

Chapter 10: Gathering Momentum in the Dispute and Concurrent Australian Attempts to Play for Time, February-November 1961

I

From March to November 1961 many international changes relevant to the dispute, and which had arisen in 1960, matured. British and American interest in policy re-evaluation was superseded in each country by bipartisan commitment to push for a solution. The Dutch chose an even more radical means of shedding WNG, and the Indonesians, for their part, built substantially on the atmosphere of crisis that had arisen from the *Karel Doorman* affair. These developments were to converge in the final resolution of the dispute in December 1961 and January 1962. What proved extraordinary from an Australian perspective was that such phenomena were constantly misinterpreted or missed in Canberra as the Government forged ahead with its policy of blocking effective Indonesian penetration.

The Cabinet decisions of 21 February (that is, to play for time, and obstruct actions prejudicial to self-determination) were foremost in Menzies' mind when he arrived in Washington in early March. His meeting with new US President John F. Kennedy would have been seen as a prime opportunity to influence the new administration, perhaps against its bureaucracy, as it began the process of formulating WNG policy. In a cablegram to John McEwen (Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade) and Harold Holt (Australian Minister for Labour and National Service), Menzies described how he had talked with the President "over a couple of hours", and was able to "tell him about the New Guinea problem in its proper historic and national setting."¹ He continued:

You will remember that some notions were being evolved on the official level in the State Department about a trusteeship for West New Guinea which would exclude the Netherlands. I am sure that this has not been adopted by either Kennedy or [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, and that after our discussions, there may be a healthy disposition to preserve the status quo in West New Guinea.

This rosy picture was characteristic of the tone of the rest of the document. Indeed, he also commented that "Both Kennedy and Rusk possess the advantage of high intelligence", and that "the new President ought to do a great deal to rescue American policy from the doldrums." Finally, in the rapturous vein in which the young President had been greeted in many parts of the world, Menzies added that "Kennedy is, in

¹ Cablegram 131 from Menzies to McEwen and Holt, 4 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

physical appearance and personality, so much better than his television image that I was both relieved and delighted.”

There were soon signs, however, that the election of the Democrats might not have been as advantageous as it had seemed. Towards the end of March, External Affairs learnt that the State Department had not done away with ideas of trusteeship.² More problematic again was the news that – as James Bell (Director, SW Pacific Affairs, State Department) made clear – US proposals were geared towards a “solution” of the WNG dispute.³ On 6 April, a cable from Beale strongly suggested that such an attitude had been approved by the executive. Kennedy told the Ambassador that “his problem was to try and put forward some solution or proposal which could head off any Indonesian action”, and he asked for Beale’s view on trusteeship.⁴ Commenting on Beale’s reply, he said that he agreed with the principle of self-determination, but returned to the question of what, consistent with this principle, could be done to prevent the Indonesians from resorting to force. Ominously, he had said earlier: “Tell me, how seriously does Australia really view the idea of Indonesia getting Dutch New Guinea?” Though perhaps slow in grasping that the President was considering the idea of a solution in Indonesia’s favour, Beale was less sure than Menzies had been of the direction of US policy; Kennedy “seemed” to understand and even sympathize, “but”, he wrote, “I cannot of course judge what effect, if any, his reputed anti-colonial sentiments, and those of some of his advisers, may have.”

Beale’s doubt was certainly justified. While the Australians may not have seen it clearly, the US decision to search for a solution represented the first time the Americans had taken a positive step, as opposed to their previous position of non-active neutrality. The State Department had generated momentum in this direction with their approach to the Australians in late 1960, and this was maintained by a series of telegrams from Ambassador Jones early in the new year.⁵ Kennedy’s White House advisors, who were keen to devise a new approach to Third World problems,⁶ also added their voice to the

² Conversation between Isinger and Hamilton, 30 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

³ R. L. Harry (First Assistant Secretary, DEA) to Tange, 5 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

⁴ Beale to Menzies, 825, 6 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

⁵ For Jones’ views see 2 telegrams to State of 25 January 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 302-07. For a recent analysis of the WNG policy of the Kennedy administration, see T. Markin, *The West Irian Dispute: How the Kennedy Administration Resolved that “Other” Southeast Asian Conflict*, PhD dissertation, The John Hopkins University, 1996. Oral sources are a strength of this work, but the documentary content is poor. His account of US policy during 1961 is therefore of limited value (see *ibid.*, pp. 64-69).

⁶ See Pemberton, *All the Way*, p. 83, for comment on the new administration’s attitude towards underdeveloped countries.

calls for change.⁷ The debate in Washington was, by this stage, dominated by those who saw the need for these changes as being self evident.

This is not to say agreement existed as to how to intervene in the dispute, or that a final decision had been made by the President. On 3 April, Rusk submitted a memorandum to Kennedy dealing with trusteeship.⁸ It was essentially a revised version of the Policy Planning Staff paper of October 1960.⁹ However, owing to the problems experienced in the Congo by the UN, it was suggested that Malaya be made trustee of WNG under UN auspices, with administration by the Organisation itself kept only as a secondary option. Robert W. Komer of the NSC Staff immediately attacked these ideas. In a letter to the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt W. Rostow, he wrote:

State's West New Guinea memo...puts the issue clearly, but comes up with no commensurate solution. If the prime reason for a policy shift is to keep Indonesia from sliding away, we must come up with a solution which is broadly satisfactory to the Indonesians...State's proposal...will incur all the disadvantages of outraging the Dutch, Australians, et al without satisfying [the] Indos. Why move at all in this case?...Of course, if we are proposing trusteeship as a cover operation for eventually giving WNG to the Indonesians, it might make sense. But if this is the case, why not tell the President? And why not spell out how the proposal...could be used to convince Sukarno that we are really moving in this direction....The trouble with State is that it never thinks these problems through to the end.¹⁰

Kennedy's conversation with Beale, in which the President mentioned both trusteeship and transfer to Indonesia, suggests that he was weighing the alternatives presented by the State Department and his White House advisors, and had not come to a firm conclusion. In fact, much of American activity in 1961 was characterized by vigorous debate and indecision, resulting in a 'muddling through' of the problems of the year. Nevertheless, it was a clumsy policy that, given its primary objective of achieving a final and peaceful solution to the dispute, had an important impact on the policies of the parties involved, and on the eventual outcome.

The UK did not have a major role in the course of events regarding WNG in the early part of the year. This aside, it is worth noting that consensus developed in the Foreign Office concerning the need to push for a long-term solution – as opposed to the Australian policy of waiting. The British were concerned at the momentum being generated by the Indonesians in the direction of a resolution in the Republic's favour. As F. A. Warner (head, SEA Department, FO) expressed it:

⁷ For example, see Robert W. Komer (NSC Staff) to McGeorge Bundy (President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 27 March 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, 'Southeast Asia', pp. 333-34.

⁸ Tab A attached to Dean Rusk (US Secretary of State) to J. F. Kennedy (US President), 3 April 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 336-39.

⁹ See the editorial comment in footnote 2, *ibid.*, p. 341.

With the initiative now in the hands of the Indonesians, it may be that the greatest danger for the Dutch, the Australians and ourselves is to do nothing and leave the field to the Indonesians. The idea of a “Melanesian Federation” offers the least risk of allowing the territory to fall into Indonesian hands whilst offering the best prospects for an ultimate solution. Finally, self-determination for the Melanesians is the only device which can possibly be expected to appeal to the Afro-Asians as an alternative to Indonesian colonialism.¹¹

Aside from these vital short-term considerations, it was believed that an independent Papuan state would be a “poor and weak state, wide open to Indonesian penetration or attack.”¹² A federation was thus also an attractive long-term proposition. This concept was discussed with the Americans in February and March who, while not completely dismissing the proposal, judged it to be of little help in dealing with the “immediate problem”.¹³ Although the British retorted with their own views of the weaknesses of US ideas – they expressed “doubts” *vis-à-vis* trusteeship¹⁴ – their particular opinions on WNG in reality counted for little in Washington at this point. On the other hand, their clear anxieties were not unimportant in this period in that they contributed to perhaps the most significant dynamic of the WNG controversy in 1961: the further growth of the feeling among the international community, springing from events in 1960, that the question could not be left to fester.

II

As the British and Americans began to act on their fears, the Australians, walking consistently along a traditional path, as Menzies’ visit to Washington had confirmed, allowed the continued re-emergence of 1950s relational patterns regarding the Dutch and Indonesians. With regard to the latter, this, in the present climate, and given events since 1957-58, of course meant much worse relations than the poor ones of the past decade. An exchange between Menzies and Subandrio early in the year revealed this unmistakably. Subandrio wrote to the Prime Minister in late January, explaining that tensions between Australia and Indonesia had increased, and urging Menzies to look to the future, rather than the “irrealistic [*sic*] and irrational past.”¹⁵ He also hinted that armed conflict was a possibility. In his reply, Menzies said elements that might breach Indonesian guarantees of no force could be restrained, and he warned that infiltrations

¹⁰ Komer to Walt W. Rostow (Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 5 April 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 340.

¹¹ Minute by F. A. Warner (head, SEA Department, FO), 13 February 1961, in FO 159993, PRO.

¹² Minute by Warner, 11 January 1961, in FO 159993, PRO.

¹³ Telegram 155 (Saving) from Sir Harold Caccia (British Ambassador, Washington DC) to the FO, 3 March 1961, in FO 371/160007, PRO.

¹⁴ Undated record entitled “Anglo-American Bilateral Talks: Washington: February-March, 1961” in FO 371/160007.

¹⁵ Subandrio to Menzies, undated, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.

were incompatible with these assurances and international law.¹⁶ Infiltrations would, he said, discredit the party concerned. Notably, Menzies also emphasized that Australian policy was far from weak on the question of self-determination:

The views of both Government and Opposition parties expressed in Parliament demonstrate that there is strong attachment to the view that these people are entitled to make their own choice of government. This the Dutch are pledged to permit, and you and the Netherlands have not been able to come to agreement.

Given the hardening attitude of Sukarno and his followers, these were hardly innocuous words. When told of the main points in Menzies' letter, Subandrio answered that arguments about self-determination were secondary to the problem of Australia's confidence in Indonesia.¹⁷ More threateningly, he went on to say that it would be possible for the Indonesian press to begin discussing Australia's immigration policy or what was occurring in ENG. A week later Shaw wrote that the Sukarno's Supreme Advisory Council had highlighted Indonesia's opposition to colonial imperialists "and their supporters", and that there existed the possibility that the Australian Embassy, or his residence, may come under attack.¹⁸

Such deterioration failed to move authorities in Cabinet for the same reasons the 1959 attempt at *détente* had been abandoned; WNG was viewed as peripheral to Indonesia's flirtations with communism, and to disintegrating bilateral relations. On 18 February a circular cable had been sent from the DEA claiming that Indonesian activities were geared towards encouraging the idea that the frustration of the Irian campaign was opening Indonesia to the communist powers, and reducing the potential impact of the West in the Republic.¹⁹ It continued:

The New Guinea dispute is an obstacle...but the basic obstacles to significantly improved relations between Indonesia and the West are ideological...We do not see what the United States or other Western powers can do to remove these obstacles – so long at least as Sukarno remains in power.

Shaw's reaction was vehement. He said that WNG was "the major obstacle" to better relations with the West, and that the Republic's leaning towards the communist bloc could be traced to the Bloc's support on anti-colonial issues, including WNG.²⁰

¹⁶ Menzies to Subandrio, 21 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.

¹⁷ Shaw to Barwick (Acting Minister for External Affairs), 3 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

¹⁸ Cablegram 126 from Shaw, 10 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA. This was written in the context of concern over Australia's participation in the forthcoming opening ceremony for the NNG native council, but it is likely that the dangers spoken of were the result of a number of indicators that the Australian attitude had been hardening. (The Supreme Advisory Council was a consultative political body incorporated into Sukarno's concept of 'Guided Democracy', see Feith, *op.cit.*, p. 592.)

¹⁹ Circular cablegram from Canberra, 18 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

²⁰ Savingram 33 from Shaw, 4 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

Elsewhere, in a personal letter to Heydon, Shaw commented that “I cannot imagine an appreciation of Indonesian policy in such terms as those in the Departmental circular coming from the pen of any senior External Affairs officer who has served in the past few years at this post...it is regrettable that we should not have been able to keep in the South East Asia Branch...one at least of the small number of...officers who have served in Indonesia in recent years.”²¹ Shaw’s remonstrances were to no avail. He was outnumbered in the Department, and could expect no aid at a Ministerial level.

Not surprisingly, the resurgence of a conservative policy effected something of a Dutch-Australian *rapprochement*. Menzies had met Luns in Geneva shortly after speaking to Kennedy. The atmosphere appears to have been cosy, and they agreed on various points – including the way in which the Dutch would behave regarding a UN *fait accompli*, and on the importance of playing the self-determination “card” with Third World leaders.²² Earlier, Sir Edwin McCarthy (Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands) had written that “Here the view is that Australia is playing their part in the public approval they are giving to the Dutch policy of self determination.”²³ He would not have been able to make such an observation at times in 1960, but it was one that became increasingly valid throughout 1961, as reflected in growing cooperation and cordiality between Canberra and The Hague.

Another positive for the Australian Government was the strength of the Dutch Government and public on the question of self-determination – at least as Ambassador McCarthy presented it. On 10 February, he had written that “in the reasonably near future there will be no political move towards withdrawal”, and although he noted the electorate might force such a solution if WNG was truly threatened, he added that public opinion was not disturbed.²⁴ In June he said that, contrary to US suggestions, Luns had strong support for his WNG policy in the Dutch Cabinet unless serious trouble developed.²⁵ As Cabinet and the DEA did not think it particularly likely that large-scale fighting would occur,²⁶ this seemed singularly good news, and it added to the optimistic atmosphere prevalent in Canberra.²⁷

²¹ Shaw to Heydon, 4 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

²² Cablegram 131 from Menzies to McEwen and Holt, 4 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

²³ McCarthy to Tange, 10 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

²⁴ *loc. cit.*

²⁵ Cablegram 1516 from Menzies to Beale, 9 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

²⁶ See Tange’s comments in the record of his informal discussions at the Commonwealth Record Office, 22 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.

²⁷ As an aside, it should be noted that Australian officials were, strangely enough, often more positive during 1961 than events apparently warranted. This divergence between fact and perception may not have applied to the Dutch stance, but it is an observation that is applicable to most aspects of Australian WNG policy at this time.

III

The tenor of events was, however, far from uniformly sweet for the Australian Government. In the first place, the Americans made it clear that they continued to be interested in solving the dispute, and the Australians detected signs that some of them were prepared to compromise on the principle of self-determination. On 10 April, Beale was informed by the State Department that the Americans felt a UN trusteeship administered by Malaya offered the best chance of success.²⁸ The Ambassador felt that the proposal indicated “an encouraging awareness of and sympathy for Australia’s position”, but Menzies thought it necessary to have Beale seek assurances that the US held self-determination to be of first importance in any arrangement, that this be publicly declared by them, and that nothing be done against the wishes of the Dutch.²⁹ Later, Menzies was disturbed when he heard that Dean Acheson, who no longer held a position in the US Government, but nevertheless appears to have retained some influence,³⁰ had described self-determination as “one of Woodrow Wilson’s less intelligent expressions”.³¹ He replied:

I must admit I was disappointed that Acheson should ridicule self-determination (even if he did so in jest). Apart from the importance of the principle itself, I should have expected Acheson to recognize the political importance internationally of active native participation in the processes looking towards self-determination. We regard the principle as important not only for Dutch New Guinea but also for Papua/New Guinea.³²

Behind the scenes, the Americans were acting in a manner consistent with the desire for a solution, though their uncertainty as to how to go about this resulted in equivocal signals. During a visit by Luns to Washington, Kennedy made the Dutch Foreign Minister aware that the US had been thinking of ways to bring the dispute to an end, and that he wanted Luns’ views on this.³³ The latter replied that “the Dutch were willing to explore with the United States any and all formulae which might promote a solution”, though both he and van Roijen repeatedly emphasized the Netherlands’ commitment to self-determination. Luns also pressed for the continued building of a

²⁸ Cablegram 855 from Beale to Menzies, 10 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

²⁹ Draft cablegram from Menzies to Beale, undated, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. It is not clear if this cable was sent, though there is no minute to suggest (as there might usually be) it was not.

³⁰ See, for example, footnote 2, p. 391, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’.

³¹ Cablegram 1240 from Beale to Menzies, 12 May 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. Dean Acheson (in 1961, Head, Advisory Group, NATO) followed this up with a proposal that Australia take over WNG as trustee, an idea that Beale took him to be broaching in seriousness, but one that must perhaps be interpreted as a cynical stab at what the American saw as the lack of realism in Australian policy.

³² Cablegram 897 from Menzies to Beale, 1 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA, AA.

deterrent. Kennedy avoided answering this directly, commenting that “the problem was how the case could be put on the most favorable basis from the point of view of all concerned”. He also warned that the US “wanted to be sure that what we do is in accordance with the common interest”, in spite of the fact that they “were not unmindful of Dutch views”.

The tone of Kennedy’s talk with Luns was not particularly sympathetic to the Dutch, but this contrasted with Rusk’s discussions with Luns.³⁴ The Secretary of State conceded that self-determination was “basic to U.S. policy generally”, and said the US recognized this was the Dutch stance on WNG. Thus, the “problem was...how to find an answer on the basis of self-determination” – and it was here that Rusk said the US thought “a trusteeship offered possibilities.” Various arrangements were suggested in this context, including a Malaya-New Zealand trusteeship. Rusk even suggested that Indonesia could be isolated in the UN if it opposed trusteeship. He added that the US would warn Indonesia regarding the use of force if a trusteeship were put in place, and he made it clear that this warning would not be bluff.³⁵

The cleavage between Rusk and Kennedy implied by these talks was not substantiated by a discussion between the President and Sukarno at the White House.³⁶ Rather, it was the indeterminate nature of US policy, within the bounds of the search for a solution, that was noticeable.³⁷ Having been unforthcoming regarding the Dutch, Kennedy surprisingly treated Sukarno in a similar manner. Predictably, within a few minutes of meeting Kennedy, Sukarno launched into a heartfelt plea for US help on Irian:

please understand us in our national aspirations...How many times have I spoken to your Ambassador and pled for America’s support for the restoration of this territory to us. Let America say just one word to the effect that West Irian is a just claim. Give me something to say to my people....Before 1950, America said that Indonesia has the right to freedom. Why don’t you say so now? Why don’t you support our just claim to West Irian? The only answer to that question I have had is your friendship with the Dutch and your relations with NATO. America should not play the role of a tight-rope dancer between Europe and Asia, always keeping a balance.

Kennedy replied by asking why Indonesia wanted WNG, considering that Melanesians were different racially and that Irian was, financially, a deficit area. Indeed, the US

³³ Conversation between Luns, van Roijen, Kennedy, and other US officials, 10 April 1961, in FRUS, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 345-51.

³⁴ Conversation between Luns, Rusk, and officials from both countries, 10 April 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 352-60.

³⁵ These ideas were repeated the following day at the Dutch Embassy. See conversation between Luns, Rusk, van Roijen and Kohler, 11 April 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 361-63.

³⁶ Conversation between Kennedy, Rusk, Sukarno, Subandrio and others, 24 April 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 382-90.

³⁷ Pemberton, apparently incorrectly, has asserted that US policy was by this time geared towards ceding WNG to Indonesia. See Pemberton, *All the Way*, p.89.

President thoroughly interrogated his Indonesian counterpart on a range of issues, clearly putting Sukarno on the defensive. He even suggested – no doubt much to Sukarno’s annoyance – that a plebiscite should be held in WNG to determine whether the people wanted to join the Republic. Nevertheless, and consistent with the one solid point in the US program, Kennedy said that “We want to see this [WNG] matter come to an amicable conclusion”.

In Canberra, at around the same time, the Menzies Government hosted General Nasution, Australia’s “hope” in Indonesia.³⁸ The Australians perhaps wanted to bolster Nasution’s prestige in the Republic by allowing him to show he had been well received in Australia, but Nasution, like Subandrio, knew that a success on the Irian issue was the yardstick by which the visit would be measured at home. Prior to his departure, he said that Australian-Indonesian relations had become “weak” because it was thought “Australia is on the Dutch side”, and he remarked that the aim of his trip was to eliminate misunderstandings.³⁹ He received less joy than Subandrio had. His talks with Cabinet, and with Menzies personally, brought to light little that was new, though they illustrated how deep the divide between the two countries had become. The Australians constantly emphasized the need for self-determination, and deprecated the occasional manipulation of the dispute to crisis point, while Nasution explained the Indonesian position along standard lines.⁴⁰ He also said he hoped to get Australia to maintain a neutral position like the US.⁴¹ This was the most significant idea to emerge from the talks, and it was one that Menzies interpreted as being part of a drive to make the Netherlands appear as though they were isolated on the international scene.⁴² Nasution made it clear that he thought the direction of events in the Netherlands was moving the Dutch Government closer to capitulation, and he wanted Australia to cease propping it up.⁴³

The General received little comfort from Menzies on this point. In a final talk at Kirribilli House, the Prime Minister said that Australia could not be expected to “support a course of action which was inconsistent with self-determination”, and that

³⁸ The expression is that of former Australian diplomat Pierre Hutton. See P. Hutton, *After the Heroic Age And Before Australia’s Rediscovery of Southeast Asia*, Brisbane, 1997, p. 58.

³⁹ Cablegram 215 from Jakarta, 17 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Nasution’s meeting with Cabinet, 18 April 1961, and his meeting with Menzies, Tange, E. J. Bunting (Secretary, Australian Prime Minister’s Department) and Athol Townley (Australian Minister of Defence), 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

⁴¹ Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Tange, and Townley, 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

⁴² See Cablegram 146, Menzies to Sir K. J. Holyoake (Prime Minister, New Zealand), 21 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

⁴³ Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Tange, and Townley, 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

they would not put pressure on the Netherlands to alter their position.⁴⁴ He added that he did not want Nasution to believe Australia was indifferent to the use of force. Nasution gave the view that, as a young man, he could afford to wait for WNG to come into Indonesian hands, though President Sukarno was determined to get the territory before he died. His visit to Australia thus ended in a stalemate, and gave no reason for either side to believe that their opinions, or indeed their countries, had moved any closer.

IV

A certain motionlessness, albeit one underlined by great tension, came to characterize the dispute as a whole towards the middle of the year. The State Department, to use Menzies' words, were still "fumbling around" over the idea of a trusteeship,⁴⁵ but failing to come up with anything effective. In late April the Tunku told the Americans that Malaya would act as trustee to WNG on the condition that Sukarno "publicly and unequivocally" accept his country in this role, and that, secondly, any financial consortium established include Australia and New Zealand.⁴⁶ The Australians interpreted the first condition as an effective rejection of the initiative,⁴⁷ but Rusk evidently did not share this view; he instructed that the Tunku be told "we...are gratified with his initially positive response."⁴⁸ This seemingly prompted the adoption of the Malayan trusteeship proposal as the 'official' State Department position.⁴⁹ Rusk soon went cold on this idea, however. As a memorandum from W. R. Tyler (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs) explained:

The Secretary has been reluctant to accept a course of action which would place too heavy a reliance on the U.N. organization as such. He does not believe it feasible to approach Congress with any plan which would require substantial U.S. expenditure to support a West New Guinea trusteeship. He, therefore, is apparently leaning toward a course of action which would bring the two parties together for conciliation or arbitration.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Townley, and Tange, 26 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

⁴⁵ Record of Menzies' talk to Foreign Affairs Committee, 20 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.

⁴⁶ Telegram 532 from J. L. O'Sullivan (Deputy Director, SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) to Rusk, 23 April 1961, 656.9813/5-2661, box 1352, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁴⁷ Annex to Critchley to Tange, 5 May 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.

⁴⁸ Telegram 571 from Rusk to US Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, 24 April 1961, 656.9813/5-2661, RG 59, DF 1960-63, box 1352, A2.

⁴⁹ W. R. Tyler (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, State Department) to W. L. Blue (Deputy Director, Office of Western European Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, State Department), 26 May 1961, 656.8913/5-161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁰ *loc.cit.*

In this connection, Rusk appears to have believed that a UN Special Committee might investigate the WNG problem and make recommendations⁵¹ – presumably regarding a solution.

This plan had not developed to any great degree by the time the Dutch made a decisive move. On 16 June, Ambassador van Roijen told the Americans “he had been instructed to...propose bilateral secret talks looking toward the internationalization of the West New Guinea problem.”⁵² Here, he mentioned the notions of a visiting mission to WNG and trusteeship. Van Roijen said Luns had frequently thought of this in terms of the Somali trusteeship concept, which required “a developmental agency, or some international body and allow the Dutch to remain in West New Guinea for a certain period, thus avoiding the vacuum which was left in the Congo.” Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles agreed to talks as long as they were confidential. Significantly, van Roijen concluded by saying “he hoped that the Netherlands would have U.S. support should a plan develop from these talks”. Evidently, the Dutch, seeing US support as the critical factor in the successful implementation of their scheme, wanted to manoeuvre the Americans into a position of commitment. At a wider level, the Netherlands Government seems to have been thinking hard on how to reconcile growing anti-colonial pressure – not to mention domestic nervousness over a continued presence in WNG – with a desire to deny Indonesia the territory. The meeting of 16 June was the opening sortie of a new campaign aimed at achieving this.

At a second meeting on 29 June, the Americans attempted to take advantage of Dutch willingness to change the complexion of the dispute by developing Rusk’s concept of a visiting mission.⁵³ Bowles opened by saying “the situation in West New Guinea was dangerous, that Indonesia was insecure and that she was being played upon by the Soviets”, and he felt that Indonesia “might indulge in some unfortunate adventure”. He followed by making it clear that the US had decided a UN committee, which would visit WNG, was “the best solution”. This committee would study the problem and make recommendations that the Dutch and Indonesians would have to agree to beforehand. In answer to a question by the Ambassador, Joseph Sisco of the State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs, stated that the

⁵¹ W. Wallner (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs) to Rusk, 20 June 1961, 656.8913/6-2061, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵² Conversation between Chester Bowles (Under Secretary of State) and van Roijen, 16 June 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 403-04.

⁵³ Conversation between Bowles, van Roijen, and J. J. Sisco (Director, Office of United Nations Political and Security Affairs, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, State Department), 29 June 1961, 656.9813/6-2961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

principle of self-determination could be safeguarded by the committee's terms of reference.

Apart from raising his unhappiness with the idea of agreeing to abide by any ruling made by the UN, van Roijen said he thought his Government "would not find the scheme palatable as the element of expediency is evident and there was not enough protection of the concept of self-determination." A meeting on the following day brought no new results, though each side clarified their position somewhat.⁵⁴ The Americans made it clear that their committee would deal with the issue of sovereignty, and admitted that its recommendations could not be guaranteed. Van Roijen, on the other hand, reaffirmed that the Dutch were "anxious to internationalize the West New Guinea problem", but a "proviso" was "that the population have the right of determining their own future".

Van Roijen's views were substantiated by his Government, and conveyed to the Americans during the third meeting in early July.⁵⁵ The Hague thought the "United States...proposal is not in harmony with present Dutch thinking", though it did not want to discard US suggestions as it wished to "draw up a catalog of possible courses of action". Van Roijen said the Dutch were still keen on the idea of a trusteeship supported by a development authority or, alternatively, a visiting mission – apparently with far narrower terms of reference than that of a US-inspired political committee. Sisco expressed scepticism regarding the success of any Netherlands initiative in the UN, and the meeting ended on this rather flat note. Thus, the Dutch-American dialogue had resulted in no compromise whatsoever; it had simply highlighted the Netherlands determination to marry termination of sovereignty with genuine Papuan self-determination, and it concurrently underlined the paramount American consideration of finding an amicable solution. Indeed, during the same meeting, van Roijen asserted self-determination was "the most important aspect of Dutch concern", while Tyler had commented that US support for any project "would probably be in direct proportion to the prospects of success for any given proposal."

Four more meetings were held in July between the Dutch and the Americans, but they produced no agreement. The US was anxious to discuss the WNG problem with the Indonesians, feeling that would lose "leverage" with the Indonesians the longer they delayed contact, though the Netherlands Government saw no need to involve

⁵⁴ Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 30 June 1961, 656.9813/6-3061, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁵ Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 3 July 1961, 656.9813/7-361, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

Jakarta at this point.⁵⁶ Rather, the Dutch suggested the US tell the Indonesians that transfer would not bring about a solution, and that “the rights of the Papuans must be respected.”⁵⁷ Tyler replied that such an approach would be “unproductive”. By the end of the month, having failed to achieve the goal of an agreed plan, the Dutch, as implied when they informed the State Department that a decision would be made at The Hague in early August regarding internationalization, chose to implement their ideas unilaterally.⁵⁸ The Americans, on the other hand, sought to continue their role as an ‘honest broker’, and chose to initiate talks with the Indonesians.

V

A day after the last meeting, the Netherlands Ambassador in Canberra presented to the Australian Government some of The Hague’s ideas, which had begun to crystallize. In an *aide memoire* handed to Menzies and Tange, the Dutch said that they wanted to carry their desire for an international answer to the problem a step further.⁵⁹ This involved a proposal to accept UN intervention in some form, as long as self-determination was guaranteed and Indonesia excluded from any control over the territory. The Netherlands Government also pledged to continue to pay for the development of WNG until it gained independence, and it recommended a UN fact-finding mission be sent to the area. In order to test the viability of these objectives, the Dutch wanted the views of the Australians – along with those of a number of other governments, who would be asked whether they would be willing to sponsor such a move.

The Dutch also revealed that they had been engaging in secret consultations with the Americans.⁶⁰ They explained that somewhat separate ideas had eventuated from discussions and that, as a result, they had formulated their plans without telling the Americans.⁶¹ Tange told J. G. de Beus (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) that he had just received news of the existence of such talks, but nothing more, and he said that he

⁵⁶ Conversation between Emile Schiff (Minister, Netherlands Embassy, Washington DC) and J. D. Bell (Director, Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), 14 July 1961, 656.9813/7-1461, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2. For further US views on this issue see conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 26 July 1961, 656.9813/7-2761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁷ Conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 28 July 1961, 656.9813/7-2861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁸ Conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 31 July 1961, 656.9813/7-3161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁹ Annex to conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶⁰ Annex to, and conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶¹ Cablegram 1907 from D. J. Munro (Australian Minister, Washington), 31 July 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

“would not have anything substantive to say” on the Dutch propositions because they were of such importance that they necessitated Ministerial consideration.⁶²

The next day a cablegram arrived in Canberra outlining US proposals. These were that a resolution should be adopted by the General Assembly citing the WNG question as an “irritant” to certain relationships in the UN, and that a group of countries construct a report with “suggestions for a solution” that would be considered by the Assembly in 1962.⁶³ Notably, in answer to a comment on Australia’s support for the *status quo*, Bell said that “the status quo had dangerous possibilities”, and he hoped the resolution would avoid the use of the term self-determination. In an observation that would have caused further discomfort in the DEA, he said that the initiative would have the support of President Kennedy who had ordered the Secretary to “seek a solution”.

These events surprised the Australians. Though there had been hints that the Netherlands might have been working on something,⁶⁴ it seems officials in Canberra had been unaware the Dutch and American proposals would be as radical as, in fact, they were. As far as the US was concerned, it had certainly given clues to the way in which its thinking was headed, but the Australians had been unwilling to interpret these as negatively as was perhaps warranted. Now they were suddenly faced with decisions that could have far-reaching consequences, a situation which posed problems for the strategy that had hitherto been utilized. In returning to a more conservative policy, Cabinet had apparently decided not to engage in long-term planning, but rather watch and wait, while having self-determination as a general goal. Consequently, little time had been given to forward planning in the DEA.

The reply to the Dutch – and the initial debate that preceded it – reflected and prolonged this lack of specific direction in Australian WNG policy. In a note to the Minister, Tange recommended that “we raise no objection, but offer our assessment of some of the dangers”.⁶⁵ He was against actively opposing or endorsing the Dutch proposals, essentially because a choice either for or against contained too many risks.⁶⁶ A cable from Plimsoll in New York similarly pointed out the possible dangers and benefits of the Dutch initiative, without containing any exact proposals.⁶⁷ The keynote of his argument was that once a degree of UN jurisdiction was conceded, it might be difficult to prevent an outcome favourable to Indonesia. On the other hand, there was a

⁶² Conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶³ Cablegram 1918 from Washington, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶⁴ See cablegram 808 from J. Plimsoll (at this point, Australian Permanent Representative to the UN), 30 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. Note that possible Netherlands plans were, furthermore, only seen as coming into effect if WNG was placed on the UN agenda.

⁶⁵ Tange to Menzies, 2 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶⁶ See his arguments in the memorandum attached to *loc.cit.*

chance that the General Assembly might be impressed with such a *bona fide* drive towards self-determination and therefore pave the way for advantageous, hitherto impossible, developments. Whilst Plimsoll emphasized the possible benefits of the Dutch move to a greater degree than Tange – who tended to concentrate on the negative impact of Australian opposition on relations with the Dutch and on voting in the UN – both papers highlighted the pros and cons in such a way as to discourage any strong courses of action.

A fortnight later Tange had changed his mind. He had become anxious that the Australian Government might get left behind as the pace of the dispute quickened. In a letter to Menzies, he described previous policy as preventative – as aimed at knocking back American and Indonesian initiatives that would upset the Dutch program for self-determination – but he believed that “now...something more than mere opposition to political initiatives is required.”⁶⁸ He suggested Australia might even try to attain a role in the administration of WNG and, in doing so, allow a change in its position in ENG. This kind of approach had some support in the lower levels of the Department. For instance, W. T. Doig of the United Nations Branch wrote:

I suggest with all respect that the current approach to this matter based almost exclusively on the proposition that it is desirable and essential that the status quo be maintained is over-cautious, unhelpful to the Dutch and the Americans, and...in present conditions, not entirely in line with Australia's interests. The facts of life are such that under current and prospective measures some initiative must be taken and soon, and will take it despite our cautionings...I believe also that in our general and in our more detailed examination of proposals we have tended to adopt a somewhat “restricted” or “limited” approach....We have become, and rightly, fearful of the initiative going “wrong”....I suggest the time is ripe for a very big and bold initiative.⁶⁹

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet were not interested in this line of thinking. Instead, they preferred action of a reactive kind in protection of self-determination. In a paper considered by Cabinet on 16 August, Menzies argued that, with the continuance of a policy of self-determination, the main issues that needed attention were the minimization, firstly, of damage to Western interests and, secondly, of the risks associated with the Indonesian claim.⁷⁰ In agreement, Cabinet ratified Menzies' interim reply of 7 August (which offered no advice to the Netherlands Government, yet pointed to potential problems),⁷¹ and elucidated a number of other risks that should be communicated to the Dutch.⁷²

⁶⁷ Cablegram 908 from Plimsoll, 2 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶⁸ Tange to Menzies, 14 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁶⁹ Emphasis original. Doig to Harry, 14 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁷⁰ Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.

⁷¹ See *aide memoire* attached to conversation between Heydon and Menzies, 9 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA. In his submission, Menzies admitted that a move in the UN might

There was some awareness that the Netherlands initiative could prove disastrous for Papuan prospects. Presumably as precaution for dealing with the Australian public if this occurred, the Ministers ordered that it be re-stressed to the Dutch that “it is the business and responsibility of the Netherlands to decide whether and in what manner to proceed with its general intention to find an international solution”. This was as close as Cabinet came to contingency planning. The response to the American proposals, which was effectively dealt with at the same time, made clear that Cabinet’s primary goal was to concentrate on defence of the *status quo*: “Cabinet...endorsed the comment...that we should make strong representations to the United States, as and when necessary, that the future for Western New Guinea should be one which is in the future interests of the inhabitants of both Western and Eastern New Guinea and not merely a settlement of the Indonesian-Dutch dispute for its own sake.” It is important to note that this was also an answer to a part of Menzies’ submission, in which, for the first time, he directly broached the question of whether Indonesia should be allowed to have the territory.⁷³ After presenting some considerations, he had written: “A survey of these...will, I believe, lead Cabinet to conclude that there is no real scope for modification of Australian policy...and thus no question of our contemplating a “solution””. Cabinet obviously concurred.

On 21 August, Menzies sent a tough message to Rusk. He said that the only way of solving the dispute was by handing the territory to Indonesia, and that he found it “difficult to believe” that this was the US intention.⁷⁴ He added:

I cannot see how a policy of virtual open appeasement in the face of armed threats could help us in our general difficulties with Indonesia; nor can I see how so complete a disregard for the interests and rights of the Papuans could be justified to the world.

Menzies then denigrated the notion of a mission charged with recommending solutions to the problem, and suggested that a fact-finding team under strong leadership would be a better option. Furthermore, he thought that if the State Department was unclear on its objectives, Indonesia and its supporters would hijack American moves, and turn them to their own advantage. Finally, in order to counter US fears of an invasion, it was added that according to Australian intelligence, the chance of an attack was no greater than it had been 12 months before.

prove advantageous, but he did not extrapolate on the idea, preferring instead to concentrate on the possible pitfalls of such a move. See Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.

⁷² Decision No. 1541, Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 16 August 1961, in A4943, Vol. 5, NAA.

⁷³ Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.

⁷⁴ Cablegram 1311 from Menzies to Beale, 21 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

Rusk's reply was somewhat evasive, perhaps representing a desire to avoid a clash with the Australians.⁷⁵ He said that US ideas did not represent a policy; they were contingency plans that may become an initiative, but not without full consultation with Australia. On the other hand, he asked a series of questions attempting to allay Australian fears,⁷⁶ but due to their tone, they may have encouraged doubt in Canberra among those who recognized how quickly the dispute had begun to move. Doubts were certainly justified. The entire American policy-making elite had become serious about finding a way out. A week after contacting the Australians, the Americans had approached the Indonesians. Under instructions from the State Department, Jones told Subandrio that the US "deeply desired [to] help find [an] amicable solution", and he introduced the idea of a UN commission.⁷⁷ He also made it clear that they were not presenting the Indonesians with a plan "cooked up" in cooperation with the Dutch. Initially, Subandrio's reply was that the US initiative was a "great step forward", yet later in the conversation he said it would be difficult for his Government to begin dealing with the UN again. Jones pointed out the differences between the resolution favoured by Indonesia in 1957 and the current State Department plan, and he asked whether the Indonesians themselves had any proposals *vis-à-vis* a solution. In concluding, the Ambassador pleaded with Subandrio to give the US suggestion "most serious consideration", saying that it "represented [the] best Washington thinking to date", and he hinted that "slamming of [the] door at this point could do serious harm [to the] Indonesian cause."

Over the course of the following weeks and months, the Indonesians showed themselves as adept at using the situation created by the introduction of American schemes for the projection of their own plans. Their method typically involved the espousal of an attitude that combined elements of both rigidity and apparent compromise, and they sought to maximize the impact of these aspects by stimulating a sense of crisis. For example, the day after Jones' *demarche*, Subandrio told him the US approach "could not [have] come at [a] better time" because he, Sukarno and Nasution were set to meet on 12 August to discuss Indonesia's tactics regarding the Irian

⁷⁵ Cablegram 2071 from Beale to Menzies, 22 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

⁷⁶ For example: "Was it not possible that a United Nations mission sent out to recommend a solution would come up in its report with an account of the real facts in Netherlands New Guinea?", and "Would not the United Nations have to take cognizance of the principle of self-determination in dealing with this issue?"

⁷⁷ Telegram 234 from Jones to Rusk, 8 August 1961, in 656.9813/8-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

problem.⁷⁸ He “had [the] feeling”, the Foreign Minister continued, “he would have been fighting a rear guard action against ultimate use of force”, but “Armed with [the] Department suggestion he could focus [the] attention of the group on [a] peaceful solution.” He followed this by expressing doubts as to whether his Government could accept the US ideas because the final status of WNG was “not negotiable” – though the means of achieving this was open to debate. Indonesia recognized an interim solution was necessary “to save Dutch face”, and he mentioned Sukarno’s earlier offer to have WNG under an Indonesian trusteeship. At the same time, he said they would not tolerate Dutch ideas regarding Papuan self-determination.

In a meeting with Adlai Stevenson (US Permanent Representative to the UN) a short time later, the Indonesians again attempted to create hope and fear in American minds, and therefore generate irresistible momentum in the direction of a hand-over.⁷⁹ Sukarno claimed to have tried to respond to the Dutch need to salvage some pride by making a distinction between sovereignty and administration in his 17 August speech, and by suggesting that “good relations” could be restored if Indonesia was made administrator of WNG. The President said that one of his reasons was that he had been trying to avoid the possibility of “physical acts” between the Netherlands and Indonesia, and yet the Dutch had not responded to this olive branch. Thus, he thought that progress in the search for a solution could now be assisted by the US.

Parallel to American-Indonesian contact, Dutch-Australian interaction continued throughout August. On the 22nd, de Beus was given a supplementary *aide memoire* by Heydon that conveyed the additions to the earlier one as requested by Cabinet. The Ambassador commented that the document was “good”, and concurred with the Australian idea that a request for a fact-finding mission would be the best way to begin a UN initiative if the Netherlands decided to go ahead with their plans.⁸⁰ Some in the DEA thought it would be better to do nothing at the UN because the Indonesians had shown no signs of desiring inscription,⁸¹ yet the Dutch determination to take the initiative was recognized. The Australians believed they could not afford to break with the Netherlands at a time when the Indonesians would be able to take full advantage of Dutch isolation, but most did not see that, in reality, Australia was by now almost

⁷⁸ Telegram 239 from Jones to Rusk, 9 August 1961, in 656.9813/8-961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁷⁹ Telegram from Adlai Stevenson (US Permanent Representative to the UN) to the State Department, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 429-32.

⁸⁰ Conversation between de Beus and Heydon, 22 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA. The *aide memoire* of the same date is attached.

⁸¹ See a later letter by Hamilton to Blakeney, 28 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.

completely hemmed in by growing calls for a solution and Dutch desperation to do something decisive.

VI

Within a month, Netherlands ideas had taken on a more definite form. The Australians were told the Dutch would announce in the General Assembly that the Netherlands was willing to subject itself to a UN development authority that would supervise the process towards self-determination.⁸² The Dutch also again proposed to continue to provide much of the finances needed for ongoing development. These ideas would not be voted on immediately. Rather, the Assembly could despatch a commission to assess the viability of a development authority, establish target dates for a plebiscite in WNG, and make further suggestions. Menzies at this stage reiterated that Australia had had “serious doubts” about the efficacy of taking an initiative in the UN in 1961, but he said Australia would like to “help to ensure the success of your initiative and forestall attempts to divert it into undesirable directions.”⁸³ The Australians were thus committed almost by default, and now they were determined to do everything in their power to ensure that the Netherlands submission was not converted by others into a vehicle for transfer to Indonesia.⁸⁴

The events of the 16th Session of the UN General Assembly in many ways mirrored the twists and turns of US policy. Certainly, it was in New York that the Americans became irrevocably involved in the WNG problem. Luns presented the Netherlands plans on 26 September. The Australians responded by ordering their posts to “support the general approach” of the Dutch, while not specifically lobbying for it.⁸⁵ The US reaction was predictably more equivocal. In response to pressure for support, Tyler told van Roijen that though the Dutch had taken “imaginative and potentially far reaching steps”, Indonesia would probably oppose these; therefore the US had to maintain a “flexible position”.⁸⁶ More specifically, the State Department seems to have

⁸² Cablegram 1121 from Plimsoll, 22 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 49, NAA.

⁸³ Cablegram 593 from Canberra to Plimsoll, 25 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 49, NAA.

⁸⁴ For example, see Menzies suggestions in *loc.cit.* that the development authority be supplementary to Netherlands administration, rather than instead of it, and that the commission be restricted to examining possibilities for a development authority.

⁸⁵ Circular cablegram 128 from Canberra, 28 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 50, NAA.

⁸⁶ Telegram 785 from Rusk to New York, 3 October 1961, 656.9813/9-2961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

been waiting to see whether the Dutch proposal had significant international support before it was willing to try to utilize the plan as a means attaining compromise.⁸⁷

Before officials in Washington had had a chance to make an assessment on this issue, Stevenson cabled Rusk with a new idea.⁸⁸ Perhaps realizing that drift in New York would simply produce another session in which Indonesia and the Netherlands adopted irreconcilable positions, the US delegation had decided the Americans and the British could talk with both parties, with the idea of drafting a resolution incorporating points that would be mutually acceptable, or at least tolerable. The resolution would call for a UN authority to run the territory until the Papuans were able to determine their own future. Indonesia would have access to the population during the intervening period. Stevenson thought the Dutch might accept a revised resolution, as it would be based on their own model. His reasons for believing the Indonesians might be persuaded to participate included the argument that, in view of their actions in the UN, it was now impossible for the Netherlands to engage in a direct transfer, and that a resolution along proposed lines would “for practical purposes assure Indonesia of acquiring WNG in [the] relatively near future.”

Rusk replied on 14 October. He said that the Department had given careful thought to the notion that the US should look to “play [a] more active middleman role” in an attempt to get the Dutch and Indonesians “closer together”.⁸⁹ They had reached the conclusion that the Dutch were amenable to changes, especially if this would result in a sizeable majority in the General Assembly. Consequently, without making a final decision in terms of an intermediary role, it was believed that the Indonesians should be pressed to demonstrate “substantial flexibility” in order that the 16th Session would at least produce the abandonment of Dutch sovereignty.⁹⁰ Rusk expressed regret that, so far, the Indonesians had not “budged from their insistence that their objective must be achieved in one bite”. His instructions for Jakarta set the pattern for US dealings with Indonesia for the rest of the Session:

[The] Ambassador should...point out to Sukarno that Dutch willingness [to] relinquish sovereignty and shifting public attitudes in [the] Netherlands are positive elements which could be exploited by GOI [the Government of Indonesia] if [the] Indos play their cards right...[The] Ambassador should point out to Sukarno that through intransigence at this point [the] Indos not

⁸⁷ See telegram 986 from Plimpton (position and initials unidentified) to Rusk, 29 September 1961, 656.9813/9-2961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2, and DEA cablegram 2399 from Washington, 28 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 50, NAA.

⁸⁸ Telegram 1127 from Stevenson to Rusk, 7 October 1961, 656.9813/10-761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁸⁹ Telegram 923 to New York (393 to Jakarta), 14 October 1961, 656.9813/10-761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁹⁰ Rusk had evidently decided to discard Stevenson’s idea of involving the British in approaches to other countries.

only will fail to take advantage of potentially exploitable opportunities...but may also negate any progress toward [a] meeting of minds already accomplished...we [are] in no position, as Sukarno will understand, [to] guarantee either future Dutch attitudes or [a] successful outcome of current efforts.

The Indonesian reaction was not positive. During Jones' initial approach, Sukarno said he had ordered Subandrio to seek a compromise solution in New York, rather than completely dismissing Netherlands' plans, but he observed that he would only accept UN involvement as a means of transferring Irian to Indonesia.⁹¹ Soon after, the State Department drafted a resolution which aimed at the creation of a UN administrative authority as a "first phase", to be followed by a "second phase" – an "act of self-determination under UN auspices".⁹² In Rusk's words, the resolution "carefully avoids [the] contentious question of who now has sovereignty over this territory", the reasoning behind which was that "We see no prospect of agreement in the UN to settle this ancient and entangled juridical question, so we propose to finesse it." Subandrio gave the Americans no encouragement when presented with the text. He said it was "unacceptable", and that it would be "suicidal" for any Indonesian Government to accept the language embodied in it, as it failed to mention Indonesia, or identify the country with the WNG.⁹³ On top of this, the Foreign Minister commented that the draft by-passed self-determination in a procedural sense, but contained the "essence" of the principle in a way Indonesia would find difficult to approve. The final Indonesian position appears to have been that they would accept a UN administration and some reference to self-determination, on the proviso that Indonesia was the sole administrator⁹⁴ – something unacceptable to the Dutch.

The Americans had, in fact, presented the draft to the Dutch and Australians before giving it to the Indonesians. Beale and Plimsoll were handed a copy during a conversation with Rusk on 28 October, and told that the US wanted to find an uninvolved country, or group of countries, to sponsor the resolution.⁹⁵ They were informed that the US had not ruled out the possibility that it might be one of the sponsors. In response to Plimsoll's comment that the resolution must not be "a mere face-saving device for ultimate handing over to Indonesia", the Secretary of State gave a "specific assurance" that no "side-deal" had been, or would be, made with Indonesia.

⁹¹ Telegram from Jones, 18 October 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, 'Southeast Asia', p. 446.

⁹² Telegram from Rusk to The Hague (419) and Jakarta (467), 1 November 1961, 656.9813/10-2761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁹³ Telegram 830 from Jones to Rusk, 3 November 1961, 656.9813/11-361, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁹⁴ Telegram 1600 from Stevenson to Rusk, 11 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁹⁵ Cablegram 1388 from Beale to Menzies, 28 October 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

Canberra's reaction was cautious, but not dismissive. In a message for Luns, a number of criticisms of the draft were made, including that the principle of self-determination was not sufficiently affirmed because no reference to the wishes of the people had been made.⁹⁶ Also, the US resolution had specified that sovereignty would lie with the people, but that this would occur "without prejudice to the ultimate status of the territory". The Australians thought that the deletion of these clauses in the UN, and the retention of the remainder, could be portrayed as a "victory" for the Indonesians, "and could pave the way for transfer to them."⁹⁷ They additionally believed that the General Assembly was, "strictly speaking", not competent to decide where sovereignty should lie. Still, the cable noted that "if the United States is prepared to back this resolution in its entirety, it is important not to press minor points". The Australians apparently held that US support for a resolution that mentioned self-determination could be crucial in turning international opinion on the dispute in favour of that principle. The American initiative seems to have been important in convincing Australian policy-makers to change from a negative defence of the Dutch draft – that is, ensuring it was not 'hijacked' by Indonesia and its supporters for their own ends – to an offensive based on the belief that a solution grounded on self-determination could be set in train. The Australian Cabinet also appears to have finally grasped that great momentum was being generated in the direction of a solution, and that if an effort was not made to ensure it was one based on self-determination, it would certainly be one that led to a transfer to Indonesia.

The Dutch opinion of the American draft was similar to that of the Australians – as succinctly expressed by Jan Huydecoper, the First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy in Washington:

in general...the Dutch view was that the United States Draft was basically not too bad, subject to certain amendments, but even with these amendments would represent the irreducible minimum beyond which the Netherlands would not go...an important consideration behind the Netherlands [*sic*] agreement was that it was that it was very desirable to have United States support at this stage and essential to have it when the United States resolution was to be executed.⁹⁸

The US were therefore in a position where one side, encouragingly, did not dismiss their 'two-phase' approach, but the other threatened to undo their work due to intransigence. From another angle, the Americans were faced with the dilemma created by the possibility that the Indonesians would be displeased if they went ahead, and the Dutch angry if they did not. These two aspects made for an awkward situation, and one

⁹⁶ Cablegram 211 from Canberra to The Hague, 31 October 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 52, NAA.

⁹⁷ Emphasis original.

that threatened the aim of maintaining good relations with both while bringing the antagonists closer together. Basically, the US had reached a crossroads, and their subsequent steps held important ramifications for the dispute as a whole. From within the State Department, a 'non-radical' line became prominent in the debate over what should be done. For example, Stevenson cabled Rusk with the suggestion that, of the alternatives now open to the US, the best was to continue looking to float or sponsor their own resolution, though with some changes to the text.⁹⁹ Building on this idea, R. G. Cleveland (Southeast Asian desk, Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) sent a memorandum to Rusk in which he argued that if a resolution was not forthcoming the Indonesians might believe their stubbornness had been profitable, and could invade WNG with the excuse that the UN had done nothing.¹⁰⁰ On the other side, the Dutch "would have learned that the U.N. is incapable of helping them to decolonize in a principled manner." On top of this, it would not be possible to abstain on the Dutch resolution if the US did not float its own; the Netherlands had, according to Cleveland, in essence proceeded on American recommendation, and "we would appear to be compromising our adherence to the principle of self-determination to a substantial extent". Thus, a US resolution was seen as the obvious choice.

Meanwhile, Luns somehow found out that a critical decision was in the wind, and sent an urgent message to Menzies.¹⁰¹ He told Plimsoll that a judgement "on whether the United States would support the Netherlands resolution would be made by President Kennedy himself tonight or tomorrow",¹⁰² and that if the Prime Minister wanted to send a note to Kennedy (whom Luns initially thought would be choosing the final course), "it would have to be done immediately." The Dutch Foreign Minister's information was perhaps not entirely correct, but it was close enough, and it had the desired affect on Menzies.

Possessing, as he did, a particular gift with the English language, the Prime Minister was able to write a fine rhetorical message for Rusk.¹⁰³ It began with the assertion that the "question of West New Guinea has reached a stage where decisions of fundamental and long-lasting importance may soon be taken in the United Nations General Assembly". "The issues", it was added, "can be simply stated"; the

⁹⁸ Cablegram 2694 from Washington, 31 October 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 52, NAA.

⁹⁹ Telegram 1600 from Stevenson to Rusk, 11 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum by R. G. Cleveland (Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) for Rusk, 15 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, 'Southeast Asia', pp. 454-55.

¹⁰¹ Cablegram 1543 from Plimsoll, 14 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹⁰² He later said van Roijen had gained the impression that the decision "would be left to Rusk".

¹⁰³ See cablegram 1839 from Canberra, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

Netherlands, who had an “uncontested” legal title to the territory, had announced their willingness to hand sovereignty to the people, while progressively transferring administration to an international authority. Furthermore, they proposed to allow the Papuans to decide their own political future “with the completest freedom of choice” and, “even after divesting themselves of their rights”, to maintain their financial contribution to WNG. The Indonesians, on the other hand, were unwilling to challenge the Dutch in court, and obstinately stood by the political claim that transfer was needed to complete the Indonesian revolution. Using deliberately evocative language, Menzies said that the Indonesians made false claims, including accusations that the people of WNG were persecuted “and desire “anschluss” with Indonesia”, and that the Dutch had aggressive intentions.

Having begun with this overview, Menzies moved to more specific questions. He said that the Netherlands proposals represented a complete plan for settlement, so he did not feel there was any scope for concessions. Australia would accept a US resolution blurring the issue of sovereignty, as long as this did not become the launching pad for a further series of compromises. Still, the fact that Indonesia had rejected the draft meant that it might be wiser to leave the Dutch resolution untouched. This judgement, the Prime Minister asserted, was supported by “the new and alarming element” recently introduced – that of undisguised threats by Sukarno and Subandrio to resort to force if the Netherlands resolution was adopted. Rusk was told that “Such threats must make us all reconsider the wisdom of concessions to Indonesia which could now be made only under the appearance of duress”. And it was added: “I am sure you will agree that concessions under threat can never be a solid basis for stability.” Looking from a contrary, and what he intended to be a more positive, perspective, Menzies said the “Netherlands proposals are solidly based in law, and international equity”. From the Australian viewpoint the Dutch scheme already commanded a simple majority in the Assembly; thus, in conclusion, he argued that

A lead from the United States, with its great moral influence as a non-colonial power, should ensure a clear two-thirds majority which the Indonesians would hesitate to defy...Australia has a particular interest in finding for this problem an answer which would not contain the seeds of future instability. I believe that such a solution cannot be achieved unless it is based on a free expression of the will of the inhabitants themselves – whether they choose union with Indonesia, or independence, or indeed some association with the east of the island, where we are rapidly preparing the people to make a similar free choice.

In giving the message to Rusk, Beale omitted Menzies’ suggestion that the Dutch resolution be left undiluted, and based the Australian case on the US resolution instead; his reason was that the US “very definitely preferred their own version which

they thought would have more chance of acceptance”.¹⁰⁴ Rusk asked Beale to thank Menzies for his “excellent message”, and assured the Ambassador that the US resolution reflected views that were not changing. He said that they had not tabled the draft yet because they wanted to make an “impression” on the Indonesians, in order that the latter “would not bitterly oppose” it. Rusk felt that a resolution was even more important than it had been five weeks before in that the situation had been inflamed by the Netherlands proposals and Sukarno’s threats. He was concerned with the US position “if the situation on the ground worsened” because nearly everyone was looking to them as the “gendarmes of the whole world”, and there was a limit to how many problems the US could police. He thought the US could probably go “all out” and push their resolution through, but there were plenty of other problems where America had to use “maximum diplomatic effort” – and he implied the US might pull back, for the State Department believed success for the resolution was not guaranteed. Also, if the Indonesians attacked following the tabling of a US resolution, this would be a “direct challenge” to America at a time when they were truly stretched. Perhaps sensing that Rusk’s mood was dangerous to Dutch and Australian interests, Beale countered with the view that the greater risk was allowing the US or Dutch resolution to be defeated, after which Indonesia “would...feel free to move”. A sizeable majority was needed in favour of self-determination, which would deter the Republic from using force, or bring world opinion against them if they did. Such a majority, Beale urged, could only be achieved if the US backed self-determination “horse, foot, and artillery”. He went on:

we would be surprised and very disappointed if United States – whose nationhood was founded on this principle – could not stand up and be counted on. I said it seemed to me that sometimes (in understandable moments of pessimism) members of the United States Government underestimated United States influence and moral authority around the world. Now surely was the time to cash a few cheques on the United States bank of goodwill abroad.

In what made for a very strong *demarche*, Beale also commented “that there was an idea prevalent in some quarters that Indonesia should be given West New Guinea so that the “constructive forces in Indonesia would be released to bring the country around to the Western viewpoint”; “this view”, he argued, “seemed...to be unrealistic, if not naive.”¹⁰⁵ Rusk encouragingly said “you have never heard me say anything like that, for I don’t believe it”, but at the end of the meeting Beale must have been wondering, not without some trepidation, which way the Americans would jump.

¹⁰⁴ The conversation between Beale and Rusk may be found in cablegram 2832 from Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹⁰⁵ Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

The Australian representations hit home. At a meeting a short time later, Kennedy and Rusk decided to go ahead with the US resolution.¹⁰⁶ A. B. Emmons (Deputy Director, SW Pacific desk, Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) phoned the Australian Embassy and said the US “had come to the tentative decision it would explore ways and means of getting its resolution floated with the co-sponsorship of nations not directly parties to the dispute.”¹⁰⁷ The US did not plan to be a sponsor, though it would “actively support...[the draft] at every stage”. Some alterations, he said, were possible, but he did not think these would be ones of substance. Beale wrote to Menzies that he had had the impression Rusk had not made up his mind by the time the Ambassador talked to him – an opinion shared by van Roijen – and had found that the “determining factor had been the “more than equal weight” given to Australia’s general standing *vis-à-vis* the United States”.¹⁰⁸

The importance of Australia in the decision is corroborated by the comment of Robert Johnson (NSC Staff) to Kennedy that it “was after a conversation with the Australian Ambassador that [Rusk]...decided we should switch from the role of intermediary to that of active sponsor of a resolution.”¹⁰⁹ This was a highpoint in terms of Australian influence on American policy, but it was a somewhat tenuous victory. Not only were there those who believed Indonesia should be given the territory – indeed, Beale acknowledged that “with the Rostows and Bells, and the President understandably reluctant to involve the United States in any more commitments, the decision could easily have gone the other way”¹¹⁰ – but Rusk himself was probably motivated by more than respect for the Australians. Given the strength with which he had urged the ‘two phase’ approach, it is likely the Secretary was convinced that Dutch willingness to let go of sovereignty was too good an opportunity to be missed, in spite of Indonesia’s opposition. The US could work on Indonesia later – and hopefully the Indonesians would not react too violently – but the priority was to take the first step.

Not all in Washington, as alluded to above, were happy with this approach. Johnson wrote to Rostow that, from the Indonesian point of view, “we have now entered the lists against them”, and he felt that the US had gone from “honest broker to

¹⁰⁶ The existence of this meeting is not acknowledged in *FRUS*, and no record of it was found at A2, but Rusk had told Beale that he would be “seeing Kennedy within a few hours, when a decision would be taken whether the United States would lodge its draft resolution.” See Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹⁰⁷ Cablegram 2833 from Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹⁰⁸ Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 468-69. For more on the importance of Australia in Rusk’s position during the 16th Session see Bundy to Kennedy, 11 December 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 463.

¹¹⁰ Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

advocate on the wrong side.”¹¹¹ Johnson, who had earlier described Netherlands insistence on self-determination as a “sham”,¹¹² thought they should be dissuaded from putting their resolution to the vote, and felt notions of a US resolution should be dropped also. He believed a resolution calling for talks would be better or, in case of failure, that the Dutch be encouraged to enter secret bilateral negotiations with the Indonesians.¹¹³ Within State, Under Secretary Bowles expressed his view that the US needed to disentangle itself from the current position:

I am disturbed by [the] impression that [the] US is being backed into [a] position of appearing to support [the] Dutch on [the] New Guinea issue....It would be deeply hurtful to our interests [in Indonesia] if [the] net result of our good-intentioned efforts [to] bring [the] disputants together was to relinquish our carefully-preserved neutrality on this issue, even though reluctantly, in favor of [the] position supported by [the] Dutch and opposed by [the] Indonesians....I believe we should seek [to] extricate ourselves by any loophole that may be left.¹¹⁴

By this time, however, the Americans had passed the point of no return; a draft had been made and presented to a group of smaller nations.¹¹⁵ Rusk and his State Department supporters had won the day.

The proposed resolution incorporated the US idea of a commission, and the Dutch concept of a development authority.¹¹⁶ The job of the commission would be to “consider and report on arrangements for bringing the territory...under the administration of a United Nations Authority”. In deference to Indonesia, the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia was acknowledged, though it was said that the future of WNG should be determined by the Papuan population. The Netherlands informed Washington that these changes were the last they could accept,¹¹⁷ but the Australians were anxious to put everything behind the draft. Beale, who shared Rusk’s fear that US involvement did not guarantee the resolution’s success, wrote that “In my opinion, if we lose on this one, we may well have lost our last chance of preventing West New Guinea from going to Indonesia.”¹¹⁸

The chances of losing were increased when, on 20 November, India tabled a draft resolution calling for negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Not only did this draft threaten to steal important votes from the Dutch and American drafts,

¹¹¹ Johnson to Rostow, 16 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 458, 460.

¹¹² Johnson to Bundy, 6 November 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 448.

¹¹³ Robert Johnson (NSC Staff) to Rostow, 15 November 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 457.

¹¹⁴ Telegram SECUN 6 from Bowles to Rusk, 17 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

¹¹⁵ Cablegram 1583 from Plimsoll, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹¹⁶ Attachment to Johnson to Rostow, 16 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 460.

¹¹⁷ Cablegram 1583 from Plimsoll, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹¹⁸ Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

the principle of self-determination was excluded from the text. The Australians needed to improvise rapidly. An urgent cable was sent to New York stating that

Our own assessments leave considerable doubt whether [the] Dutch resolution as tabled could now be adopted... Since it is most imported [*sic*] that a resolution confirming the applicability of self-determination and establishing some United Nations presence should be adopted we feel that [the] draft formulated by [the] United States should be tabled immediately. New York should do all possible to achieve this.¹¹⁹

It was even suggested that if the US resolution was not tabled, the Australian delegation should introduce amendments to the Indian resolution in order to bring it into line with the minimum requirements of Canberra and The Hague. The Australians would have breathed a brief sigh of relief when the Embassy in Washington was told the next day that three Brazzaville African countries had taken up the US resolution,¹²⁰ while Luns had said he would withdraw the Dutch draft “to enable a more generally agreed text to be adopted.”¹²¹ Nonetheless, Australia’s troubles were not over. Up until the moment the vote was taken, the Australians were worried that a blocking third would not be available to counter the Indian resolution, and they continued to think of ways to amend it in order ensure its defeat.¹²²

In the end, it was probably the nature of the African resolution – the final version of which was sponsored by 13 nations – that ensured the defeat of the Indian draft. It was basically a combination of American and Indian ideas in that it called for negotiations on the basis of self-determination and, if these failed, for a commission to oversee the development of the territory and an eventual act of self-determination.¹²³ This would have stolen a number of votes from the Indians, who finished with 41 for, 40 against, and 21 abstentions.¹²⁴ The demise of the Indian scheme, which was supported by the Indonesians, did not, however, result in a victory for the Africans, who managed 53 for (including Australia, the US, and the Netherlands), but had 41 against, with 9 abstentions. Luns had tabled the Dutch resolution for fear that the African draft would be attacked as being a Netherlands draft under a different guise,¹²⁵ but he withdrew it after the defeat of the African resolution.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Cablegram 790 to New York (243 to The Hague), 21 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.

¹²⁰ Cablegram 2883 from Washington, 22 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²¹ Cablegram 1625 from Plimsoll, 22 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²² See cablegrams 798 and 818 to New York, 22 and 27 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²³ For a copy of this draft, see cablegram 1653 from New York, 24 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²⁴ The results of the vote may be found in the DEA circular of 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²⁵ Cablegram 1662 from Plimsoll, 25 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹²⁶ DEA circular, 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

Outwardly, the results of the 16th Session were inconclusive. The Dutch and the Australians had failed in their bid to force a solution based on self-determination, and the Indonesians had not managed to push the Netherlands into talks that were intended to facilitate transfer – in spite of the fact these contradictory resolutions both commanded a simple majority. These appearances were deceptive. The political fallout that accompanied perceptions of failure in Washington and Jakarta soon began to have a major affect on the direction of the dispute, and the Australians again found themselves being tossed back and forth by forces that eventually became overwhelming.

VII

The consistency with which the Australian Government pursued a traditionally-styled policy in 1961, despite being repeatedly surprised by policy change in other Western capitals, is capable of misinterpretation if not placed within the context of late 1960 to early 1961. It would be possible to view Cabinet as having returned, quite inexplicably, to ignoring Indonesia and being independent from the US and UK. Of course, policy was an extension of the assessment that Australia remained an emasculated power, with a degree of increased independence limited to WNG, and circumscribed in that connection as well, yet indicators within the scope Australia's main activities over WNG are difficult to detect. West New Guinea policy, in other words, was an uncharacteristically poor barometer of Government views on the nation's status. What does seem obvious is that Australia's real vulnerability to Indonesia, and dependence on the US and UK, was becoming even more pronounced than the considerable degree admitted by Cabinet. However, such a trend was not discerned by Cabinet until December. As this study focuses on Australian perceptions, and not on comparison between these and what might be interpreted by the historian as 'reality', analysis will follow description of the December period. Suffice to say, though, that Cabinet comprehension was accompanied by shock, and this reaction, it seems, played a significant part in the definition of SEA policy for a number of years.