

## Chapter 9: Reversion to a Hard-Line WNG Policy, January 1960-February 1961

### I

Nineteen-sixty was not a year that repaid Cabinet hopes for an environment conducive to the policy of ‘controlled bias’. It was a complex and unstable period in terms of the WNG dispute, and one that promoted change in the capitals of interested powers. On the international front, it was a year of growth for many of the direct causes of Dutch capitulation in 1961-62. This phenomenon was sparked by a Netherlands decision to push much faster towards Papuan self-determination and, particularly, by concurrent Dutch anxiety to reinforce the NNG garrison. The Indonesians seized on the move, and seemingly proceeded to drive the dispute towards a violent climax – a trend which in turn stimulated the beginning of policy re-evaluation in Washington and London. In Canberra, these crises would predictably have drawn the Government closer to accepting an Indonesian takeover, but this was not to be; a reassessment of the dynamics of Indonesian communism, and bilateral relations resulted in a surprisingly pro-Dutch outcome.

Early in the year, the Liberal Government was certainly not prepared to unequivocally exhibit a pro-Dutch mood. In the period just prior to Cabinet consideration of the DEA submission, it had made abundantly clear to the Dutch that the Australian Government was not keen to become actively involved in either Dutch plans for rapid political development in WNG or Papuan unification. This was particularly so in relation to the administrative conference scheduled for early March. Following Casey’s talk with Lovink on 27 November 1959, during which the Ambassador was informed that the Australian Government did not want larger political questions discussed at an administrative level,<sup>1</sup> close scrutiny was paid to any Dutch moves that could turn the Hollandia Conference on Administrative Co-Operation into a means of discussing larger political issues.<sup>2</sup> Despite an unofficial visit to Australia in mid-February by T. H. Bot (the new Netherlands Secretary of State for NG), during which he alluded provocatively to the significance of cooperation on the island,<sup>3</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> Describing the secret meeting at which this decision was made, Hasluck wrote to Lambert that “the Department [of Territories] and the Administrator of Papua and New Guinea should clearly understand that these administrative conferences are to be kept solely to the administrative level and are not to discuss matters other than those which are customarily dealt with at the administrative level.” Hasluck to Lambert, 23 November 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.

<sup>2</sup> See Lambert to D. M. Cleland (Administrator, Papua and New Guinea), 25 January 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.

<sup>3</sup> On 16 February 1960, *The Canberra Times* reported T. H. Bot (Netherlands Secretary of State for NG) as saying he had had “informative” discussions with Menzies and Hasluck, that he “believed the wisest course would be for [the West Papuans] to join with the natives of Australian Papua-New Guinea”, and

Australians were apparently successful in limiting the conference to managerial problems.<sup>4</sup>

The basic message was reiterated, not surprisingly, after the Cabinet meeting of 2 March. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Menzies spoke to Lovink, ostensibly as a means of answering the Ambassador's letters of November. He told Lovink that cooperation between the two countries "should take place naturally and without fuss and on actual tasks being carried out in the Territories", and that the 1957 joint statement and Memorandum of Agreement were an "adequate basis" for such cooperation.<sup>5</sup> As a sop to inevitable Dutch disgruntlement, Menzies then focussed on deterrence, saying that Australian and Netherlands attempts to make the US and UK aware of the need to prevent an attack – and Indonesia cognizant of the futility of doing so – appeared "to have had considerable effect." Therefore, Australia thought "the programme of diplomatic activity needs to be continuous and has decided to maintain it."

Lovink "expressed himself as disappointed", but went on to say that he was soon returning to The Hague, and would propose that the Dutch, in presenting their case to Asian nations, stop talking about legal issues surrounding the WNG question, and emphasize that transfer to Indonesia would deny Papuans that same rights that Asians now enjoyed. This reaction was an early sign of a new trend in Dutch circles; the desire to rapidly rid themselves of WNG, and find novel methods of doing so, regardless of the state of Australian policy. Dutch eagerness in this direction was soon to transform the atmosphere of a dispute which had, since the tense days of late 1957 to early 1959, become relatively quiescent.

A month after the Hollandia Conference, the Netherlands Government announced new plans for the future of West New Guinea. In a Second Chamber address, Bot indicated that a scheme for a legislative council in WNG – consisting of elected and selected indigenous representatives – was to be put in motion.<sup>6</sup> He also suggested that his Government would increase sharply the pace at which WNG was driven towards independence. The objective of this was to accelerate movement towards self-determination, whilst attempting to prepare a foundation for its

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that he "welcomed the increasing economic and administrative co-operation between the Dutch and Australian authorities." See article in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.

<sup>4</sup> See the press release at the end of the conference in savingram 20 to New York, 11 March 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 8, NAA.

<sup>5</sup> In a memorandum for the DEA (15 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA), Menzies explained that in conversing with Lovink, he used notes provided by Heydon (as quoted). See attachment to Heydon to Lovink, 16 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of Bot's speech, 5 April 1960, see attachment to memorandum by H. W. Bullock (Counsellor, Australian Embassy, The Hague), 14 April 1960, A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

international acceptance, particularly within the Third World. Although sentiment in favour of denying the territory to Indonesia was still strong in the Netherlands, support for the notion of hastening the process towards a severing of the connection between WNG and the 'Motherland', previously the domain of the Socialists, was now bipartisan.<sup>7</sup>

There were a number of reasons for the wave of support for what would obviously be premature independence for DNG. From the perspective of the de Quay Government, as J. van Beuge (Deputy Director, New Guinea Division, Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs) remarked, the reality of the international movement for an increase in the tempo of decolonization had to be faced.<sup>8</sup> This was true enough, as was the incentive to be rid of both a drain on the Netherlands economy and an area that had nothing to do with the European focus of Dutch foreign policy, but there were more specific motives as well. The most important of these was that Dutch believed Australia, along with the United States and Britain, was not prepared to afford the diplomatic and military protection necessary to a carefully graduated process towards self-determination. The chances were that an isolated Netherlands administration overseeing a slow-moving program would eventually suffer invasion in WNG or defeat in the UN, or both. It made sense, then, to try to establish an international bulwark against these contingencies that was separate to the traditional one provided by white allies. The establishment of a credible Papuan voice, around which the developing nations would rally, was considered a (perhaps the only) possibility within this context.

A problem for the Dutch was that they were still vulnerable in the period before they could expect to build this international body of opinion. This was especially the case in terms of Indonesian aggression, for Netherlands officials appeared to believe Bot's speech, at least in 1960, would help them defeat an Indonesian action in the UN.<sup>9</sup> Anxiety over a physical threat explains why the elucidation of Bot's address was paralleled by the declaration that the aircraft carrier *Karel Doorman* would make a trip to NNG in order to "show the flag",<sup>10</sup> and would strengthen the defences of the territory

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<sup>7</sup> See comments of J. van Beuge (Deputy Director, New Guinea Division, Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs), in his conversation with Bullock, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>8</sup> *loc.cit.* Van Beuge declared that "the Dutch would not be able to hang on any longer than 10 years. In fact, he was inclined to doubt whether they had that long. They must take whatever steps seem practicable to speed up the whole process. He would not be prepared to say that the inhabitants of New Guinea would be ready for self-rule within 10 years. But pressures were likely to build up which could mean that they would have self-rule in about that time whether they were ready or not."

<sup>9</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> See memorandum on Netherlands, Indonesian, and Australian statements on the defence of WNG, 25 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

at the same time.<sup>11</sup> The Dutch wanted not only to prepare for a medium-term threat, but, similar to a year before, meet any immediate danger. In mid-March, Isinger had told F. J. Blakeney (head, South and SEA Branch, DEA) that since having to abort an invasion scheduled for March 1959, the Indonesians had “changed their tactics”,<sup>12</sup> and he handed over a report detailing an alleged “plan for aggression” against WNG.<sup>13</sup> This plan, which the Netherlands claimed had already been implemented, consisted of four phases.<sup>14</sup> In the first, the Indonesians would gather intelligence on centres of potential resistance amongst the indigenous population of DNG, whilst in the second these centres would be activated – though not in the form of positive insurrection. The forces needed for these two stages would be infiltrated from Indonesia. In the third phase, rebellion, guerilla warfare, and the establishment of a rebel government would occur, to be followed, finally, by a diplomatic – and possibly military – offensive. Within this context, it was thought that “the Indonesian Government have issued instructions to provoke an incident with the Netherlands Forces” and that they had realized “that it would suffice to undertake military action of a character that inevitably would lead to the internationalization of the dispute.”<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not such an Indonesian strategem existed,<sup>16</sup> there can be no doubt that the *Karel Doorman* decision set in motion a chain reaction that eventually had an impact on the complexion of the dispute as a whole. The first effect was that the Indonesians, who were initially caught “flat-footed” (as R. N. Hamilton, an officer of the DEA’s SEA Section noted),<sup>17</sup> reacted vehemently. The new Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Patrick Shaw, was asked to tell Canberra that the Indonesian Government

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<sup>11</sup> See speech by E. H. Toxopeus (Netherlands Minister of Home Affairs), 5 April 1960, attached to memorandum by Bullock, 14 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. The Dutch *Charge d’affaires* in Canberra later told F. J. Blakeney (head, South and SEA Branch, DEA) that reinforcements to the NNG garrison, the nature of which were revealed in more detail by the Netherlands Minister of Defence on 26 April, were “such as would be able to cope with a surprise attack”. See conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 28 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>13</sup> See annex to letter from Isinger to Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>14</sup> The Dutch believed that a controversial earlier statement by Nasution, to the effect that Indonesia must be ready for “territorial war” in its fight for freedom from colonialism (see Hamilton to Cox (DT, position and initials unidentified), 29 March 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA), fitted “exactly into the pattern exposed in the paper.” See conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>15</sup> The Dutch also gave the Australians a supplementary paper that referred to six alleged infiltrations by Indonesia since the beginning of 1959. See conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 9 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. The paper itself, dated 9 May 1960, can be found in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>16</sup> The Australians believed there was no hard evidence to support its existence, and yet were not prepared to rule out the possibility. See “Draft Comment on Dutch Assessment” by the Joint Planning Staff in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA, and cablegram 648 to Washington, 21 May 1960, in the same file.

regarded the announcement to send the *Doorman* as a provocative act which raised tensions in a dispute that Indonesia hoped to resolve peacefully.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Helmi, told the Acting Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, that the Dutch “were playing with fire”, and that “there was a real danger that some kind of an incident might occur.”<sup>19</sup> Publicly, Subandrio said in Cairo that if the Dutch continued “with their provocative display of force in Indonesian waters, certainly Indonesia cannot remain idle”.<sup>20</sup> Later, feeling over the matter was graphically symbolized by Sukarno’s announcement of the severance of diplomatic relations with the Dutch.<sup>21</sup>

Indonesian fears were not entirely manufactured. In July, Shaw wrote that the decision had “caused genuine alarm here about the possibility of [an] incident leading to armed conflict”, and there is evidence to suggest some thought plans might be afoot to oversee infiltrations into East Indonesian territory in an attempt to destabilize the Republic.<sup>22</sup> In essence, however, Indonesian rhetoric had more to do with propaganda than anything else. It was evident to all that a Dutch *reconquista* was out of the question, and that the international climate was in no way favourable to the threats by the Netherlands over WNG. In foreign policy terms, the real issue was that the *Karel Doorman* provided an ideal opportunity for the controlled intensification of the dispute, and for the nullification of the potentially damaging announcement of plans for a Papuan native council.<sup>23</sup>

The struggle to ‘liberate’ Irian nearly always had an internal complexion as well. The *Karel Doorman* affair provided a useful tool for Sukarno at a time of great political tension in Jakarta. After failing to enact his scheme for ‘Guided Democracy’ through Parliament in mid-1959, Sukarno had opted for Presidential decree to bring it

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<sup>17</sup> Hamilton to Blakeney and B. C. Hill (Assistant Secretary, UN Branch, DEA), 20 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>18</sup> Suwito (position unidentified) to Shaw, 9 April 1960, in a summary of Indonesian statements, 13 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>19</sup> Conversation between Barwick (Acting Minister for External Affairs) and Helmi, 16 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>20</sup> Untitled and anonymous memorandum containing statement by Subandrio in Cairo, 25 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>21</sup> Circular cablegram from Canberra, 24 August 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 42, NAA. Sukarno cited the “increasing stubbornness” of the Dutch over WNG, and the *Karel Doorman* incident, as the reasons behind this action.

<sup>22</sup> See R. W. L. Austin (Second Secretary, Australian Embassy, Jakarta) to Tange, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA, and also memorandum on Netherlands, Indonesian, and Australian statements on the defence of WNG, 25 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

<sup>23</sup> An example of how the latter was attempted may be found in Ganis Harsono’s (Spokesman for the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs) comment (as paraphrased by Antara) that “Obviously what the Dutch wanted now is to still colonize West Irian territory for at least another 10 years...[and] they even intended to do it with the force of arms which they would flagrantly display by a “flag show” of their naval forces.” See Austin to Tange, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

about, re-establishing the 1945 Constitution, and dissolving the Constituent Assembly.<sup>24</sup> Soon afterward, a new Cabinet, viewed positively by the US,<sup>25</sup> was formed. Sukarno assumed the additional role of Premier, and for the first time, Nasution was given a political position as Minister for Defence. It was soon to emerge, however, that Sukarno was interested in sustaining (and perhaps increasing) the influence of the PKI as a counterweight to Nasution's rising power. Between early and mid-1960, the Sukarno-Nasution relationship became tense to an unprecedented degree – as did that between the PKI and the Army – and there were some who believed a decisive showdown likely.<sup>26</sup> In order to forestall an attack on himself or the PKI, Sukarno used the *Karel Doorman* issue “as one of [his] chief diversionary weapons”.<sup>27</sup>

The Americans were bothered by the ramifications of the *Doorman* affair for both Indonesia's domestic politics and the Republic's policy on WNG. This concern, which was compounded during attempts to deal with the twin-pronged problem, was one of the most important indirect effects of the Dutch Government decision to send the *Karel Doorman*. It appears to have been central in convincing influential US policy-makers that the WNG dispute was costing the US too much.<sup>28</sup> As soon as the Netherlands announced its intentions, there had been unease in Washington as to the response it might evoke in Indonesia. Reflecting on expected internal outcomes, the US *Charge d'affaires* in Jakarta wrote: “[The] Army, anti-Sukarno parties, [and] other forces pressing for reversal [of] present Sukarno policies will be placed at a disadvantage in [the] closely balanced struggle by [the] long-standing personal identification [of] Sukarno with this highly emotional [WNG] issue....[The] *Karel Doorman* visit...could well tip the balance [in] his favour, and force opposition either [to] fall in weakly behind him or be branded pro-Dutch.”<sup>29</sup> There were also fears that Indonesia's official policy on WNG could become more extreme. The deputy head of the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau stressed to his counterpart in European Affairs that it “seems clear...the *Doorman* visit could seriously undercut the efforts the United States has been making to dampen Indonesian chauvinism with respect to the

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<sup>24</sup> See J. G. Mein (Director, Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) to J. G. Parsons (Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), 8 July 1959, in *FRUS*, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, 'Indonesia', p. 409.

<sup>25</sup> See Parsons to Dillon, 16 July 1959, in *ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>26</sup> See Mein to J. M. Steeves (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), 29 March 1960, in *ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>27</sup> The expression belongs to Ambassador Jones. See telegram from Jones to State, 31 August 1960, *ibid.*, p. 529.

<sup>28</sup> Phelps, *op.cit.*, p. 330, challenges this idea, believing calls for a review of policy mid-year preceded the emergence of the *Doorman* affair. The *Doorman* had, however, been a live issue for a number of months by this time.

West New Guinea issue.”<sup>30</sup> In view of these burdens, the Americans tried to exert a moderating influence on both the Dutch and Indonesians.<sup>31</sup> By the time the aircraft carrier had left SEA in September, and the worst of the furore had blown over, US officials probably judged that their efforts had been relatively successful, but this was not achieved without considerable exertion.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the *Doorman* had poignantly illustrated how intractable and dangerous the WNG dispute had become, and, particularly, how problems thrown up by it could continue to damage the prospects of their major ‘asset’, General Nasution. Given that US commitment to Nasution was increasing,<sup>33</sup> these were serious concerns – and concerns that were soon to result in the first real review of US policy since the early 1950s.

The US was not alone among the international community in its growing fears, as stimulated by the *Doorman* issue, over the possible impact of the WNG dispute on national self-interest and objectives. Indeed, in 1960 the British appear to have become nervous over the more menacing atmosphere between Indonesia and the Dutch administration in Irian. In April, shortly after the announcement of the *Doorman’s* cruise, the British Ambassador to Indonesia, Sir Leslie Fry, commented to Shaw that there “was substantial British investment in Indonesia and the security interests of Britain in Singapore, Malaya and elsewhere in the Far East were far more important to the world than the Dutch interest in West New Guinea...he was recommending to his Government that Indonesia be taken up much more seriously and importantly.”<sup>34</sup> This apprehension soon produced rumblings in London that pointed to possible policy reassessment. In July, thought was given to retracting promises of logistic support for the Dutch unless informed of decisions regarding WNG,<sup>35</sup> and at the same time concern was expressed by a member of the Commonwealth Relations Office regarding the lack of knowledge in Whitehall of Australia’s long-term plans regarding Indonesia, the

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<sup>29</sup> Telegram from J. W. Henderson (US *Charge d’affaires*, Jakarta) to State, 14 April 1960, in *FRUS*, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, p. 479.

<sup>30</sup> Parsons to F. D. Kohler (Assistant Secretary of State, European and Canadian Affairs), 15 April 1960, in *ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>31</sup> See telegram from the State Department to US Embassy, Jakarta, 14 May 1960, in *ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, telegram from Dillon to US Embassy, Jakarta, 14 May 1960, in *ibid.*, p. 491-93.

<sup>33</sup> On 29 September 1960, for example, General Abdul Haris Nasution (Indonesian Army Chief of Staff, and Indonesian Minister for Defence and People’s Security) was secretly promised US support in the event of “a crisis and a confrontation”. See telegram from State Department to US Embassy, Jakarta, 30 September 1960, in *ibid.*, pp. 547-49.

<sup>34</sup> Conversation between Sir Leslie Fry (British Ambassador to Indonesia) and Patrick Shaw (Australian Ambassador, Jakarta), 1 April 1960, in Shaw to Tange, 4 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. Mid-year, the FO demonstrated its anxiety by revealing to the Australians that it planned to have talks about Indonesia policy with Australia and the US. See cablegram 2926 from London, 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

<sup>35</sup> Cablegram 2926 from London, 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

Netherlands, and WNG.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps exposing an assumption that the British were hoping, or beginning, to work by, the officer said that he felt that “if it came to the test, [Australia] would not in fact support the Dutch.” It would be incorrect to portray the British as on the verge of a break with the Dutch or the Australians – the former were too important to them in Europe and they wanted to maintain solidarity with the latter *vis-à-vis* WNG<sup>37</sup> – but there were faint signs the UK might one day pressure both to capitulate.

An important accompaniment to a new and more serious form of American and British anxiety was the emergence of a Third World emergency initiative aimed at solving what was perceived to have become a dangerous dispute. On 20 September the Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, commented to Sukarno that

It is foremost in my mind that this source of acrimony between Indonesia and Holland should be removed once and for all for the sake of world peace and particularly the stability of this region.<sup>38</sup>

Believing that the Dutch would be prepared to hand the territory over to the UN, the Tunku proposed that Indonesia accept a UN Trusteeship for WNG, after which the UN could be persuaded to “accept as a term of the trusteeship system that West Irian be handed over to Indonesia after a suitable period of tutelage”. There was widespread agreement in Canberra that this was contrary to the Charter,<sup>39</sup> though Menzies – seeing the potential repercussions of a metamorphosing international climate over WNG – asserted that Australia should be careful not to oppose mediation itself, or be irrevocably committed against trusteeship.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, such considerations were not foremost in Australian minds. The immediate problem was that although Indonesia had previously received backing from the smaller nations both inside and outside the UN, there had never before been a relatively independent call for an immediate solution to the conflict. The attempts of the Tunku to mediate carried the threat of gathering an irrepressible wave of support from the newer countries as a move in defence of regional and global stability. In other words, the Tunku’s actions lent credibility to the growing

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<sup>36</sup> Conversation between A. J. Eastman (Assistant Secretary, Division 1, DEA) and H. A. Twist (Officer, South East and Far Eastern Department, British Commonwealth Relations Office), 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

<sup>37</sup> See *loc.cit.* for the importance of links with the Dutch and, for their concerns regarding the Australians, see cablegram 3950 from London, 7 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 42, NAA.

<sup>38</sup> Tunku Abdul Rahman (Prime Minister of Malaya) to Sukarno, 20 September 1960, as an annex to T. K. Critchley (Australian High Commissioner to Malaya) to Tange, 22 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

<sup>39</sup> See W. T. Doig (Officer, United Nations Branch, DEA) to Harry, 27 September 1960, and Heydon to Harry, 28 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA. See also cablegram 1513 from Menzies to Beale, 31 October 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.

<sup>40</sup> *loc.cit.*

feeling that the situation in Irian was out of control, and that something should be done about it.

## II

Canberra's response to the crises of early 1960 had been cautious. News of Dutch plans for a Legislative Council were not marked by declarations of enthusiasm, but neither were they condemned; the Menzies Government wanted to maximize the possibilities of establishing a new political system in WNG free from Indonesian control. On the other hand, it did not want to be too closely identified with the Netherlands position. No attempts were made to raise the issue of the council with the Indonesians, and interestingly the latter were similarly reticent to discuss the problem in an explicit manner. A similar wish to avoid unnecessary damage to Dutch confidence – without damaging links with Indonesia by appearing to have a “Siamese-Twin relationship” with the Dutch<sup>41</sup> – was evident regarding the *Karel Doorman*. Representations were made to the Netherlands Government parallel to early ones made by the US,<sup>42</sup> and presumably for the purpose of ensuring that the Dutch engage in no drastic action. Moderation of the Indonesian attitude – without appearing as “apologists for the Dutch”<sup>43</sup> – was also sought,<sup>44</sup> as there was a feeling an “inspired incident” might occur.<sup>45</sup>

The policy of ‘controlled bias’ soon began, nevertheless, to show signs of breaking down. As recently as December 1959, when Menzies visited Indonesia, the Liberal Government seems to have thought it might just keep bilateral relations with the Republic afloat, and continue to witness a decline in the PKI's prospects – all without fatally undermining Dutch resolve. Such judgements of the success, and the potential, of Australian policy began to take a beating after mid-1960. The major contributing factor in this trend seems to have surrounded events in Jakarta. In the first place, in spite of the concession of Australia's non-party principal status made to Subandrio, and repeated to Sukarno, the expected pay-off in terms of neighbourly cordiality – even in the sense of a slowing of deterioration in the bilateral relationship – showed no signs of coming. In September, Shaw wrote from Jakarta that

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<sup>41</sup> The expression was used by Crocker in 1955 when Ambassador to Indonesia. See cablegram 525 from Crocker to Casey, 20 November 1955, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 18, NAA.

<sup>42</sup> Cablegram 373 to Jakarta, 27 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

<sup>43</sup> Circular cablegram from Canberra, 29 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

<sup>44</sup> See conversation between Barwick and Helmi, 16 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

<sup>45</sup> Circular cablegram from Canberra, 29 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA. In May, concern over Dutch-Indonesian tension was great enough for the Acting Prime Minister, John McEwen, to give an “oral report” to Cabinet. Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 31 May 1960, in A4943, Vol. 3, NAA.

In explaining to the Indonesians our support for the Dutch position in West New Guinea, we have endeavoured to say that this is something which should not affect our otherwise cordial relations. This is not the case and we suffer more than any other country because of our support for the Dutch...At present our influence on the Indonesian Government is negligible.<sup>46</sup>

The DEA, while admitting that WNG had soured Indonesia's relations with Australia, argued that the "main impediment to co-operation has been Indonesian suspicion of the West."<sup>47</sup> In other words, a challenge was issued to the notion that WNG was in fact central to a positive atmosphere between Australia and Indonesia. Hard evidence of the influence of this claim on Menzies is difficult to obtain, but it seems likely from later changes in the Prime Minister's thinking that the idea of WNG having little significance on relations began to influence him in the period between mid to late 1960.

There was another charge by the DEA that would have bothered him further. It was alleged that the West's position on WNG was unlikely to disadvantage decisively moderate forces in their fight against the PKI.<sup>48</sup> The emergence of a strong Cabinet view to the contrary, combined with the overriding fear of a communist takeover in Jakarta, had been behind the shifts in Australian WNG policy in 1958-59. Menzies might have been unimpressed by the DEA's reasoning, which at one level was a simple re-statement of an official line used with the Americans for most of the 1950s, but for one apparent reality: the PKI, after early set-backs under 'Guided Democracy', was gaining strength amidst domestic and political chaos in spite of growing Dutch isolation over WNG. Thus, Menzies wrote to Beale on 21 September that the PKI's "strength derives primarily from Indonesia's domestic misgovernment not from Dutch policy."<sup>49</sup>

There were some early hints that this logic was pushing Menzies towards stronger support for the Netherlands. In a talk with Luns in New York, the Prime Minister reportedly said "Australia regarded the presence of the Dutch...as vital to Australia and the entry of Indonesia to West New Guinea as a catastrophe".<sup>50</sup> This was a much stronger statement than Menzies would have allowed himself earlier in the year. A creep backward had started to occur in his thinking, one not yet rapid, or fully self-conscious, but nevertheless real.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Shaw to Menzies, 24 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum entitled "Notes On Djakarta Despatch No. 12 of 24 September, 1960", undated, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA. No authorship is acknowledged, though from marginal notes, and an earlier promise by Heydon to write a critique of this despatch (see Heydon to Tange, 30 September 1960, in the same file), it seems to have been the work of Heydon, Blakeney, and Hamilton.

<sup>48</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Cablegram 1326 from Menzies to Beale, 21 September 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

<sup>50</sup> Record by Luns related in conversation between J. G. de Beus (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) and Tange, 11 October 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

<sup>51</sup> Viviani, *op. cit.*, p. 198, mistakenly interprets the re-emergence of a more orthodox policy under Menzies to the public reaction following the Casey-Subandrio statement. Phelps, *op. cit.*, pp. 328, 333-35, does not identify a change, instead pointing to a "duality". The reasons for the emergence of this "duality" are not explained.

### III

In what was one of the great ironies of the WNG dispute, in the period between December 1960 and February 1961 confirmation of a change in outlook in the Australian Cabinet against Indonesia accompanied early stages of a reversal in US policy. The same events which began to turn the State Department towards a more radical stand on Irian turned Australia to a more conservative position, and this began to reverse the trend of increasing US-Australian cooperation and understanding on issues pertinent to Australia's 'near north'.

Late in the year, Menzies' movement away from a WNG policy more sensitive to Indonesia was challenged and further stimulated by some strong representations from Shaw. On 10 December the latter wrote to Menzies directly, arguing that "[Australia and Indonesia] should have a complementary and not a rival relationship in world affairs". He believed the "development of such a complementary relationship cannot proceed as long as Australia is committed to active support of the Netherlands position in West New Guinea."<sup>52</sup> In a subsequent despatch, written on the same day, Shaw added:

The choice for Australia, seen in an over-simplified form from Djakarta, would appear to lie between, on the one hand a more confident acceptance of the Indonesian Republic – and this would mean disentangling ourselves from our present identification with Dutch interests in West New Guinea -, and, on the other hand, acceptance of the inevitability of a hostile attitude towards ourselves by Indonesia which might be passive, but which could be active.<sup>53</sup>

Menzies told Tange that he had read the Ambassador's notes "with some disquiet."<sup>54</sup> Though he later gave nothing away to Shaw by saying both that his "mind was open" in connection with the Ambassador's personal opinions, and that he knew some of Shaw's views "were not accepted in the Department",<sup>55</sup> his "disquiet" must be interpreted within the context of the issues that had begun to bother him earlier. Shaw's view on transfer equated with Cabinet's emergency option of 5 January, yet the memoranda in which it was conveyed seemed to illustrate the DEA assessment in action; Indonesia was anti-Western and anti-Australian, and nothing conceded on WNG would help in the fight against communism and for a better bilateral relationship.

In the US, similarly important changes had been occurring. After a series of departmental meetings on WNG in the summer of 1960, Under Secretary of State

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<sup>52</sup> Shaw to Menzies, 10 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

<sup>53</sup> Shaw to Menzies, 10 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

<sup>54</sup> See Menzies' minute of 19 December 1960 on note from Tange to Menzies, 17 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

Livingston T. Merchant commissioned the Policy Planning Staff to write a paper incorporating a re-evaluation of US policy.<sup>56</sup> The study, which covered 18 pages, was passed to Merchant on 12 October 1960. The central question was, as stated in the opening section, to “determine whether the US position...which is now one of neutrality, should be modified, and if so, how.”<sup>57</sup> The basic argument of the paper was that the interests of the “Free World”, along with those of the US, the Netherlands, and Indonesia, had been “badly damaged by the...quarrel over West New Guinea”, and that it would be impossible to resist calls for another 10 years to a change to the Dutch administration.

However, none of the main alternatives canvassed were seen as capable or worthy of immediate implementation. For example, urging the Dutch to turn the territory over to Indonesia was perceived as too damaging to relations with America’s NATO ally, whilst independence was seen as impractical within a decade. A condominium would, it was thought, simply “transfer the dispute to West New Guinea itself.” Consequently, it was suggested that a final answer might be determined after an interim solution was first found. A trusteeship with the UN itself as administrator was envisaged as providing the best hope. It was recommended that the US Government pursue this option by first approaching Australia, and then Indonesia and the Netherlands simultaneously. If US ideas met with resistance, other solutions put forward by the objecting power(s) would be considered. If these were not worthy of American support, it was proposed that the US consider making their efforts public, and mobilizing world opinion in favour of a UN trusteeship.

Merchant judged the paper “excellent”, and commented that the Far Eastern and European Bureaus agreed with its conclusions and recommendations.<sup>58</sup> Such unanimity was significant. Throughout the 1950s these Bureaus had disagreed, often bitterly, over the direction of US WNG policy, but recent events had convinced both sides that a solution to the dispute had to be sought. Without the approval of the executive, these moves toward change were not official, but consensus in the State Department over the need for something different certainly carried with it the distinct possibility of alterations at the highest level.

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<sup>55</sup> Record of Menzies’ conversation of 30 January 1961 with Shaw in Heydon to Tange, 2 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.

<sup>56</sup> For a summary of the background to this paper, and action taken on it, see an editorial note in *FRUS*, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, pp. 564-65.

<sup>57</sup> “The Problem of West New Guinea (West Irian)”, 12 October 1960, box 141, Lot 67D548, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff 1957-61, ‘Indonesia’ folder.

<sup>58</sup> L. T. Merchant (Under Secretary of State) to C. Herter (Secretary of State), 27 October 1960, in *FRUS*, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, p. 565.

Merchant had recommended to Herter (now Dulles' successor as Secretary of State) that State confine itself to approaching the Australians for the moment.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, J. Graham Parsons (Assistant Secretary, Far Eastern Affairs) contacted the Australian Embassy. He said that "free world interests had been damaged by the continuance of the quarrel between [the] Netherlands and Indonesia over Dutch New Guinea", and added that the US position was now "lamentable".<sup>60</sup> He suggested that it might be possible to solve the dispute by pushing for a trusteeship that took account of both the Dutch desire for self-determination, and the Indonesian demand that sovereignty be given to the Republic.

The Australian response was notable. Though no definite answer was given, a cable to Washington – most probably approved by Menzies<sup>61</sup> – made points and posed a number of questions that implied an essentially negative attitude. For instance, it was stated that "The essential basis and objective of the United Nations Trusteeship System...is self determination", and it was subsequently asserted that:

It would not be consistent with the United Nations Charter to establish a trusteeship which provided for, or implied, limitation of choice on the part of the indigenous people concerned. At the time an election was to be made various questions could, of course, be put by plebiscite...It would only be at this point that the possibility of the marriage of the Dutch and Indonesian objectives could be practically considered.<sup>62</sup>

The re-emergence of a more traditional WNG policy suggested by this was confirmed a month later in a Cabinet submission by Menzies on the US proposals. While the Prime Minister wrote that the notion of trusteeship "was clearly of the greatest importance to Australia", he remarked that he had decided – in consultation with other Ministers and Beale – that "our initial response should show objective interest, should temporize and point out the problems."<sup>63</sup> Menzies did not want to commit Australia to rejection of what might become a reality, but he wanted events controlled in a manner capable of excluding Indonesian influence. The comments he suggested might be made to the Americans through the Embassy in Washington made this clear. The first was that "There would be little prospect of attaining genuine guarantees of self-determination under a new trust agreement; but once the Dutch had launched the proposal in the United Nations there would be little prospect of

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<sup>59</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Cablegram 3217 from Washington, 30 November 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.

<sup>61</sup> See reference to a planned conversation between Menzies and Tange, to be held on 4 January for the purpose of discussing US representations, in Heydon to Tange, 4 January 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.

<sup>62</sup> Emphasis original. Cablegram 17 to Washington, 5 January 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.

<sup>63</sup> Submission No. 991, 6 February 1961, in A5818/2, Vol. 24, AA.

withdrawing.” Secondly, it was to be stressed that Australia’s “defence interest in Netherlands New Guinea in terms of the status of the territory in war and the availability of bases there to us or to an enemy was involved.” These points would not have surprised the Americans (for much of the Australian Cabinet changes since 1959 had been concealed from them), but such remarks were certainly not indicative of the policy that had produced such dismissive treatment of the DEA-DT paper of March 1960.

Later in the month, another Cabinet meeting on WNG was held, the result of which was basically a ratification of Menzies’ paper of 6 February. It was widely agreed that a UN trusteeship “bristled with difficulties”, and that while Australia did not oppose trusteeship in principle, “the administering authority would need to be the Netherlands.”<sup>64</sup> It was also recommended that the Americans should be asked to make it clear to the USSR and Indonesia that it believed in self-determination. Finally, the idea that the UN could unilaterally make decisions on territorial sovereignty was again derided. This was a firm line, though Cabinet chose not to look closely at the crisis surrounding growing Indonesian belligerence, or at the viability of an interim Dutch administration and an independent WNG. It was not that the Ministers were unaware; Menzies had informed Cabinet of these problems,<sup>65</sup> and it was axiomatic that there would be numerous obstacles to the defence of a traditional policy. Therefore, the essence of Cabinet thinking must be interpreted as an optimistic decision to play for time. The hope was that this would enable events to be turned so that Australian hopes – that is, the completion of Dutch rule and Papuan self-determination – could be brought to fruition. As the record of the meeting read: “Cabinet agreed generally that there was much in favour of politically delaying tactics”.<sup>66</sup>

#### IV

This unexpected reversion of Australian policy inevitably poses two wider questions: did the return to a traditional stand signify recantation of the notion that Australia should fear Indonesia, and therefore annulment of the idea that the country was (and must attempt to be) dependent on the UK and US? Secondly, and interrelated, had Cabinet come to believe that rejection of the conception of Australia as an ‘imperial’ power was a mistake?

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes of Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 21 February 1961, in A4943, Vol. 4, NAA.

<sup>65</sup> In his submission, Menzies wrote that “The objections to this [US] proposal have to be weighed against the hazards of the present situation, and against our judgement of the kind of result which the Dutch programme of early handover to the natives will produce, assuming that Indonesia does not resort to force.” Submission No. 969, undated, in A5818/2, Vol. 23, NAA.

Closer examination of the Government's behaviour shows that the surprising changes in WNG policy did not infer such dramatic alteration at a broader level. In connection with fear of Indonesia, the logic behind Menzies' revision of the NNG problem is instructive. The Prime Minister did not decide to review the weaker and more conditional policy of January 1959 because he believed Indonesia's political orientation and military strength were no longer dangerous to Australia. To the contrary, he still viewed a communist takeover to be genuinely possible, and he was aware that the ability of Indonesia's armed forces to create a lodgement in WNG, and in the future to menace Australian territory, had not declined, but had actually increased with the influx of US arms during 1959. Menzies had essentially chosen to revert to 'old' policy because he thought that if action on WNG made no difference to Indonesia's current and potential relations with Australia and the West, there was little point in holding to an attitude that was not innately preferred.

It followed from persisting anxiety over Indonesia that Cabinet did not feel Australia to be again basically independent from the US and UK in offshore SEA. Their deterrent influence was needed over WNG, and the allied fight against communism in the archipelago remained critical. Nevertheless, it is true that reversion to orthodox WNG policy involved some willingness to risk friction with the Americans. This points to a belief that Australia could, to an extent, be less dependent on the US than it had been since 1957-58. There are two probable explanations for this. Firstly, in the same way that a less vexatious traditional WNG policy (primarily motivated by fear of Indonesia) had been further encouraged by fear of the US becoming disinterested in Indonesia, the magnitude of America's material commitment to the anti-communist cause there by 1960 added to decreasing concerns (mainly prompted by notions of the disconnection between WNG and the chaos of domestic politics under Sukarno) over the effect of taking a more irritating conventional stand. Secondly, it is likely, given what was to happen later, that divergence with the US was estimated as being of short duration; there were hopes of soon convincing the US – particularly after failed attempts to appease the Indonesians over Irian – of the now seemingly obvious nature of this disconnection. Taken together, these explanations of greater independence do not speak of the 1950s-style perception of independence south of Singapore. The new form was not founded on the concept of Indonesia's insignificance and Australian superiority. Rather, it was limited to WNG, and was finite even in that context; specifically, it was based on the faith that a fortunate set of circumstances compelled

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 21 February 1961, in A4943, Vol. 4, NAA.

the US to carry the Indonesian problem (on which Australia was helplessly dependent) in a manner unharmed to Dutch sovereignty (possession of which was dependent on US and UK deterrent action).

Collating the above, Australia emerges in the eyes of Cabinet not as a reconstructed imperial power, but as a still weakened force with somewhat renewed prospects of retaining a portion previously indicative of former glory. Indeed, proactive regional security was now more the domain of friendly outside forces, yet offered the opportunity to continue a rearguard action – which would, after all, not prove incompatible with Australia's more humble status in the area once Indonesian communism was neutralized – the Menzies Government thought it foolish to demur. This, therefore, was the task to which authorities in Canberra devoted themselves until December 1961.