²⁸

The Hague’s representatives to the excursion had, in addition, presented the Netherlands’ blueprint for an open-door policy concerning commercial relations in Indonesia, ‘citing’ as Hulen wrote, ‘American rubber, oil, and other interests’.¹²⁹ The rendition of these plans led the correspondent to comment that the ‘area could become strategically of great importance to the United States.’¹³⁰ Thus, Dutch government officials were well aware that U.S. support required not only a plea to American-specific principles, but that assistance from the State Department would stand or fall with its perception of the profitability of Dutch presence in the archipelago towards the U.S. government’s interests. Although the company of American reporters proved fairly susceptible to the Netherlands’ reasoning, the impact of their favorable disposition was hampered by a tragic turn of fate. The airplane carrying the party of journalists crashed near Bombay – killing all passengers, and leaving most of their stories unpublished.¹³¹

Contrasted with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* coverage of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was quite unequivocal. Reportage was determined by matter-of-fact observations of the proceedings within the confines of the Security Council and the U.S.

¹²⁸ B. D. Hulen, ‘Dutch plan urges Indies free trade’, *NYT*, 16 June 1949; B. D. Hulen, ‘Agreement is near in Indonesia talks’, *NYT*, 21 June 1949.

¹²⁹ B. D. Hulen, ‘Dutch plan urges Indies free trade’, *NYT*, 16 June 1949.

¹³⁰ Idem; B. D. Hulen, ‘Indonesia enjoys oil industry boom’, *NYT*, 5 July 1949.

¹³¹ Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog*, 353-363.

State Department, and, as stated earlier, stemmed chiefly from external press agencies' accounts. There were a couple of deviations from the norm.

The *Post* reporter Ferdinand Kuhn, writing from and on Washington, became the mouthpiece of American foreign policy during the last months of the dispute. Kuhn's accounts reinforced the conception that the United States assumed an essentially realist outlook in its conduct of the Indonesian affair. Towards the end of the conflict, on 2 November 1949, Kuhn wrote that 'American policy-makers are convinced that the real alternative to communism in Asia is not colonial rule, but rather the encouragement of native nationalisms with free and democratic institutions of their own.'¹³² The U.S. government's ultimate resolve to support 'moderate nationalism' in Southeast Asia grew from intelligence assessments that such course of action would offer the best chance to impede communist expansion. This pragmatic viewpoint was equally reflected in the State Department's decision to renew economic aid for Indonesia, which was a means to, as Kuhn articulated, 'revive the output of raw materials needed by Western Europe'.¹³³

A couple of articles published by the journalist Walter Lippmann adopted a similarly pragmatic vocabulary. Lippmann stressed the profound importance of maintaining friendly relations between the 'Western democracies and the emerging peoples of Asia.' If the United States would 'support puppet governments against the rising tide of nationalism', he asserted, it would certainly lose what influence it otherwise might have had in the region.¹³⁴ Yet the reporter recognized, at the same time, that the situation was complicated 'by the fact that the very same nations which in Europe are leading democracies, and our close allies, have been east of Suez the empires against which all of Asia is in rebellion.' His words

¹³² F. Kuhn, 'ECA dollars soon to bolster free Indonesia against reds', *WP*, 2 November 1949.

¹³³ Idem; F. Kuhn, 'US to recognize Indonesia today', *WP*, 28 December 1949.

¹³⁴ W. Lippmann, 'Today and Tomorrow. America in Asia', *WP*, 12 January 1949.

underlined the fine line the State Department walked between continuing the existing alliance with Europe, and the simultaneous intention to secure good relations with the countries in the Far East by recognizing their nationalist aspirations.¹³⁵

The truly exceptional voice in the *Washington Post* belonged to the columnist Drew Pearson who, like Kuhn, wrote on the occurrences within the U.S. government, but whose approach was very different. Whereas Kuhn embodied a prime advocate of the State Department's practical politics, Pearson expressed severe – but arguably justifiable – criticism of the U.S. policies vis-à-vis the Indonesian dispute. In an account of 8 January 1949 he labeled the second Dutch aggression an 'unhumanitarian' act, and contended that the operations were made possible by 'piled up American materials' and U.S. government's Marshall Plan aid.¹³⁶ An article appearing in February charged the State Department with 'delivering fine phrases before the United Nations', where State Department delegates had expressed their disapproval of the Netherlands' intervention, while at the same time 'playing footsie with the Dutch aggressors under the U.N. table' – referring to the State Department's reluctance to halt financial aid to the Netherlands.¹³⁷ This line of argument was repeated in March, when Pearson commented that 'while State Department spokesmen were making pious speeches before the U.N. against Dutch aggression ... other spokesmen were making secret speeches to Senate leaders that they must vote [in favor of] Marshall plan relief to the same Dutch aggressors'.¹³⁸ Pearson, unlike other *Post* reporters, did not hesitate to accentuate the Janus-faced nature of the State Department's strategy and was, with his criticism of Dutch 'unhumanitarianism' and Washington's opportunism, an isolated idealist.

¹³⁵ W. Lippmann, 'Today and tomorrow. US and Asia', *WP*, 15 December 1949.

¹³⁶ D. Pearson, 'Truman pays sentimental visit', *WP*, 8 January 1949.

¹³⁷ D. Pearson, 'State Department put on spot in Senate', *WP*, 15 February 1949.

¹³⁸ D. Pearson, 'US is two-faced toward Dutch', *WP*, 20 March 1949.

Coverage of the Dutch-Indonesian question moved, in this last phase of the conflict, increasingly away from the archipelago's line of fire to the battlefield within the U.S. government and the U.N. Security Council. The year 1949 evinced for the first time a stark divide between *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reportage. *New York Times'* correspondents did not shy away from voicing their fervent disapproval with the State Department's passivity in the Indonesian dispute. The journalists' vilification of the U.S. government and the U.N. council was still defined by practical terms: the most pressing concerns were the unremitting communist threat; and, in addition, the prospect of Asian regionalization, which would pose an insurmountable obstacle not only to world peace but also to American dividends in the region. *Washington Post* accounts in contrast generally lacked much criticism or reflection, which was probably a result of their reliance on news syndicates – although the paper's adjacency to the policy-making nucleus might have affected their output as well. One *Post* reporter who did eventually touch on the State Department's conduct of affairs with respect to the predicament in Indonesia out to be a zealous supporter of its maneuvers.

Conclusion

The essence of the American reportage on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict can by no means be captured in a sentence, let alone in a single designation as, for example, ‘anti-colonial’.

Perspectives on the Indonesian dispute and its two main opponents, as this thesis has illustrated, were highly susceptible to change. The journalists’ accounts were naturally determined by the availability of information, but also to a large extent by perceived United States’ interests, policies and worldviews.

In the early stages of the conflict, most of the accounts on the Indonesian dispute were framed within a Second World War binary of allies versus ‘Japanese inspired’ nationalists. The frames in the subsequent period were dominated by American economic and strategic stakes in the region and, as the Red Scare gained impetus, the containment of communism. An anti-colonial framing of the conflict was in fact nearly absent.

The Netherlands was generally sketched as a righteous nation, intent on ‘restoring law and order’; stabilizing the Asian region; and enlighten the people of the Indonesian islands. Only after the second ‘police action’ was their reputation tainted with accusations of ‘stubbornness’ and executing policies to the detriment of the U.S. stature. The Indonesian nationalists, on the other end of the spectrum, were initially equated with their Japanese occupier. Even after this World War binary subdued, the Indonesian leadership was granted little credence, and the U.S. correspondents long continued to mockingly refer to the ‘so-called republic’. The tables turned on the Republican leadership after they suppressed the communist Madiun uprising – but the perception of Indonesian inferiority persisted.

Media interest increased in tandem with U.S. entanglement in the Indonesian affair, and much of the coverage stemmed from reporters in Washington or at the U.N. rather than from the archipelago. The Indonesian-related negotiations and policy-making processes

attracted more attention than the actual warfare. The *Washington Post* never even sent a correspondent to the Southeast Asian region.

Throughout the four-year-conflict both Dutch and Indonesian spokesmen committed themselves to affecting the American press. They assumed that if the press would support their case, the State Department would too. In retrospect this assumption seems not too far off. Although the media are obviously not in the position to stipulate policies, they certainly provide the parameters for political action. It is very questionably whether the State Department could have backed the Netherlands' position until the beginning of 1949 if the media had consistently voiced their sharp disapproval. An examination of the media's impact on other decolonization processes could offer a valuable comparison.

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