

Chapter 11: Sukarno's Move and the Anglo-American Decision to Force a Dutch-Australian Capitulation, December 1961-January 1962

I

December 1961 proved the decisive period for the final outcome of the dispute over WNG. Events in Washington, Jakarta, and London – and also The Hague – completely changed the complexion of the dispute, and finally forced the Australians to wash their hands of the territory that they had vigilantly watched over since February 1950. The Menzies Government was, following the UN vote, somewhat optimistic regarding the future of WNG, if unsure of how to exert its influence. Nonetheless, it soon dawned that to support the *status quo* was to stand, without hope of success because of Dutch collapse, against the will of the US and UK. Reluctantly – and momentarily – Australia capitulated because of the futility of opposition, and for the sake of its relationship with its two great allies.

Pemberton has argued that events in Washington surrounding the WNG issue established a pattern of White House dominance over the State Department in the making of foreign policy.¹ In so far as this is true, it must be said that the aftermath of the 16th Session was the crucial period in this development. Hitherto, Rusk and his Department had exerted their influence over WNG policy at the expense of figures such as Rostow and Robert Johnson – as evinced in the decision to float the US resolution after it had been rejected by the Indonesians. Following the vote, the Indonesians reacted vehemently, feeling that they had been betrayed by the Americans and a number of their anti-colonial comrades. Reporting from New York, Stevenson said that he had been told by an Indonesian UN representative, Nugroho, that “Subandrio and other leaders of the Indonesian delegation...were all, including those who might be expected to moderate, exceedingly bitter about the part played in voting on WNG by [the] US”.² Nugroho added that “he was certain that there would be [a] strong wave of anti-American feeling which would take a long time to overcome.” Though Rusk felt that US efforts had been “very useful”,³ those in the White House thoroughly disagreed, and took what had probably been a long-awaited opportunity to attack the Secretary of State

¹ Pemberton, *All the Way*, p. 92. For a personal account of the role of the White House in foreign policy during Kennedy's administration, see A. M. Schlesinger, Jr, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, Boston, 1965, pp. 420-26. (See pp. 533-36 for reference to the WNG dispute). See also R. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy*, New York, 1967 (pp. 371-80 for an analysis of the WNG question).

² Telegram 1829 from Stevenson to Rusk, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

³ Telegram 577 from Rusk to Jakarta, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

and his Department. McGeorge Bundy (Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs) wrote to Kennedy that “most of the specialists in the area believe that the Secretary’s respect for the Australians and dislike of Sukarno has led him to take a position in the UN debate which, if continued, can only help the Communists.”⁴ Rostow, also in a letter to Kennedy, spoke of the “UN fiasco”, and said that

It is the feeling of all of us on your staff that the Western World has got to consider this problem somewhat less in terms of the pure diplomacy of West Irian and more in terms of a common interest in frustrating communism in Indonesia...I know of no one in the town who does not believe that, soon or late, the Indonesians will get West Irian. If this is indeed the way it will go, it may be important for us to work with this trend, using it for the common benefit, rather than permitting the Communists to continue to exploit this issue to press Indonesia closer to the Communist Bloc externally and towards Communism internally...A final word. We must move fast...both the Dutch and the Indonesians may do things which will quickly heighten tensions. In fact, as of today, they have both started down that track.⁵

In a specific sense, Rostow implied that pushing the Dutch to negotiate would be the best option. Johnson added his voice to this idea, and went as far as suggesting Luns be pressured to eliminate the condition of self-determination that he had set for the initiation of talks with Indonesia.⁶ Both believed that Australia should be persuaded that its long-term interests lay in preventing Indonesia from falling to communism, rather than simply keeping Indonesia out of WNG.

It is difficult to determine exactly what the State Department was doing at this time. Rusk appears to have met with the President on 1 December, but apparently no record of the conversation was made. Similarly, internal correspondence on the matter is not easy to find. In spite of this lack of material, there are indications Rusk believed that while the ‘two-phase’ approach had failed in a strict sense, it had contributed to developments that could now be built upon. There was, he wrote, now “clear evidence that [the] Dutch wish to disengage from WNG at [the] earliest time possible”⁷ – something he thought reassured the Indonesians – and he made it clear to Jones that he did not feel the Department had “compromised...[its] potential for continuing [to] assist parties [to] reach [a] peaceful and acceptable settlement.” In other words, activities in the UN resulted in some important ground work that could now be built upon through non-biased US assistance.

⁴ Bundy to Kennedy, 1 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 463. For a profile of Bundy, see Pemberton, *All the Way*, p. 92.

⁵ Rostow to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 464-65.

⁶ Johnson to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 468.

⁷ Telegram 577 from Rusk to Jakarta, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

Kennedy seems not to sided immediately with either his own staff or that of the State Department, for an obviously unresolved debate was still occurring on 8 December.⁸ Indeed, it was not until the momentum generated by events in Indonesia was felt that US policy was moved in a particular direction. Elsewhere, Australian policy had returned to a reactive state. The campaign in the UN had been aimed at stimulating the growth of international support in favour of self-determination, but with the failure to get a two-thirds majority, the initiative was taken from Australia's hands. As R. L. Harry (First Assistant Secretary, DEA) commented to de Beus:

it was a pity that we had not got the approval of the Assembly to proceed with a definite course of action. The United States had voted for the resolution, which was useful support for the principle of self-determination. On the other hand the vote had not been clear cut enough to prevent the Indonesians from maintaining pressure activities.⁹

Talking to de Beus a day later, Tange made it clear that the Australians realized new factors had come into play with the conclusion of the 16th Session, but revealed that their policy was to simply watch and wait:

although the U.N. debate had been deadlocked, a number of new and important ideas had been floated which might well generate further initiatives. The situation now was clearly not the situation existing before the Dutch and U.S. proposals were made. We and others therefore attached considerable importance to reactions to the U.N. debate of the Netherlands, Indonesian and United States Governments.¹⁰

At first, Australian representatives were apparently cautiously optimistic that something positive might come from the UN debate. At the end of November, Beale cabled Menzies and conveyed his extraordinary judgement that Bundy was "sympathetic" to the Australian viewpoint, and "would be likely to favour our point of view" in talks with the President.¹¹ Beale similarly thought that the attitude towards Australia in the State Department was favourable, and he recommended that this generally advantageous atmosphere be exploited through indications of the way the Menzies Government wanted the US to move in the wake of the Assembly debate. Confirming that policy was to wait, the Prime Minister replied that Australia's "first priority" was a "firm assessment of the situation" after the last Session, and this was dependent on further clarification of the Indonesian and Dutch attitude.¹² Still, he echoed Beale's positive outlook by asking him to thank the US for their strong support in New York, and by commenting that "It seems to us that, as a result of the Assembly

⁸ See Johnson to Bundy, 8 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, 'Southeast Asia', pp. 471-73.

⁹ Conversation between Harry and de Beus, 5 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹⁰ Conversation between Tange and de Beus, 6 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹¹ Cablegram 2951 from Beale to Menzies, 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

¹² Cablegram 2007 from Menzies to Beale, 8 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.

debate, there is a greater realisation than formerly of the direct interest of the Papuans themselves in their future.”

As officials in Canberra waited benignly, and those in Washington were groping around rather ineffectively, Sukarno made a decisive move. In a speech to the Indonesian Army Staff College on 30 November, he had said that the “present moment is the proper time” for settling the WNG problem, adding that he would “issue orders soon about the liberation”.¹³ This contributed to an atmosphere of heightened tension that provided an ideal setting for his major ploy. On 8 December, Sukarno told Ambassador Jones that

he was “deeply disappointed”, indeed his hope and faith in [the] US had been “shattered” as a result of our abandonment of our historic policy of neutrality....we had not only failed to help Indonesia, we had actively campaigned against [the] Indonesian position and supported [the] Dutch right down the line.¹⁴

Rejecting Jones’ protestations that the US had tried to be objective, Sukarno continued:

My people are pushing me to give the command...force was the only language the Dutch understood...we don’t have much time. I am holding a meeting on Monday (December 11) with the heads of our military services. I need to know something by then. Specifically, what does the United States intend to do....Let the United States abandon its policy of tightrope walking on this issue...it is time for America to make its voice heard, to take a firm stand to talk to the Dutch. That is my suggestion.

Jones’ interpretation of the President’s comments added to their weight. He began by stressing that while Indonesia’s military leaders would do their best to stop Sukarno from “giving the command” at the meeting, they all admitted they had little choice but to toe the line if he did so.¹⁵ As a consequence, Jones said he was “convinced there is a grave and imminent danger of some form of military action by Indonesia aimed at either outright conquest or creation of [a] situation which would force international action to restore peace...[and] advance recognition [of] GOI claims”. The Ambassador observed that although Sukarno was “of course, a consummate actor...his demeanor was wholly compatible with sincerity”; it would therefore “be unsafe to assume he was bluffing”. He said he realized the President was applying “all the pressure at his command to get us back to specifics”, but he believed that if the US took a hard-line stance because they did not want to give in to pressure, “we must be prepared to face [the] probability of military action.” He went on:

¹³ Quoted in Rostow to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 464

¹⁴ Telegram 1018 from Jones to Rusk, 8 December 1961, 656.9813/12-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

¹⁵ Telegram 1022 from Jones to Rusk, 8 December 1961, 656.9813/12-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

On the other hand, we can yet save the situation...what we must have immediately is a message...from President Kennedy to President Sukarno. To be effective, it must contain something specific to give Sukarno hope that a political solution of this question is still possible in the near future. To have an impact on Monday's peace or war meeting at Sukarno's palace, I will need a message not later than Sunday, December 10.

Jones' messages had a critical impact in Washington. A general willingness to believe that the Ambassador's assessment was correct enabled the more radically-minded White House staff to gain the ascendancy over the State Department. The key figure in this switch was President Kennedy. Previously reticent to use his influence at Rusk's expense, Kennedy approved two cables to Jones – one of which was a letter to Sukarno – which Bundy described as moving “towards [the] views of Rostow and others who have been critical of our UN position.”¹⁶ The first telegram contained instructions for Jones to be delivered concurrent to the delivery of the President's letter.¹⁷ It contained three main points, the opening one of which set out the means by which Sukarno should be persuaded that the use of force was counter-productive. Preventing a ‘boil-over’ was central to the US strategy at this point – for such a situation was viewed as disastrous from an American perspective – but the US was, at the same time, careful not to suggest their opposition would in any way be military. The second point dealt with arguments in defence of the ‘two-phase’ position assumed by the US in the UN, and implied the Indonesians should think of accepting a Dutch withdrawal followed by a period of UN administration during which Jakarta would have access to WNG (and therefore be able to influence the outcome of an act of self-determination). Significantly, it was commented that the US impression was that the WNG problem was “primarily a question [of] finding a face-saving device so [the] Dutch can get out”. Nonetheless, as long as Indonesia insisted on being the sole administrator of WNG, neither the Dutch or the Australians would be willing to retreat. The final, and perhaps most important point, had to do with the United States' future role in the problem. It was here that the influence of Rostow and his supporters was most evident. Jones was to tell Sukarno that the US “would be prepared to play a behind the scenes role in order [to] help bring about [an] amicable solution.” Two notable aspects of this process were spelt out. Firstly, it was made clear that pressure would be exerted on the Netherlands to pursue such a solution; the Indonesians were to be told “we [are] prepared [to] explore with [the] Dutch what first steps might be

¹⁶ Bundy to Kennedy, 8 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 473. See footnote No. 1 for Kennedy's approval.

¹⁷ For these instructions, see Rusk to Jakarta, 9 December 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 474-77.

feasible to this end”. Secondly, by saying they were “encouraged” by the recently expressed Indonesian hope for a US role in the initiation of bilateral talks, the Americans implied they had given in to the Indonesian demand for discussions of this kind. The penultimate paragraph of the communication to Jones highlighted the nature of the bargain the US were doing with Sukarno, and the gloomy prospects that this carried for the Dutch and Australians:

In summary you should seek to persuade Sukarno that if he does not give a signal for force on Monday, we can and will intensify our efforts with [the] Dutch and with [the] Australians and will hope to be able to indicate significant progress to him as these efforts proceed.

Kennedy’s letter to Sukarno covered similar points to those contained in the telegram to Jones.¹⁸ He said that from the US viewpoint, the period in the UN had “narrowed the gap” between the Dutch and the Indonesians, and he thought a “definitive action” resulting in a Netherlands withdrawal, and a “greatly enlarged opportunity” for Indonesian influence on WNG’s future, was now a “wholly realistic prospect.” On the lines of the US part in a solution, Kennedy remarked that “we are quite ready to play whatever role you and the Dutch think would be useful”, though, in the context of expressing his hope that an attack would be avoided, he warned that “the use of force would make it very difficult for me to be as helpful as I would like to be in working out a satisfactory resolution on this matter.” Kennedy and his advisers were indeed desperate to divert Sukarno from war, yet these admonitions were far from reflecting the spirit of assurances of logistic support as given to the Dutch by Dulles. If the crisis of early December revealed anything, it was that the US had almost reached their limit for extending help to the Netherlands in its time of need, and that the Americans were prepared to go a little further for an equally desperate Indonesia.

In a dramatic moment befitting the entire episode, Jones drove to Bogor at night after receiving the messages from Washington, and confronted an “irritable” Sukarno, who was by then in his pyjamas.¹⁹ Jones covered all the points in his instructional cable, despite being “constantly interrupted with emotional outbursts against the Dutch”. Much of the discussion seems to have involved attempts to convince an apparently volatile Sukarno that the use of force was unwise. The Ambassador believed that when he “first saw Sukarno, he was rarin-tearin to go”, but he felt that Kennedy’s letter had brought him back to earth for the moment, and that Sukarno had made it obvious

¹⁸ For this letter, see Rusk to Jakarta, 9 December 1961, in *ibid.*, pp. 477-78.

¹⁹ Telegram 1025 from Jones to Rusk, 11 December 1961, 656.9813/12-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63. The quotation – and the content of their conversation – is taken from telegram 1033 from Jones to State, 11 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 479.

military moves would be postponed “pending [the] promised US initiatives”. Again reinforcing an impression Sukarno would have wanted to portray, Jones wrote that the “important thing is that we press vigorously for [a] settlement while this period of relative calm lasts.”

Apart from creating the understanding that it was only the US *demarche* that had “saved the day”,²⁰ Sukarno maintained the threat of attack by failing to reveal what exactly he would say to a mass rally that would, in his words, take place “to demand that I give them the order to march on West Irian.”²¹ Foreign representatives were apparently told that the result of Sukarno’s war or peace meeting was that Sukarno would issue a “final command” on 19 December.²² Officials in Washington thus believed they were under continued pressure to demonstrate that they were taking action. On 11 December, Dutch, Australian, and British representatives were briefed, and told the US “took a very serious view of the situation”.²³ They were also asked to give suggestions as to the alternatives now open regarding the WNG problem. Two days later, Acting Secretary of State George Ball sent a telegram to Rusk reiterating the urgency of moving to forestall a catastrophe:

[the] content of [the] Sukarno speech to [the] WNG rally now scheduled [for] Dec 19 might be influenced in a less aggressive direction if Sukarno, prior [to the] speech, can see specific evidence that meaningful movement [is] possible in [the] very near future...[the] President’s message to Sukarno appears to have somewhat allayed [the] imminent crisis but strong tension continues and we believe constructive steps on [the] Dutch part [are] urgent...We have carefully weighted [the] importance [of] this issue with all other matters you are confronted with and reluctantly conclude that it is desirable [to] take advantage [of] your presence [in] Paris [to] discuss possible future steps to resolve [the] WNG dispute with Luns who plays [the] dominant role [in] Dutch policy. Hopefully we could have positive initial Dutch reaction to convey [to] Sukarno prior [to the] December 19 mass meeting for [the] purpose of convincing him [to] moderate his public stance [on] this problem or, at least, avoid irrevocable aggressive steps...You may wish to reemphasize our concern over [the] latest development [in] Indonesia...and sound out Luns on [the] possibility of direct talks without preconditions with [the] Indonesians.²⁴

In the event, Rusk appears not to have talked to Luns along these lines – having discussed WNG with him earlier in the day²⁵ – but the desire to push quickly towards a solution is clear enough.

²⁰ This was Jones’ opinion. See telegram 1025 from Jones to Rusk, 11 December 1961, 656.9813/12-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.

²¹ Telegram from Jones to State, 11 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 480.

²² For reference to this “command”, see telegram 813 from Fry to FO, 14 December 1961, in FO 371/160008.

²³ Johnson to Bundy, 12 December 1961, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 483.

²⁴ Telegram from George Ball (Acting Secretary of State) to Rusk, 13 December 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 485.

²⁵ See footnote No. 3, in *loc.cit.*

Soon afterward the State Department surrendered to the White House staff view that WNG must go to Indonesia. In a memorandum for Bundy, State Department Executive Secretary Lucias D. Battle wrote:

we recognise that for historical, geographical and political reasons West New Guinea probably will tend to closer if not complete association with Indonesia and our role in seeking a settlement will be to facilitate this evolution. We are in effect committed by the President's letter to assist in efforts to find a solution in a framework that would allow the Indonesians every opportunity to achieve their objective peacefully and without undue delay.²⁶

Previously, the position favoured by Rusk and the bulk of his officers had been that the US should push hard for a solution, but avoid favouring a settlement that represented the core of either Dutch or Indonesian thinking. By 17 December, however, there were no internal hindrances to US pressure for an outcome on Jakarta's terms.

The Australians believed the Americans had over-reacted. When told of the crisis in Jakarta over the weekend, Beale told Averell Harriman (Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs) that "we had lived with this thing for a long time and that Sukarno had made such threats many times before and there was no reason to assume that this time was the time."²⁷ Revealing his scepticism over the US response, Beale commented to Menzies that "Ambassador Jones...however, seems to have got excited and found willing listeners here." This was perhaps the beginning of a realization in Australian circles that their optimism was misplaced. Adding to his account of events in Jakarta, Harriman told Beale that the Dutch should not assume that UN deliberations had settled the issue – "the emergency continues" – and that the US hoped bilateral talks would eventuate. He said he could envisage "a "two-bite" operation", the first of which would involve the Dutch removing themselves from WNG and access to the Papuan population being given to the Indonesians.²⁸ The second bite would occur with a plebiscite from which the Indonesians "might reasonably hope to secure West New Guinea if they behaved well". Beale remarked on the "developing interest amongst the Papuans themselves", to which Harriman made noises that Australia's interests were appreciated, and views sought, but the Ambassador reported to Menzies that the interview "has left me with some feeling of disquiet". Beale said he suspected Harriman thought a hand-over "might not be such a bad thing", and that – in spite of his agreement with Australia's attitude and the idea that self-determination was "the rock to

²⁶ Lucias D. Battle (State Department Executive Secretary) to Bundy, undated, in *ibid.*, p. 489. The State Department copy of this paper is dated 17 December 1961, and it is clear that it received the support of previously warring factions within State. See the footer on p. 486.

²⁷ Cablegram 3046 from Beale to Menzies, 11 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

²⁸ This, and information in the rest of the passage, comes from cablegram 3059 from Beale to Menzies, 11 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

stand upon” – “the need to settle the problem somehow is in the front of his mind at all times.”²⁹

During the interview, Beale was informed Rusk had spoken to Lord Home, the British Foreign Secretary, and told that the US hoped the UK would work to bring the Dutch and Indonesians together.³⁰ The notion of bilateral negotiations had, in fact, been popular in the Foreign Office for some time. The concept of a Melanesian Federation that had prevailed early in the year came to be seen as impractical unless some interim measure could be found.³¹ The FO therefore became interested in pushing for a solution that would be acceptable to both the Dutch and Indonesians, and yet at least contained the possibility of enabling the development of a Papuan state at a later stage. These desires spawned various proposals,³² but they were proposals that also began to show the influence of other factors. With the advent of the Dutch policy of ‘internationalization’, and clear US interest in a solution, opinion in the FO began to stress more strongly the importance of finding a way out, while expressing a belief that this could only be achieved through bilateral negotiations.³³ The central reason why the British were keen on the American resolution was that it met their “main requirement” that it be “as unprovocative as possible and need not, therefore, lead to an embittered debate calculated to prejudice subsequent negotiations”.³⁴ When the issue came to a vote, the rationale for going with the African resolution had been the same.

The Indonesian reaction to the aftermath of the 16th Session alarmed the British. Early in the month, J. E. Cable (Assistant, SEA Department, FO) thought Sukarno might “conceivably calculate that an attack...might bring him important political dividends”, and E. Surper (FO) minuted that “Soekarno is quite mad enough to attack and has a badly swollen head at the moment.”³⁵ In the period following Sukarno’s war or peace meeting, and prior to his 19 December speech, officials in London appear to have panicked. It was here that their policy on negotiations moved from quiet suggestion amongst allies, to active advocacy on a wider scale. In spite of Harriman’s

²⁹ Emphasis original.

³⁰ *loc.cit.*

³¹ FO memorandum for the Cabinet Official Committee on the South Pacific, Undated (though almost certainly drafted in late July 1961), in FO 371/15997, PRO.

³² See, for example, *loc.cit.*, and minute by E. H. Peck (Superintending Under-Secretary, SEA Department, FO), 17 August 1961, in FO 371/159998, PRO.

³³ See Lord Home (British Foreign Secretary) to C. A. Carey-Foster (Counsellor, British Embassy, The Hague), 30 August 1961, in FO 371/159998, PRO.

³⁴ Peck to R. T. Ledward (Counsellor, British Embassy, Washington), 15 November 1961, in FO 371/160003, PRO.

³⁵ Minutes by J. E. Cable (Assistant, SEA Department, FO), 2 December 1961, and E. Surper (position unidentified), 4 December 1961, in FO 371/160008, PRO.

comment regarding the US hope that the UK would initiate something designed to bring the Dutch and Indonesians together, the Americans do not seem to have suggested that the British do this. It would hardly have been necessary. In a telegram of 14 December from London to the Embassy in Washington, it was clear the British policy on WNG was turning:

We fear that President Sukarno may be intending to issue an ultimatum to the Dutch on December 19. Even if this ultimatum allows a period of months for the Dutch to negotiate the transfer of sovereignty before the Indonesians resort to force, we consider the Dutch will refuse to negotiate under duress. This might finally close the door on a negotiated settlement and make the outbreak of hostilities almost inevitable. As such hostilities would do irreparable damage to western [*sic*] interests in South East Asia, we think a last attempt should be made to persuade President Sukarno to leave an acceptable loop-hole for negotiations in his statement on December 19. Merely to urge moderation would, however, be useless. We must offer him a definite bargain.³⁶

It was proposed that the US and British Ambassadors – and, if possible, Shaw as well – approach Sukarno and tell him of their anxieties regarding Indonesia’s threats, and their fear that an ultimatum would preclude negotiations. The President was then to be advised:

We could not urge the Dutch to negotiate under duress. On the other hand, if the Indonesian statement on December 19 is moderately worded and leaves a real loop-hole, the United States and British Governments will, in return, do their best to get the Dutch to come to the conference table in a reasonable frame of mind always on the understanding that the Indonesians would be similarly reasonable.

Menzies was given an *aide memoire* on 15 December expressing the British proposition in the same terms, and asking if Australia wanted to be part of a joint Anglo-American approach to Sukarno. The Prime Minister sent a lengthy personal reply the following day.³⁷ In it, he acknowledged that they were faced with “a situation in which the risks have to be calculated carefully”, and said he understood British anxieties, but he was critical on a number of points. The first was that he thought the British proposal assumed the Indonesians would “launch a serious attack unless suitably placated”. Intelligence available to the Australians suggested that any attack would be “token” at most, and would be geared to producing UN calls for a cease fire. Furthermore, he believed deterrent pressure would be more effective in preventing force than would reacting with alarm. Menzies then moved to the heart of the Australian position, which was – for the first time since the Bevin era – beginning to appear to be fundamentally at odds with the British stance. He explained that, as far as the

³⁶ Telegram 9448 to Washington, 14 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

³⁷ For a copy of this message see cablegram 3940 to London (2056 to Beale, 271 to McCarthy), 16 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

Australians were aware, the Indonesian concept of negotiations “meant only negotiations about the terms and conditions of transfer.” Thus, “Anglo-United States pressure on the Dutch to negotiate could well be taken by the Indonesians as implying a concession of their claim to sovereignty”. By implication, Menzies was reiterating the long-held opinion of his Government that the Indonesian claim was entirely illegitimate, and should be given no recognition whatsoever. Typically, he moved from here to self-determination. He wrote that the Dutch proposal in the UN included “very substantial concessions and went as far towards meeting the Indonesian position as would be consistent with the principles of the Charter.” Though it promised a change in sovereignty, this was to be one that favoured the inhabitants of WNG – “It emphasised, as we have always emphasised, the over-riding importance of the principle of self-determination for those people.” The Indonesians, he continued, “have made not the slightest move” towards this principle. He therefore added:

If you and the United States pursue a course which even appears to set self-determination aside, the Indonesians will be confirmed in their rigid attitude. The problem will then be soluble only by an outright Dutch capitulation, which would sacrifice the rights of the inhabitants, or by the very Indonesian violence that we are all anxious to avoid.

Menzies made it clear he did not rule out the possibility of negotiations, but these would have to be “free from threat and on a previously agreed basis of self-determination”. If pursued seriously, he thought this could result in arrangements under which “undiluted and unrestricted freedom of choice” could be combined with an opportunity for Jakarta to influence such a choice in their own direction. Menzies thought a just solution might be achieved in this way, but stressed that the Indonesians would have to accept the principle of self-determination at the outset.

Returning to the immediate issue, Menzies concluded the main part of his message on a tough note. Failing to offer Australia’s support for the proposed initiative, he said that:

If you and the Americans feel constrained to make some approach to Sukarno, I wish you would consider telling him frankly the unwisdom of his present tactics. He and his Ministers need to be persuaded that his threats of force are likely to reduce the opportunities for a negotiated settlement and drive the foreign policy of Indonesia in direction [*sic*] dangerous for the country’s future.

Menzies explained in his communication that he had not consulted Cabinet – as Ministers were scattered around Australia – but would immediately instruct the British if they wanted to change what he had said. When they met on 19 December, Cabinet

whole-heartedly endorsed the Prime Minister's hard line.³⁸ It was consequently clear that although no firm expression of Australian WNG policy was given in the wake of the vote in the General Assembly, uncertainty concerned tactical questions and not those of substance.

An attempt to soothe Australian fears through a note from the UK High Commission on 17 December probably served to increase them.³⁹ In it, concern was expressed that the Australians might think "the British Government are aiming to put pressure on the Dutch to hand over West New Guinea without self-determination". This intention was denied with the claim that it had "always been felt that the right course was to aim at the Indonesians and the Dutch meeting for peaceful negotiations and that is all [we] are concerned with at the moment." The next step would be to talk to The Hague about what solution would be acceptable (within the bounds of self-determination). The problem for the Australians was that, as Menzies had pointed out, negotiations on the basis of the current Indonesian position would result in a transfer. Thus, the idea that the British were exclusively focussing on initiating immediate discussions was hardly reassuring.

The reality of the developing split between the UK and Australia was demonstrated by the British decision to go ahead with an approach to Sukarno. They were not accompanied by the Americans, for the latter believed they had done enough with the Indonesians in the interim.⁴⁰ Convinced that Britain's commitment to help the Dutch in the case of conflict meant that they had an even greater need to dissuade Sukarno than the US, the Foreign Office instructed Ambassador Fry to approach the President if he felt that an ultimatum would be issued.⁴¹ After consulting Jones, Fry replied that Sukarno was likely to order Indonesia to enter a final state of "confrontation of the Dutch" rather than order an attack. Still, both he and Jones thought a word to the President might "have some effect" in view of the fact that "Her Majesty's Government are universally regarded here as committed to supporting the Dutch through thick and thin".⁴² Unable to get to Sukarno before his speech, he conveyed the British message to Subandrio, who later told him that the President was "most appreciative".⁴³

³⁸ Decision No. 1689, 19 December 1961, Cabinet meeting, Canberra, in A4943, Vol. 5. See A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA, for a draft of this message. The original does not appear to exist in DEA files.

³⁹ Note from the British High Commission, 17 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

⁴⁰ See Rusk's views in minute by Warner, 15 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

⁴¹ Telegram 852 to Jakarta, 16 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

⁴² Telegram 829 from Sir Leslie Fry (British Ambassador, Jakarta), 18 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

⁴³ Telegram 836 from Fry, 20 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

On 19 December, with the British and Americans moving in the direction he intended, Sukarno left the door open to negotiations. As an official of the FO put it, “the President’s long awaited final command turned out to be no more than the order to await the final command.”⁴⁴ The speech itself, however, had ceased to be the immediate concern for the Americans. Following Kennedy’s message to Sukarno, a general feeling in Washington was that they could be confident an invasion would not be announced from the podium in Jogjakarta, but the period of grace was limited and dependent upon America’s ability to show that a solution was nearing. Sukarno himself reminded them of this state of affairs when he wrote to Kennedy on 17 December saying that Indonesians were at “boiling point”, and that there would be no alternative to force if the Dutch continued to push for an independent Papua.⁴⁵ It was therefore imperative to move the Dutch towards the negotiating table. In spite of losing influence after 8 December, the State Department apparently managed to steer US policy in a direction that avoided openly forcing the Dutch to capitulate. They sought to encourage the Dutch to make decisions that the US deemed inevitable anyway. As in the General Assembly, aspects of the Netherlands position were encouraging to the Americans, yet there were others that were a cause for concern. On 14 December, van Roijen told representatives of the State Department that while the Dutch Government had, in backing the African resolution, agreed to talks, they would not speak with the Indonesians on the basis of a transfer.⁴⁶ The Dutch continued to insist that a pre-condition of any talks was that the people of WNG be given the right to self-determination.⁴⁷ The next day, the Dutch Ambassador laid down another condition, stressing that his Government “could agree to negotiations with the Indonesians if they were placed in an international framework”; the Netherlands felt that past experience demonstrated a solution could not be found in a bilateral context.

Knowing the Indonesians would not accept a conference based on self-determination, but might agree to the presence of a third party, the State Department left the second condition for the moment, and focussed on convincing the Dutch to drop the first. In talks on 19 and 20 December, Harriman pushed the Netherlands to take

⁴⁴ H. A. Staples (position unidentified) was paraphrasing a comment in the *Manchester Guardian*. See minute by Staples, 21 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.

⁴⁵ See footnote No. 1, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 490.

⁴⁶ Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 14 December 1961, in 756C. 00/12-1461, box 1837, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁴⁷ The record of a conversation between Ledward, Robert S. Lindquist (Officer in Charge of Indonesian Affairs, Office of SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), and Arthur B. Emmons III (Deputy Director, Office of SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State

advantage of the present opportunity for a settlement.⁴⁸ He said that Kennedy had instructed that the US role should be “one of assisting in establishing the procedure and framework under which talks would take place.”⁴⁹ Specifically, “he urged that the Dutch put aside...[the self-determination] pre-condition as a principal point.” On 22 December van Roijen told Harriman that his Government had decided to drop this requirement, but they “would...of course, stick to the principle of self-determination in negotiations”.⁵⁰ There was some division in the Dutch Cabinet over the question of pre-conditions,⁵¹ and it is possible that the Indian invasion of Goa on 19 December – which was widely interpreted as setting a dangerous precedent that Sukarno would be tempted to follow – tipped the balance against the hard-liners.⁵² The Dutch were not in a position to risk a war, so they removed the immediate barrier to negotiations. They had not, on the other hand, given away their stubborn insistence on self-determination, and acquiesced in a ‘face-saving device’. As a member of the Dutch Foreign Ministry told the Australians, “some members of Cabinet felt more strongly on the question of prior conditions than...some others [*sic*]”, but he added, “with considerable emphasis”, that “not one in Cabinet...would entertain the idea of any “sham” negotiations or “enter into a shabby deal”.”⁵³

Though conflict over the issue of self-determination remained between the Netherlands and Indonesia, the Americans would have been satisfied that they had at least opened the way to negotiations. They were, nevertheless, apparently having problems softening the Australian position. On 18 December, Beale responded to Harriman’s request of 11 December for Australia’s views. Repeating many of the arguments employed in Menzies’ reply of the 16th to the British, Beale said that Sukarno was “bluffing in order to obtain maximum concessions”. The thing to do, he continued, was to make it plain that if an attack occurred, the “US [and] Australia and other interested parties would be on [the] other side of [the] fence.” Having said this,

Department) on 19 December makes this clear. See 756C.00/12-1961, box 1837, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁴⁸ See footnote No. 1, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, p. 495.

⁴⁹ This, and the following quotation, is taken from the memorandum of conversation of 20 December 1961. See *loc.cit.*

⁵⁰ Conversation between van Roijen, W. A. Harriman (Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), and other representatives of the State Department and Netherlands Embassy, 22 December 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 495.

⁵¹ Cablegram 362 from The Hague, 22 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.

⁵² In an example of Dutch fears, Rookmaker had told the Australians that they were “more worried...about India’s aggression against Goa than they are about Sukarno’s speech. It was an evil precedent for Sukarno, who could hardly fail to take similar action.” See cablegram 348 from The Hague, 19 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

⁵³ Cablegram 362 from The Hague, 22 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.

Beale thought the Indonesians would at most attempt a “limited beachhead”. If this occurred he said “Sukarno must understand [the] grave consequences [of] such action.” Moving to the moral justification for the Australian position, Beale asserted that the “only tolerable stand for [the US] and Australia...is to insist, since [the] Dutch [are] willing to leave[,]...that genuine self-determination be exercised”. In conclusion, Beale added that the views he had expressed represented “national opinion”, and were thus unlikely to change substantially even if a new Government came to power in Canberra.

Harriman’s rejoinder was not what Beale would have hoped for. Harriman contradicted the Australian military assessment by saying that the “situation [was] more critical than in [the] past”, and he remarked that Sukarno was in an increasingly difficult situation, which meant he needed an indication that a political solution was possible, otherwise he would give serious consideration to the use of force.⁵⁴ Moving on, the Assistant Secretary intimated that the Australian Government “might consider long-range developments in [the] area and, since good relations with Indonesia [are] vital to Australia, reassess [the] validity [of a] position which might inevitably bring Australia and Indonesia into strong and lasting disagreement.” Given that all he had said was negative from an Australian perspective, Harriman assured Beale that the US took a “most sober view of Australian security requirements”. This said, he returned to the offensive. Reacting to the Ambassador’s pleas for an indication that the US would push for self-determination, he remarked that although the Americans were committed to the concept in principle, “application among primitive people [is] apt to be influenced by many factors”. The US, he remarked, could not give any guarantee to Australia in the absence of a foundation upon which to build a definite plan for self-determination.

Not surprisingly, Beale sent a gloomy report of the conversation back to Canberra. He said he was “reinforced in the disquiet” he had felt on 11 December regarding the US position.⁵⁵ Additionally, he felt that supplementary comments given at the time by J. M. Steeves (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs) – who had said the US differed fundamentally from Australia in that they were convinced Sukarno would get WNG, and that self-determination for the Papuans would be a farce – “reflect a widely held view in the State Department”. Two days later, Beale expanded on his interpretation of the American position in an important cable to Menzies.⁵⁶ Going

⁵⁴ Telegram 300 from the State Department to Canberra, 20 December 1961, 656.9813/12-2061, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

⁵⁵ Cablegram 3136 from Beale to Menzies, 19 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

⁵⁶ Cablegram 3163 from Beale to Menzies, 21 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

to the heart of US motives, he said that “no-one likes Sukarno’s tactics”, but the problem was “regarded as a dangerous one which, whether it continues as it is or erupts into an attack, can only benefit the Communists.” Having said this, Beale stressed that an attack “will involve the United States in some very difficult decisions they don’t want to have to face.” On the question of self-determination, the Ambassador believed Harriman and Steeves were not alone in thinking that the idea was a “gimmick” in the case of New Guinea. Indeed, Beale thought the main factor that had held the US from “bringing more heavy pressure to bear on the Dutch, and even perhaps taking up a public position more favourable to Indonesia” was their “regard for Australia and their reluctance to take a stand or a course of action contrary to what we regard as vital to our interests.”⁵⁷ Reiterating, Beale said the stand taken by the US at the UN in favour of self-determination was largely “in deference to our ideas but”, he continued,

I think this was their high water mark. Indications are that from now on their attitude is far more likely to deteriorate than otherwise....I think the United States will continue to use its influence to bring about a settlement at all costs.

In considering the options available to Australia within the context of the various possible developments in the dispute, Beale noted, firstly, that if there was an attack, he assumed Australia would denounce such action, make a stand on self-determination, and actively back the Netherlands in the UN. This would, nonetheless, not be a favourable development in Beale’s eyes; he told Menzies he would have “considerable anxiety” regarding any outcome of UN discussion in such circumstances. He thus implied that Australia should strenuously seek to avoid a problem of this kind. In the absence of an attack, Beale thought that if the Dutch stood by self-determination “we may perhaps continue with our posture for some time”. This aside, he posed the question of what Australia should do “if, as a result of pressure from the United States, Britain, and within Holland, the Dutch decide to make a bilateral arrangement with Indonesia, the final result of which is to give the latter the territory without real self-determination”. The following passage contained the thrust of Beale’s message, and it demonstrated that the Ambassador saw Australian WNG policy as being in need of change:

I confess to some anxiety lest Australia should be placed in a false position at some point along this line, and I am wondering whether we should not get prepared, if necessary, to “roll with the punch”, i.e. accept the result with the best possible grace when the time came, before it was too late. This would be a matter of timing. So long as the Dutch stand firm we should continue to support them on principle, but if they weaken we ought to avoid being left in the position of

⁵⁷ Emphasis original.

appearing to be intransigent and the only remaining opposition to settlement. If we did let this happen we should attract the resentment not only of Indonesians, but of many other Asians as well. Therefore, should the moment come, we should accept what is agreed to between the Dutch and Indonesians, but should even appear to be generous by offering our own co-operation and assistance to Indonesia in their efforts to advance the welfare of the Papuan people, etc. etc. I do not at all accept the argument that rolling with the punch in this way would make the Indonesians love us; my only point is that there would be little to be gained in arousing Asian resentment after it became apparent that we were not going to win anyhow.⁵⁸

Given following events, it appears the interview with Harriman, Beale's assessment of American policy, and the nature of his policy recommendations, were crucial in beginning to undermine Australian morale.⁵⁹ Combined with further body blows to the Liberal Government's position, the realizations produced by these occurrences were, in the end, decisive.

It was not long before the Australians received further evil omens. On 22 December it became clear that New Zealand – always a staunch supporter of the Dutch-Australian position – had abandoned their friends across the Tasman. External Affairs was handed a copy of a message from the Prime Minister of NZ, Sir K. J. Holyoake, to Sukarno. It read:

New Zealand does not approach the problem of West New Guinea in any narrow or partisan spirit; our sole concern is that there should be an equitable and peaceful solution which takes account of all interests involved including specifically those of Indonesia. For my part I do not believe that the road to such a solution has been closed: indeed, it is my firm conviction that for the first time in many years there are now possibilities of progress towards a just and amicable settlement.⁶⁰

Reflecting Australian surprise, Hamilton minuted that “The words “Netherlands” and “self-determination” or “people” do not appear!!”.⁶¹ It is likely that New Zealand took its cues from the British. They may even have agreed with London on the timing of this revelation, because a letter from the British Government containing more disturbing information arrived in Australia on the same day.⁶² In essence, the message – addressed personally to Menzies – consisted of a request for an Australian opinion on a plan whereby an administrative authority would be placed in charge of WNG. Indonesia and the Netherlands would be “associated” with this body, but not given administrative

⁵⁸ Emphasis original. The portion of this paragraph beginning, “If we did let this”, and ending, “Dutch and Indonesians, but should”, comes from a corrective cable (see unnumbered cablegram from Washington, 21 December 1961, in the same file); this part of cablegram 3163 had been incorrectly transmitted.

⁵⁹ In his memoirs, Beale unreliably explains events surrounding the demise of traditional policy by focussing on the period from January 1962. See H. Beale, *This Inch of Time: Memoirs of Politics and Diplomacy*, Melbourne, 1977, pp. 158-9.

⁶⁰ Telegram 612 from Wellington to the NZ High Commission, Canberra, 21 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA. A minute states that a copy was given to Australia on 22 December.

⁶¹ Minute by Hamilton on a copy of the message from Holyoake, 22 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.

⁶² See extract from MacMillan to Menzies, 27 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

power, and after a time the inhabitants would be given the choice of whether to “secede from Indonesia”. It was admitted the chances of Indonesia accepting such a scheme were not great, but the note described these ideas as the “only alternative...[the British] Government can find”. It would have been obvious to the Australians that the British were vainly trying to find a solution that would be a little more palatable to their Dutch and Australian friends, in spite of the by now dominant conviction in London that Indonesia had to be placated. Actually, the paragraphs that acted as a preamble to the presentation of the British plan gave an unmistakable picture of the main theme of UK WNG policy. Here, Menzies was told that

you suggest...all we need to do to dissuade the Indonesians from an attack is to stand firm and that the most that they are likely to attempt is a token landing...In the long run the British Government do not see how Indonesia can fail to invade West New Guinea if she does not get what she wants...We do not therefore believe that the status quo can be prolonged for more than a few months at the outside.

Making a second point which, with the first, led to an obvious conclusion, it was added “a local war over West New Guinea would be a disaster...[the British] Government’s aim is to stop the fighting breaking out.” Taken in this context, the British plan expressed later in the paper would probably have been rightly interpreted as a token gesture of goodwill.

If the Australians needed any further confirmation that the British, like the Americans, believed it was time to give the Indonesians what they wanted, it came in a letter from MacMillan on 27 December. MacMillan had met with Kennedy in Bermuda on 21 and 22 December and had discussed the WNG problem.⁶³ In the second meeting, Kennedy told the British that the new administration had made no commitment to supporting the Dutch, even if only logistically, in the case of an attack, and they had no intention of doing so. MacMillan replied that the UK were “under a long-standing obligation” to give the Netherlands logistic backing but, as this would essentially involve re-fuelling Dutch ships in Singapore, they “would be sorry to have to do this”; it would increase tension between Indonesia, at one end, and Malaya and Singapore at the other. MacMillan said the Dutch did not think they could win a conflagration, while Kennedy added that “military operations would be likely to strengthen the Communist position in Indonesia – which would be contrary to the interests of the West as a whole.” Predictably, in the light of this, it “was generally agreed that...the right course

⁶³ The following account is taken from a British record of the meeting at Government House, Bermuda, 22 December 1961, in FO 371/160009. For the State Department record of 22 December meeting see 756C.00/12-221, box 1837, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

would be to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of hostilities over West Irian and to persuade the Dutch Government to accept some arrangement which, whether through mediation or otherwise, would enable them to extricate themselves from their present position.” As far as the Australians were concerned, they were to be pushed to realize the game was up:

It was finally agreed that the United States and United Kingdom Governments should each impress on the Australian Government the desirability of avoiding military operations in West Irian and should suggest that, for the purpose of avoiding this, it would be preferable that the Western Powers should refrain from offering to support the Dutch in resisting any Indonesian attack on this territory. The Australian Government could be reminded in this connection that active Western help to the Dutch in such a situation was likely to provoke the Indonesians to take retaliatory action against Western interests in Indonesia, which would be even more damaging to Australia than Indonesian occupation of West Irian.

During the conversation, Kennedy – obviously fearful that Australia might fight in the event of an attack – had suggested that they should find out whether such intervention was planned by the Australians.⁶⁴ The decision to pressure the Liberal Government was geared towards preventing this by demonstrating that no support would be forthcoming from the US and Britain during an Indonesian invasion of WNG, and by suggesting that both desired that Australia not embark on a maverick crusade to save the territory in such a situation. Though ostensibly dealing with the repercussions of such a move, the final sentence was a subtle reminder that the US and UK were ready to sacrifice a non-Indonesian WNG in an attempt to ensure the political future of the archipelago as a whole.

In his letter to Menzies, MacMillan did not disguise the thrust of Anglo-American thinking in Bermuda. He wrote:

In this message I would like to make only one point [on WNG]. If we should find ourselves helping the Dutch in military operations against the Indonesians we must assume that retaliatory action would be taken against Western interests in Indonesia. The President and I were inclined to think that the preservation of those interests and the discouragement of Communist influence in Indonesia are more important to the West than the maintenance of the Dutch position in Dutch New Guinea. For this reason it seemed to us that we must do our utmost to persuade the Dutch to find some tolerable means of extricating themselves from their position there.... We realise of course that Indonesian ambitions in New Guinea present special problems for you and the recent developments must be causing you a good deal of anxiety. I fear however that we are faced here with a choice of evils.⁶⁵

This was, for the Australians, conclusive evidence that they were now isolated, and it was a devastating blow in the attack on their resolve that had begun with Beale's report

⁶⁴ This piece of information comes from the State Department record.

⁶⁵ Extract from Macmillan to Menzies, 27 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

of his conversation with Harriman on 18 December. The ‘crunch point’ had finally come.

It appears likely that Menzies conferred with the new Minister for External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, and other relevant Ministers over the next few days.⁶⁶ With Australia’s isolation from its most important allies now clear, a decision had to be made as to whether the Government should go it alone. Australia’s inability to defend WNG alone or with the Dutch may have been considered. Still, the Australians did not believe it likely the current crisis would result in a conflagration, so reiteration of US and UK unwillingness fight for the territory (which had been recognized many months before) was not particularly worrying *per se*. What was alarming was that the British and Americans were convinced a crisis existed, and that they were determined to force the Dutch – whose resolve was fragile – to give WNG to the Indonesians. This was the gist of Beale’s message; unreasonable panic may have occurred in Washington, but Australia was probably to be presented with a *fait accompli* regardless of what it did or said. Although prepared to agitate American, British, and Asian opinion by standing firm, Menzies and the Ministers he consulted apparently accepted Beale’s argument that such measures would be futile. A statement by Barwick on 30 December revealed, in necessarily veiled language given the domestic and international position, that the Australian Government had changed its stance. The Minister commented that “along with all Australians he hoped that Indonesia and the Netherlands would enter...negotiations...and that they would pursue these negotiations patiently to a conclusion satisfactory to themselves and to the community of nations.” Furthermore, it was admitted that Australia was not a party principal to the dispute. This was followed by a reference to Australia’s “interest” in self-determination, and the expectation that Indonesia could hardly deny this to the Papuans, but this by implication recognized the likelihood of Indonesian control, and it was simply a gloss aimed at minimizing damage to the Government’s position in Australia itself.

An important corollary to the Australian surrender was an increased determination in Canberra to do everything to forestall threats of an Indonesian attack. Now that the Government had distanced itself from the dispute, it was important – from a domestic viewpoint – that the Dutch at least appear to be negotiating freely. If the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed on an outcome not to the liking of the Australians,

⁶⁶ Garfield Barwick (Minister for External Affairs and Federal Attorney-General) had been a prominent lawyer, and became Commonwealth Attorney-General in 1958 – a position he retained during his tenure as Minister for External Affairs. For an account of Barwick’s life, see D. Marr, *Barwick*, Sydney, 1980.

Menzies and his colleagues could complain, and yet insist on the Dutch right as sovereign power to dispose of WNG as they saw fit. On the other hand, if the Netherlands were seen to be forced to come to the table on Indonesia's terms, the Liberal Government expected to be branded as appeasers.

Consequently, Menzies had made sure that Barwick's statement on 30 December was coupled with strong deterrent action. Perhaps from the tone of Indonesian rhetoric, and a request by the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Brigadier Suadi, to see the Prime Minister, the DEA had suspected that the Indonesians were seeking to tell the Australians they could no longer stand by assurances of no force.⁶⁷ When Suadi visited, he did not directly address the question of force, but asked for the Australian viewpoint on various occurrences in Indonesia, such as the President's 'command', and the apparent pressure on Sukarno from the people to take action.⁶⁸ Menzies' reaction was vehement. He was, he said,

interested to know what was the real purpose of this present approach. Was it an ultimatum? Was it intended to scare Australia? If so, the Prime Minister could assure the Ambassador that Australia was not easily frightened.

Suadi meekly replied that he did not think force would necessarily be used, but Menzies again went on the offensive, asking whether the Ambassador's appointment was meant to show that Indonesian guarantees were now invalid. "If so", he continued, "this would be a shocking breach of a solemn promise." A Counsellor of the Indonesian Embassy, Bahrum Sjah, later said that Menzies had been "rude" to Suadi, and that Suadi "had felt insulted" and was "very upset".⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it would have been obvious to officials in Jakarta that, while desperate to prevent threats and violence over WNG, the Australians had eventually stepped aside.

On 2 January 1962, Tange confirmed to the British High Commissioner, Sir William Oliver, that the Australians had indeed given in because of the *fait accompli* that would result from the Anglo-American decision to coerce a demoralized Netherlands Government. When asked the reasons for the 30 December statement, the Secretary said they were

To bring Australian opinion up to date. There had been an absence of public statement on this matter. It was also felt important to prepare opinion for future contingencies and to point out that

⁶⁷ An undated, unsigned memorandum broaching possible answers to requests for Australia's position on the disavowal of no-force promises can be found in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.

⁶⁸ Conversation between Menzies and Brigadier Suadi (Indonesian Ambassador to Australia), 30 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.

⁶⁹ Conversation between Bahrum Sjah (Counsellor, Indonesian Embassy, Canberra) and Blakeney, 2 January 1962, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 59, NAA.

such contingencies might include some over which Australia had no control. By this he meant that in the last resort the running would be made by the United States and ourselves [the UK].⁷⁰

Tange's own record of the meeting reinforces the above interpretation. He told Oliver that "Part of the background" to Barwick's statement "was our interpretation of U.K. policy (e.g. Mr. MacMillan's letter and the report of the attitude jointly reached by President Kennedy and Mr. MacMillan; our interpretation of present American attitudes toward negotiation by the Dutch; and our understanding of the attitude of the Dutch themselves".⁷¹

Barwick's later version of events deserves attention. It is clear that his account, published in 1995, and which has had considerable influence on attempts to decipher the last weeks of traditional Australian policy, is thoroughly inaccurate.⁷² He argues that a memorandum presented by him to Cabinet in the second week of January "was written well before we had any knowledge of the change in American policy" that came later in the year; the memorandum even preceded "any change in [the US] approach".⁷³ Moreover, he contends that the Government later changed its stance because he eventually managed to persuade Menzies that cession of WNG would improve relations between Australia and Indonesia.⁷⁴ Obviously, neither of these claims can be sustained. Australia knew of, and was influenced by, changes in US (and UK) policy during December, and was clearly not swayed by anxieties about relations with Indonesia. It is difficult to determine whether the inaccuracies in Barwick's account constituted a deliberate attempt to portray himself as being more influential and 'radical' than, in fact, he was, or whether they were simply the lapses of a man in his 90s looking back 40 years. Whatever the case, his representation of events cannot be considered a firm basis for historical analysis.

Further news of the position of the US and UK was received a short time after Tange's talk with Oliver. In another letter, Macmillan wrote of other aspects of the WNG problem discussed in Bermuda but not mentioned in his first note. Menzies was told the US had made clear that it would in no way undertake any military commitments in the face of an Indonesian attack. MacMillan wrote that the British

⁷⁰ Telegram 2 from Canberra to the CRO, 2 January 1962, in FO 371/166530, PRO.

⁷¹ This comes from the Australian record of the conversation between Tange and Sir William Oliver (British High Commissioner, Canberra), 2 January 1962, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 59, NAA.

⁷² For secondary accounts heavily reliant on Barwick's work, see Phelps, *op.cit.*, pp. 355-59, and Hutton, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-76. Tange (interview, 23 June 1998), perhaps influenced by Barwick's memoirs, recently argued that Barwick was the main factor in bringing about change in Cabinet policy. Presented with relevant documents, Tange was unable to defend this view.

⁷³ G. Barwick, *A Radical Tory: Garfield Barwick's Reflections and Recollections*, Sydney, 1995, pp. 177, 180.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 177-78.

themselves would be highly reluctant to carry out their promise of logistic support.⁷⁵ Significantly, the Australian Prime Minister was also told that “the Dutch would be glad to extricate themselves from New Guinea if they could do so without national humiliation and were prepared for a negotiated settlement which would leave the Papuans with the right of self-determination.” The Australians were already aware that The Hague had accepted negotiations in principle, though it seems that MacMillan was attempting to present the Dutch as being now more concerned to prevent “national humiliation” than ensure “the right to self-determination”. If, by doing so, he wanted to ensure the continuation of changes in Canberra’s policy, this was probably unnecessary, though it would have reaffirmed in Australian minds the wisdom of their choices.

Barwick went to Cabinet on 11 and 12 January 1962 to ratify the decisions of late December. In other words, these meetings simply confirmed the surrender that had been earlier conducted in the confidence that none in Government would disagree. In a submission entitled “Where the Dispute is Heading”, Barwick argued that in the face of international and domestic pressure, the Netherlands was likely to move towards a settlement that would guarantee Indonesia sovereignty, and that pledges to the Papuan population would probably be “covered by some largely face-saving formula.”⁷⁶ He spoke of the possibility that Indonesia might resort to force, and that the US and UK gave first priority to preventing this. The British and Americans were thus driving at negotiations, and had admitted the probable result of this was a hand-over to Indonesia. As Cabinet would not fight for WNG, Barwick said that the Government had to decide what attitude it would take to negotiations – the only real question of substance that remained was how an Indonesian WNG would relate to ENG. In a rather convoluted supplementary memorandum, Barwick put forward the view that Australia should take the initiative in recognizing Indonesian sovereignty over WNG, and promote a solution whereby an international administration would run the territory (with Indonesian input, or preceding a period of Indonesian administration), followed by a plebiscite whereby the people could chose their own future.⁷⁷ He explained that the

purpose of the initiative would be to ensure agreement between the parties for the transfer of sovereignty with some provision for respect for the principle of self-determination and to improve our position with the Indonesians.

⁷⁵ Macmillan to Menzies, 5 January 1962, in A6706/1, NAA.

⁷⁶ Submission No. 10 by Barwick, 11 January 1962, in A5819/2, Vol. 1, NAA.

⁷⁷ The supplementary memorandum is attached to Submission No. 10, in A5819/2, Vol. 1, NAA.

Cabinet rejected this last proposal as “unnecessary and inappropriate”, and recommended only that the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, knowing as they did “the mind” of Cabinet, make other governments aware of Australia’s views as necessary.⁷⁸ Though not explicitly stated – perhaps because the Ministers were already aware of the changes that had been put in place – there can be no doubt, given a final reference to the US and UK, and the public statement prepared for release later in the day, that the Australians had thrown in the towel. In the last sentence of the Cabinet record, the comment was made

that in whatever messages are sent to the British and American Governments, consideration should be given to including strong expressions bearing on the enduring importance to the western [*sic*] world of the principle of strength in the face of threats of aggression for territorial purposes and to the possible embarrassment to Australia of the continuance of threats of the use of force.

No reference to previously oft-repeated calls for self-determination can be seen here, but it is possible to detect a sense of bitterness over what was perceived as appeasement of Sukarno. The potential for “embarrassment” was most likely a reference to concerns over domestic reaction if negotiations were to be continually affected by Indonesian belligerence, and to the extension of Jakarta’s claim to ENG. Certainly, with the loss of WNG, these two issues had become central points of concern for the Australian Government.

The public statement of 12 January concentrated on the need for negotiations, and the need to prevent hostilities.⁷⁹ In terms of Government policy, the stance taken during the Subandrio visit of 1959 proved a convenient safety net. Australia, it was said, was not a party principal in the dispute, and would recognize a Dutch-Indonesian agreement freely reached – although, of course, it was remarked that “we...are deeply attached to the attainment by under-developed peoples...of the right to choose their own future.” These aspects aside, it was paragraph nine that surreptitiously pointed to the driving force in the derailment of Australian WNG policy:

Having regard not only to our treaty rights and responsibilities but also to the hard facts of international life, we act in close consultation with the great free powers, particularly Great Britain and the United States of America. No responsible Australian would wish to see any action affecting the safety of Australia on the issues of war or peace in this area except in concert with our great and powerful friends.

Thus officially ended – for reasons, and at a speed, unexpected – a policy that had stretched from Spender to Barwick.

⁷⁸ Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 11 and 12 January 1962, in A4943, Vol. 6, NAA.

⁷⁹ A copy of the statement is attached to *loc.cit.*

II

Arguably, the main discovery made by the Menzies Government after 18 December was that Australia had become more dependent on the UK, and especially the US, than had been realized. Unknown to policy-makers in Canberra, they had been operating on the assumption that the British and Americans would never force Australia to renege in the absence of actual war over WNG. Respect for Australian views on national security would be maintained. Such thinking explains Australian boldness and assurance – effectively until the last minute – in the face of changes in US and UK policy. Now, however, this supposition was shown to be false; Washington and London had simply ignored Australian views, and it was consequently obvious that the limited degree of movement Australia had over an already limited WNG policy had been completely circumscribed. Australian policy no longer had autonomous value, but had become wholly reliant on US and UK decisions.

On a wider scale, this meant that Australia's view of itself as the power south of Singapore was utterly destroyed. The country was now completely dependent in the area – both militarily and politically – on its two main allies. Moreover, it would become more vulnerable as Indonesia moved into what had previously been the outer portion of Australia's immediate sphere of influence. This re-definition of Australia's status would not have been confined to Cabinet. The 'Australian' outlook was again truly representative of that of the nation, for it was obvious to the public that the announcement of 12 January 1962 conveyed a *fait accompli*. Australia was no longer allowed to determine its own path in offshore SEA, and, for the first time, it shared a land border with a threatening Asian power.

The loss of the remaining trappings of middle power status was traumatic in itself, but it was doubly so for one reason: the event which revealed Australia to be entirely dependent on the US and UK, and which would mean defence of the country would have to occur along its borders, was also one which suggested the integrity of Australian territory was not reliant on US 'friendliness' and the UK's 'family' loyalty, but ultimately on whether Australian needs squared with American and British self-interest. It had always been thought by Menzies, and most of his colleagues, that if Australia became besieged, it was the cultural connection with these countries, and not ANZUS, that would save the nation.⁸⁰ There had, certainly, been a time of pessimism in

⁸⁰ A distinction must be made here between the protection of Australia proper, and 'forward defence'. The Australians were aware that US involvement in areas, and operations, further afield was very much dependent on perceptions of self-interest in Washington. (Indeed, selfishness that was, to Canberra,

mid-1958 when knowledge of probable US inaction over an attack on WNG was equated with disdain for Australia's immediate security.⁸¹ But this doubt had been momentary. Australian confidence in US prescience and sympathy on the direct security of the nation had been restored by American commitment to deterrence, and by the emerging belief that the US was, in placing the struggle in Indonesia above WNG, in fact acting in Australia's best interests. When the Liberal Government decided WNG was, in reality, not truly linked to the near-anarchic situation in Indonesia, it expected the US to reach a similar conclusion, and therefore quietly approve the return of a traditional DNG policy. At worst, the Kennedy Administration might disagree on the place of Irian in Indonesian domestic politics, but nonetheless honour Australian security concerns unless absolutely forced to do otherwise. As for the British, the steadfast support of Tory governments for the thrust of Australian defence policy had always been taken for granted.

The shock, then, of finding that the British and Americans were capable of placing their peripheral interests above what they recognized as a central concern of Australian defence thinking, was tremendous – particularly at a time when Australia could do nothing for itself. Australian policy-makers now had to presume, while admitting to complete dependence, that US, and maybe British, help would not be automatic, based on 'organic' links, if Australian territory itself was attacked. The consequences of this were apparently far-reaching during the 1960s, at least in relation to the Americans. (The impact in connection with the British is not clear, because manifest signs of declining UK power, and its intention to withdraw from SEA, intervened. Nevertheless, WNG may have been important in persuading the Menzies Government that the UK would not be prepared to use its remaining influence to fight for Australia, and that Australia therefore had to look to the US). The Australians turned to using a formal agreement – the previously largely superfluous ANZUS agreement – and US perceptions of self-interest – by encouraging ideas that SEA was vital to US national security – as the principal means of trying to ensure that dependence also guaranteed safety. Such an approach was perhaps most clearly seen in Vietnam. Here,

blatant, foolish, and shocking, had been shown at points – as on Suez 1956). It was here that Australia was particularly anxious, and had to do everything possible to cajole and encourage. 'Home defence' was different. Australia could inevitably count on US backing for the defence of the country's boundaries. After all, even Suez, when the US had reached its lowest-ebb in its regard for the British Commonwealth, had not involved direct danger to the Motherland or to the Australian continent.

⁸¹ In July of that year, Menzies, fearing an Indonesian attack on WNG, had said that "on the analogy of the American attitude in the Suez crisis they could not be relied on to face up to the realities of the Indonesia-Dutch New Guinea situation." See Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, 3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA.

by making a politically useful contribution to the American effort, Australia hoped to both encourage the US conviction that massive involvement in the region was necessary, and to oblige the US to uphold its commitment under ANZUS.⁸² Unfortunately for the Australian Government, these hopes were lost when the US ‘lost’ Vietnam, and it soon felt compelled to embrace independence as it had in the 1950s – though this time unwillingly, and as a quietly ‘self-reliant’, not ‘imperial’, power.

⁸² In *All the Way*, p. 333, Pemberton has argued that one of the causes of Australia’s commitment to Vietnam was the doubt experienced by Australian leaders regarding America’s willingness to defend Australia in a war with Indonesia.