Indonesia’s Struggle for Independence and the Outside World: England, Australia, and the United States in Search of a Peaceful Solution

On October 31, 1945, a telegram from the American Consul General in Batavia to the Secretary of State painted a picture of the chaotic situation in Java in rough brush strokes. Serious fights had just occurred in Surabaya, Semarang, and Batavia involving groups of Indonesian nationalists, armed Japanese troops, and Louis Mountbatten’s South East Asia Command (SEAC) forces trying to get a handle on the situation. A brigade of British soldiers had taken Surabaya “sans firing a shot,” the US envoy asserted, only to be attacked by bands of Indonesians with Japanese guns. In the ensuing battle, the young Indonesian men killed a British Brigadier-General “with knives and parangs.” The Allied soldiers, for their part, tried “to avoid bloodshed, but lawless armed looters and fanatics [were] out of control,” rendering the Dutch defenseless because they “lacked men, arms, and the authority to act.” Amidst all this confusion, President Sukarno attempted to appease the revolutionary youths in East Java by addressing the crowd in Surabaya, but he was “hooted down.” Nobody seemed able to restrain the “armed mobs of hotheaded Indonesian freedom fighters,” who were commanded by small-time “gang leaders,” holding allegiance to no one but themselves and their own vision of merdeka. The Indonesian Republic’s authorities, meanwhile, admitted they were not in control and Sukarno had agreed to discuss the Republic’s precarious position with General Christison.¹

A day later, on November 1, 1945, the US Consul General forwarded a summary to Washington of the stern communiqué that the Commander of the Allied Forces in the Netherlands East Indies (AFNEI), Sir Philip Christison, issued in the wake of Brigadier General Aubertin Walter Southern Mallaby’s death.² Christison warned that “the truce agreed upon in the presence of Sukarno and Hatta was broken by nationalists who foully murdered General Mallaby.” He threatened that unless the killers surrender to AFNEI, he intended to deploy the comprehensive weight of his “sea, land, and air forces and all the weapons of modern war against them until they are crushed.” As a postscript in his dispatch to the State Department, the American diplomat claimed that Christison had also personally furnished him with the startling but unconfirmed information that “five former German submarine commanders and some Japanese army officers are training and possibly leading the natives in East Java.”³
Before mid-October 1945, only fragmented and sometimes contradictory news about the political situation in Java and Sumatra had reached the American policymaking establishment and the newspaper-reading or radio-listening public in general. According to a telegram from the Netherlands embassy’s chargé d’affaires in Washington to the Dutch Foreign Minister, American correspondents for the AP and UPI wire services and the *Herald Tribune* created the impression that the “Sukarno movement was much stronger” than Dutch authorities in Java had heretofore acknowledged. US journalists had also transmitted a news story that a prominent Dutchman in the Indonesian archipelago – Charles O. van der Plas – was labeling the situation “explosive”; he had allegedly predicted the imminent outbreak of a “horrific racial conflagration.” In response to the chargé d’affaire’s request to be briefed, the Netherlands Foreign Minister, Eelco van Kleffens, reassured him that it was the Japanese Commander-in-Chief who had proclaimed the independence of Indonesia only eight days after Japan’s unconditional surrender, essentially as a last-ditch act of aggression toward the Western Allies. With Japanese assistance and by utilizing the occupiers’ wartime radio network, Sukarno had managed to evoke the false impression that the archipelago’s so-called independence relied on “Indonesians’ unanimous desire.” Van Klreffens added, however, that the Dutch government was convinced that peace and order could easily be restored by “forceful action against a limited number of extremists.”

His compatriot Van der Plas, who had landed in Batavia from Australia on September 15, 1945, to make preparatory arrangements for the arrival of the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA), shared this view but added a curious level of concreteness. He prophesied that the slightest show of Dutch force “will cause eighty percent of the [nationalist] movement to collapse.” His numerical specificity was peculiar, but it could possibly have served as a crutch he held on to when facing the frightening and hostile environment of postwar Java, where few things reminded him of the rigid hierarchies of the colonial order he had left behind in 1942. In this context, the observations offered by the French expert on Javanese epigraphy, Louis Damais, may be enlightening. Throughout the 1930s, he had lived and worked in prewar Java, surrounded by Dutch intellectuals who devoted their lives to archeological and philological scholarship concerning Javanese and Balinese monuments and texts. In early October 1945, Damais wrote from Batavia to his old friend in Washington, Claire Holt, that because of “their inferiority complex they [the Dutch] are always afraid” even when there “is no reason to be afraid. And people who are afraid can do or say very stupid things.” In the next letter in mid-November, Damais noted that “the Dutch have the great talent to do exactly the wrong thing at the wrong moment” and on January 2, 1946, he criticized the Dutch again for behaving “awfully” as if “their intelligence is completely obliterated by racial and other prejudices.”
Since America’s Consul General did not make it back from Australia to Batavia until the middle of October, Washington’s only discrete source of intelligence concerning the situation on the ground in Java came from several OSS officers. The first American to provide information on conditions in Java was a woman, Jane Foster Zlatovski, who was only thirty-three years old. She reported that the Indonesian nationalist movement was “no master plan by Russians or defeated Japanese to overthrow Western imperialism, but was rather a natural eruption of the volcanic discontent that has been rumbling for decades.” She blithely predicted that Indonesians were “not planning a revolution. They want to talk peace.”

She was also present, together with Allied Lieutenant Colonel K.K. Kennedy, at an interview with leading nationalists such as Sukarno, Hatta, Amir Sjarifuddin, Iwa Kusumasumantri, Kasman Singodimedjo, and Subardjo. It was reported afterwards that the “Republican government is most anxious to have American capital invested in Indonesia” and also “to resume the prewar export of basic raw materials.” Perhaps because she was married to a Russian-born man, however, her activities in the postwar period were shrouded in mystery; in 1957 a Grand Jury in the United States indicted Foster and her husband on charges of espionage for having passed on OSS documents concerning the situation in the Indonesian archipelago to Soviet intelligence agents in 1945.

Richard K. Stuart was the next OSS officer to come ashore in Java. Having learned the Malay (or Indonesian) language, thus acquiring miscellaneous insights into the archipelago’s history and politics, in a US Military training course during World War II, he also tended to be favorably disposed towards Indonesian nationalism in his initial dispatches to Washington. In fact, Stuart was not the only OSS officer who was influenced by his wartime engagement with European colonies under Japanese occupation. “The longer we stayed in the [Asian] Theater,” an OSS intelligence specialist commented, “the more OSS became permeated with a suspicion and disapproval of Western Imperialism.” Sukarno’s collaboration with the Japanese, however, presented OSS agents with a dilemma. But a R&A research report towards the end of the Pacific War relieved their conscience a bit, because it concluded that Sukarno had only cooperated with the Japanese to protect and preserve the nationalist movement.

While Richard Stuart was in Java, President Truman abolished the OSS, prompting most of the scholars and other well-educated professionals the wartime agency had recruited to return to civilian life. What also disappeared with these “O-So-Social” intellectuals, many of whom had Ivy League backgrounds, was the intuitive affinity with Asian nationalism that prevailed among members of the intelligence community during World War II. The President re-assigned the remainder of the OSS Research and Analysis Branch (R&A) to the State Department. The War Department adopted the OSS clandestine and counter-intelligence branches, which became a transitional unit, known as the
Strategic Services Unit (SSU), instructed to preserve the assets and facilities of the OSS even though its capability to perform “subversive operation abroad” was suspended. The Central Intelligence Group (CIG), a new entity created in January 1946 headed by Rear Admiral Sydney Souers, was only a shadow of the former OSS while Souers could hardly match the forceful leadership of OSS Director, William J. or “Wild Bill” Donovan. But the State-Navy-War Coordinating Committee (SNWCC) also furnished the Truman Administration with the necessary intelligence reports concerning strategically located regions, both in Europe and Asia. During these early Cold War days, however, Washington’s hunger for intelligence information increased exponentially, causing the CIG to expand rapidly and absorb the SSU; the merger of these two units became the basis for the CIA, once the US Congress passed the National Security Act in mid-1947.

In their reports in the immediate post-World War II period, these different intelligence branches produced a variety of interpretations of Indonesian nationalism and its leaders, resulting in a murky picture that relied more on speculation than solid evidence. Even though there were no “true-blooded” communists in Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir’s cabinet, the Strategic Services Unit tried to convince Washington policymakers that many prominent Indonesian politicians were reputedly former communists, who would undoubtedly wield their sinister influence in government circles. The SSU also emphasized the close relationship between the labor movement and the communist party; in fact, an SSU report repeated the rumor that before the arrival of the Allied SEAC forces, both Russian and Chinese communists had already visited Java and Sumatra. Also “young Australian troops with communist leanings” allegedly played a role in distributing leaflets containing communist propaganda to the inhabitants of the eastern Indonesian islands.

President Sukarno and Vice President Hatta, other US intelligence sources suggested, were genuine “radical” nationalists. Despite their history of wartime collaboration, they should not be dismissed as mere “Japanese creations,” because both of them were astute politicians reaching for the goal of Indonesia’s merdeka that they had aspired to since early adulthood. An analysis from the R&A branch within the State Department, meanwhile, emphasized that Sjahrir’s cabinet was “composed largely of moderate officials and intellectuals.” In contrast, the influential expert on the worldwide communist movement in the State Department, Robert E. Murphy, labeled Sjahrir a Soviet fellow traveler. Murphy, after reading Sjahrir’s political meditations in his booklet Perdjoeangan Kita (or Perjuangan Kita, Our Struggle), scribbled on the cover sheet of the English translation of the pamphlet: “certainly a quasi-communist." Yet other US intelligence sources appraised Sjahrir as reasonable and friendly to the West because of his desire to settle the anti-colonial dispute by diplomatic means. Sjahrir, who was a socialist dedicated to democratic principles, thus found himself in a posi-
tion full of contradictions. Various observers in the West feared he was a communist, while some of his fellow nationalists with bona fide communist credentials denounced him as a “tool of the British and Dutch” and a spokesman for “bourgeois intellectuals unable to lead a social revolution.”\(^{19}\) However, OSS officer Richard Stuart’s reports, once he had a chance to observe and analyze the actual situation in the Indonesian archipelago during the autumn of 1945, corroborated the more positive assessments regarding Sjahrir and his nationalist colleagues. He also concluded that the Republic was grounded in a legitimate anti-colonial movement, based on overwhelming popular support, that was neither a Japanese construction nor a Kremlin-guided conspiracy.

Soon after Walter Foote managed to resume the reigns of his hurriedly reconstituted diplomatic post in Batavia, the pro-Dutch Consul General’s early telegrams confirmed the vigor of the independence movement alluded to in intelligence reports and the American media, although his judgments concerning the blame for the prevailing lawlessness in Java differed from his compatriot, the OSS agent Richard Stuart. In his cables and dispatches, Foote conveyed the volatility of the situation in hyperbolic sentences. He confessed his astonishment at the apparent intensity of the Republic’s popular support, but he also underscored Republican politicians’ tenuous hold over “gang leaders” and their “hot-headed” followers in East Java. The remark in his telegram to the Secretary of State on October 31, 1945, about reticent British troops trying to forestall bloody confrontations, was another interesting issue. It is likely that he made this point after his good friend Van Mook, with whom he maintained almost daily contact once both of them had returned from Australia to Batavia, expressed his anger at SEAC troops’ reluctance to take decisive action, stemming from their wish to limit casualties.

To a great extent, Walter Foote’s pro-Dutch impulses originated from his intimate familiarity with the colonial community of the Dutch East Indies, thanks to his consular placements in Medan and Batavia since the late 1920’s. He had formed his patronizing convictions concerning the indigenous populations of the archipelago in the bygone days of Dutch culture, implanted and transformed overseas in the tropical soil of the Netherlands East Indies. An illustration of his views surfaced in 1944, when it was still plausible to expect that American and Australian troops under Douglas MacArthur’s command might be the liberators of the entire Dutch East Indies. In an effort to prepare the US General for his potential assignment in Java and Sumatra, Foote had offered his subjective opinions disguised as political advice. He tried to impress upon MacArthur that almost all natives of the archipelago were “polite, docile, friendly, and possess a sense of humor somewhat akin to our own.” But the only things in life that Indonesians truly cared about, he informed the American general, were limited to “their wives, children, rice fields, carabaos, chickens, a bamboo hut in a garden of banana and
coconut trees, an occasional visit to the moving pictures (especially when US ‘Westerns’ are shown) and a new sarong now and then, particularly around their new year.”

Once Foote was again ensconced in a comfortable bungalow in Hotel des Indies in October 1945, the tall, affable Texan resumed his accustomed existence as US Consul General. In his daily comportment – he preferred to be called “Uncle Billy” – he tried to look as dashing in his white linen suits and ten-gallon Panama hats as he did before World War II; he was, as Paul Gardner has aptly described him, “an old hand in a changed land.” He spoke Dutch, and his Indonesian was fluent enough to have published a textbook on Malay grammar during World War II that was used to train US military personnel. On Sunday mornings, he often invited Dutch, British, and American residents living in Batavia to “mint julep brunches” in his home. Even though Indonesians rarely attended his bourbon-soaked gatherings, he also communicated with Republican leaders and considered some of them his personal friends. In due course, he entertained Sukarno at his private residence and wrote to Washington that Sukarno was a “charming man – a good talker and a fine listener” who was “sincere” in his desire to reach a settlement with the Dutch. Nonetheless, he tended to treat young Republican officials in an avuncular manner, as if they were “immature boys” who should simply listen to their wiser “big brother” from the United States. He also could not refrain from addressing his eagerly awaited US Foreign Service secretary, a well-trained and capable woman, as “precious doll” or “my pretty little lady.”

During his third tour of duty as chief of the US diplomatic legation in Batavia in 1945–1947 – after which he was reassigned to Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), in 1948 – he tried to convince the State Department that most Indonesians were not anti-Dutch. On several occasions, he repeated the same banal viewpoints he had submitted to Douglas MacArthur in 1944. In a message to the State Department, he depicted the majority of the population as “entirely apathetic” regarding the question of independence, because they were content with their family life in ramshackle dwellings in rural villages, while tending to their water buffaloes and rice fields. When armed clashes became an endemic feature of daily life, Foote was quick to point his finger at the Republic as the guilty party. He informed the State Department that the political trend in the Republic leaned toward radicalism. Moderate leaders, he argued, were losing ground to extremists such as TNI Commander-in-Chief Sudirman, whom Foote described as...
“a non-entity” – a characterization that illustrated his flawed insights into the important personalities and power relations prevailing within the Republic. He added that the Dutch, whose patience was being sorely tested, had difficulty restraining themselves because Indonesians interpreted their temperance as a sign of weakness.28

According to Foote, the Republic’s government also maintained close contacts with Soviet-trained communists, ties that dated back to the era before World War II. In May 1947, he informed Washington that the “present leaders of the Republic often [reveal] very little difference between their ideologies... [and] communism with its slogans, even outside the PKI organization, which penetrates into and continues to eat its way into the lower classes of the population...” He further emphasized ”the strong influence of Moscow” on the PKI, even if at this stage it was still “limited to propaganda and moral support.” In an historical excursion, he added that “after the Jap[anese] surrender, these communist groups made fiery speeches which encouraged even the thinking and friendly Indonesians to oppose anybody who desired the return of the Dutch government.” Foote also stressed the orthodox communist reality behind the PKI’s nationalist facade, which he described as merely an instrumental phase in its goal to bring about a communist revolution. He concluded that despite its still clandestine character, there was a fanatic communist element among the Republic’s population, which, in a sudden change of opinion, he no longer depicted as apathetic. Worst of all, he warned the State Department, was that no one would bring them to a halt because the Republican government itself “is riddled with communists and fellow-travelers.”29

When challenged by Southeast Asia desk officers in the State Department about the erratic quality of his reporting, Foote professed few doubts about the value of the political assessments he forwarded. He responded to Washington’s criticism of his idiosyncratic dispatches by trying to persuade his colleagues in the State Department that he possessed excellent contacts in both the Dutch and the Indonesian camp. He emphasized that he could rely on his intimate local knowledge honed by twenty years of professional experience in the region, enabling him to separate the wheat from the chaff. In several cables he vented his anger at opportunistic journalists, whose insights into the complexities of Indonesian society were so shallow that they wrote stories for their various newspapers based on fantasy rather than fact. He warned the State Department that a motley group of Western reporters, and even worse, “some other foreign consuls” – his number-one culprit being English Consul General Mitcheson – were disseminating “many types of false rumors or unconfirmed reports.” He asserted that the American press corps was “poorly informed about the present nature of the Republic due to ignorance, bias, or false glamorizing by many correspondents.”30
In fact, Foote’s annoyance with foreign reporters as well as the local press was a recurrent theme. In a telegram to the Secretary of State in early 1947, he quoted a caustic statement allegedly made by Sjahrir, who had told him that all sorts of “sensational headline hunters” among journalists, both foreign and domestic, were “willing to sabotage peace for mere news.” Foote displayed little appreciation for anyone who offered a more positive appraisal of the Republic and its leaders, and his tendency to denigrate the political viability of the Indonesian government headquartered in Yogyakarta was enthusiastically supported by the Consulate’s political officer, Glenn Abbey. Within the US Consulate, however, there was one dissenting voice; it belonged to the naval liaison officer, Captain McCallum, who often embarrassed Foote by openly expressing his pro-Indonesian sentiments. The Consul General was outraged when during a meeting McCallum proposed to ask Dutch authorities when they would finally “send some medicines and clothing to those poor Indonesians.” Foote thought that the Captain’s partisan pronouncements were responsible, in part, for the Dutch perception that the US government was “not neutral” and actually favored the Republic; as a demonstration of his annoyance with McCallum, he submitted a request to the authorities in Washington for the Naval Attaché’s replacement.

Inevitably, Foote encountered his own critics, too. Louis Damais, who stayed on in Batavia until the autumn of 1947 when he left for Paris, berated Foote’s behavior during the previous two years as “shameful” and “anything but polite... don’t even speak of diplomatic.” Also ex-Prime Minister Willem Schermerhorn, in the fastidious diary he kept during his involvement in the negotiations with Republican officials during 1946-1947, did not perceive Foote as a harmless or inconsequential presence in Batavia either. The social democratic Schermerhorn had been appointed to the Dutch Commission General, authorized to negotiate with the Indonesian Republic on behalf of the government in The Hague during 1946-1947. He was a psychologically astute observer of people in his environment, and he displayed uncanny political insights into the Indonesian situation in the context of postwar international relations. Schermerhorn’s daily journal entries constituted a remarkable record, in which he portrayed the US Consul General as a devious and shady character. He further qualified his own observations, however, when he noted that Foote did not merely act out his personal prejudices; instead, he also conveyed the State Department’s Janus-faced pronouncements.

Whether knowingly or unwittingly, Foote replicated Washington’s ambivalence when it came to the national liberation movements in Indonesia and Vietnam. During the early autumn of 1945, a State Department report concerning “Problems Facing the Allies,” for instance, made the convoluted argument that even though Washington maintained its firm commitment to peoples’ right to self-determination, the US did not possess a license to intervene in the internal
affairs of its allies, just as Great Britain did not have the right to meddle in political matters in Puerto Rico. In justifying this position, Washington could also hide behind the provisions of the UN Charter, specifically Article 2(7) concerning domestic jurisdiction and UN members’ legal and political defenses against outside interference in internal affairs. However, the Truman Administration disguised its public announcements in the immediate postwar months regarding America’s abiding support for the international doctrine of self-determination. In reality these were hollow statements, designed not only to pay lip service to the Atlantic Charter but perhaps to honor the memory of Roosevelt as well.

After World War II, Washington’s allegedly neutral position was contradicted by the State Department’s decision in the early autumn of 1945 to grant permission, for instance, to a sophisticated Dutch military unit, trained at the US Marine Corps’ base at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, to depart for the Netherlands East Indies. Consisting of more than 200 Dutch officers and almost 2,000 soldiers, the US Marine Corps had drilled the Dutch battalion residing at Camp Lejeune into an auspicious fighting force. Their US Marine Corps instruction in North Carolina had begun as a project designed to take advantage of Dutch military expertise and local knowledge of the Southeast Asian archipelago, because in 1944 and the first half of 1945 the US Marines’ arduous efforts in the war in the Pacific still included the potential prospect of having to challenge the Japanese in Java and Sumatra. Upon conclusion of the Dutch Marines’ training in the summer of 1945, however, the post-surrender duties of demobilizing Japan’s army in colonial Indonesia had already been transferred from MacArthur’s SWPA to Mountbatten’s SEAC command. Hence, Washington’s decision to permit the brigade to leave for Java from the US Navy port of Norfolk, Virginia, on 6 transport ships equipped with approximately 15,000 tons of ammunition, tanks, trucks, communications technology, medical provisions and other indispensable materials, was evidence of the Truman Administration’s equivocal position vis-à-vis the Dutch-Indonesian confrontation brewing in the archipelago.

These inconsistencies also lend insight into US Consul General Foote’s mercurial reporting, even though his personal biases concerning Indonesians preceded his friendship with influential Dutch authorities in postwar Batavia and were not merely the result of a Netherlands propaganda campaign. Instead, during his embattled tenure as Consul General in a radically altered environment, Foote appeared to play a “double role.” In addition to his daily conversation with Van Mook and his frequent encounters with other Dutch officials, it was rumored that he also called on Sutan Sjahrir virtually every day when the latter served as Prime Minister. During these habitual visits, he apparently presented “an extremely pro-Republican face” to his Indonesian political contacts. This kind of personal duplicity was hardly surprising, Schermerhorn conceded in his meticu-
lous diary; instead, Foote’s two-faced behavior was a straightforward reflection of the hesitant and contradictory American policies towards the Dutch-Indonesian conflict.38

Foote’s homecoming to Batavia was preceded by the arrival of troops under Mountbatten’s South East Asia Command by approximately two weeks – a force that in due course consisted of a total of 92,000 British and Indian soldiers. SEAC squadrons had begun to pour into Java and Sumatra in a somewhat disorganized and desultory fashion in late September 1945. Their task was to disarm, demobilize, and repatriate the Japanese military.39 Their equally difficult assignment was to secure the recovery and release of the Allied prisoners of war, thus making it necessary to cooperate with the Republic’s newly established civil authorities in territories where those prisoners were held.40 An ancillary duty was to maintain law and order until Dutch civil servants would return and reassert this responsibility. Mountbatten’s initial plan was to use a “key area” approach by concentrating his troops on the occupation of Batavia and Surabaya in Java, and Medan and Padang in Sumatra; his intention was to transform those bigger cities into regional centers of SEAC’s logistical operations and military authority. However, the unstable circumstances on the ground in Java and Sumatra forced the Allied post-surrender forces to expand their control to the cities of Bandung and Semarang on Java and to Palembang on Sumatra.41 Aside from dire necessity, SEAC’s willingness to collaborate with Republican officials also reflected Mountbatten’s realistic assessment of the decolonizing trend in Asia, which implied that SEAC’s teamwork with nationalists at the local level, whether in the Dutch East Indies, Burma, or Indochina, was inevitable.42 Praised for his “wisdom” by Republican politicians such as Dr. Johannes Leimena – or “Oom Yo” – Mountbatten announced that as SEAC Supreme Commander he would not contribute to any settlement in the Netherlands East Indies unacceptable to world opinion.43 For the sake of SEAC troops’ security and efficiency, he advised the Dutch government in The Hague to issue “imaginative and generous” proclamations and to initiate “realistic and helpful negotiations” with the Indonesian Republic.44

Despite Mountbatten’s urging, the government in The Hague could barely conceive of entering into direct negotiations with Sukarno and Hatta. Even the subtlest hint, suggesting that Van Mook should meet with the Republic’s founders, was received with anger. In late October, when Dutch East Indies authorities felt compelled to meet with Sukarno due to British General Christie son’s admonitions, it sent the Cabinet and Parliament in The Hague into a virtual tailspin. Because the Labor Party government, as well as the members of the Second Chamber of the Netherlands Parliament, felt on tender hooks until the general elections scheduled for May 1946 would grant a clearer political mandate, government officials and legislators in The Hague reacted with a combina-
tion of skittishness and negativity. Dutch doubts about the intentions of British forces in Java and Sumatra were also magnified when the Commander of the Allied Forces in the Netherlands East Indies (AFNEI) announced that “the present Indonesian authorities would remain responsible for the government in the areas under Republican control.” Agitated politicians in The Hague and Batavia interpreted AFNEI Commander Christison’s statement to imply a de facto recognition of the Republic. As the Dutch historian, J.J.P. de Jong, argued in a recent article, employing an exotic series of metaphors, Christison’s statement was so sensational that it constituted a “green light” for the release of “the cat among the pigeons” while encouraging “the revolutionary tiger” to escape from his cage. Nonetheless, having landed in the archipelago to carry out their post-surrender assignments, the British troops established a foothold in Java and Sumatra as well as they could, despite Dutch mistrust or the excitable nationalist crowds that greeted them. From a personal perspective, Sutan Sjahrir once described SEAC during this period as providing a protective shield, making its presence a source of relief especially when he contemplated the alternative nightmare “of being left alone in the dark with the Dutch.”

In their confrontations with vibrant pro-independence groups, whether or not they were armed, the British and Gurkha battalions dispatched to Java and Sumatra operated with circumspection. A basic human instinct for self preservation, or a simple desire to return home to a regular life, motivated SEAC troops to proceed carefully after they had been deployed into the combustible political landscape of the Indonesian archipelago. The knowledge that the newly elected Labor Party government in London – as well as its constituents – did not really want British soldiers to die for the preservation of another European power’s colony, reinforced this cautious attitude. As an English diplomat impatiently noted, “our” troops were freeing the Indies for which “British taxpayers” footed the bill; London should therefore not brook any “nonsense from the Dutch.” The Foreign Office worried that the risk of using English and US equipment and British and Indian troops to facilitate the reintroduction of Dutch colonial control in the Indonesian archipelago placed England in a double bind. Although the continuance of amicable Anglo-Dutch relations was important, the possibility that English and Gurkha soldiers might have to engage in a violent suppression of a legitimate national liberation movement in Java and Sumatra could trigger a political backlash in India and other parts of the British Empire. At the same time, an overly hurried withdrawal of SEAC troops from the Dutch East Indies could give nationalists on the South Asian subcontinent and elsewhere the idea that, by mustering a sufficient level of popular agitation and anti-colonial violence, they could succeed in the goal of attaining “complete independence.” Closer to home, the reliance of Dutch soldiers in Java and Sumatra on Allied transport ships, jeeps, trucks, and other British and American equipment held
awkward political consequences. In particular, England’s Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, faced acrimonious inquiries from government colleagues in London, MP’s in the House of Commons, and his Labor Party constituents.

As a result of such British compunctions, and because the available material and manpower proved inadequate in carrying out their complicated mission, SEAC troops could not always prevent caches of Japanese weapons from falling into the hands of Indonesian nationalists; this happened in some of the larger cities as well as in the interior, where a large number of Japanese soldiers sought refuge. In the small town of Wonosobo in central Java, a former schoolteacher and ex-Peta officer named Sudirman, the future Commander-in-Chief (Panglima Besar) of the Republican National Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or TNI), had gathered around him a group of young men with whom he attacked a Japanese military regiment and captured guns, ammunition, and other military gear.51 By late October, the city of Surabaya was transformed into a veritable weapons depot and militarized fortress, the Japanese having handed over in a series of skirmishes with revolutionary groups an estimated total of 200 cannons, 690 heavy and 700 light machine guns, 25,000 rifles, 1,240 tommy guns, 3,360 revolvers and large quantities of ammunition.52 According to a persnickety Japanese officer, Sadao Oba, who had been a ranking member of Japan’s Army Supply Department during the war, Indonesian nationalists captured, either by force or through negotiations, even more Japanese military equipment in Bandung. Their newly acquired military treasures consisted of, among others, “51,698 rifles, 1,804 machine guns... 56 anti-tank guns, 201 trench mortars,... 50 tanks, 159 armored cars, 5,431 trucks, 7,624 kilos of dynamite, 318,454 hand grenades and gun powder and materials for making gun powder.”53

As SEAC troops were still pouring into the country during the first two weeks of October, fierce clashes also erupted between Indonesian revolutionary groups and Japanese military units in the cities of Garut, Solo, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Semarang, resulting in Indonesians’ seizure of temporary control of Bandung and Semarang, while they maintained their authority over Yogyakarta until December 19, 1948.54 Pro-Dutch observers portrayed the Indonesian participants in these confrontations as “gangs of desperados” or “jahats” (criminals) who engaged in illegal behavior and random acts of aggression against innocent victims “while shouting merdeka.”55 At the same time, however, a threatening Dutch colonial presence resurfaced in the archipelago’s capital in the form of “roving patrols of trigger-happy KNIL soldiers,” as a staff assistant of AFNEI Commander Christison, US Major Frederick E. Crockett, labeled them. He described these Dutch sentries, some of whom also operated under the umbrella of the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA), as shooting “at anything that looked suspicious” and when the “hunting was poor” they simply broke into Indonesians’ houses in order to attack inhabitants and ransack the homes “without charges or
In the book of photographs of the Revolution accompanied by ample commentary, which the Republican government issued almost immediately after the official transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch to the Indonesians had occurred, the “cruelties” of these soldiers and the “NICA terror” were described in several captions such as “they killed for the sake of killing. Old men, women, even children became the victims... of NICA brutality.” As a Dutch eyewitness portrayed Indonesians’ visceral hatred of NICA in 1947, “to the mentally backward victims of Republican propaganda, the word NICA acquired a diabolic aura, comparable to ‘Gestapo’ or ‘Kenpeitai’.”

Nine KNIL companies arrived from Australia, along with some Royal Netherlands Army troops and a makeshift unit called the “Doorman Battalion,”
consisting of ex-prisoners of war recruited and mobilized in Singapore. Numerous members of the patrols cruising through the capital city, however, were not Dutchmen but Moluccan, Menadonese, or Indo-Dutch soldiers who had chosen the side of their prewar Dutch colonial officers and former military employers. The reason for this choice varied. Some of them disliked the Republic, because they viewed Sukarno as a “buffoon straight out of a comedy act,” as the protagonist in Y.B. Mangunwijaya’s *The Weaverbirds* called the architect of Indonesia’s independence. Others simply resumed their lives as KNIL soldiers for a lack of alternatives, even if they might have agreed with Mangunwijaya’s fictitious Dutch officer, who told his Indo-Dutch protégé that “the Royal Dutch Army is the true army of the Dutch Crown. The Dutch Colonial Army is nothing but a band of outlaws and hoodlums.”

Before March 1, 1946, SEAC’s High Command became increasingly reluctant to permit Dutch military units to re-enter, in part because the truculent KNIL patrols, particularly those operating in Batavia, were difficult to monitor and restrain. In fact, Mountbatten was highly critical of the Dutch troops already present in Java. Although “ridiculously small in number,” he noted that they were conducting themselves in a “reprehensible manner,” without being able to impose “their will by force of arms.” AFNEI Commander Christison was equally emphatic: “not one single further Dutch soldier” should be allowed to land in Java, because otherwise a civil war would erupt in which “British and Indian troops must certainly become involved.” Thus, when ships loaded with the Dutch Marine brigade trained at the US Marine Corps Camp Lejeune in North Carolina reached Southeast Asian waters, they were prohibited from disembarking in Surabaya, as the Netherlands Indies military leaders had planned. Since the unit had departed from Norfolk, Virginia, it could not simply be dismissed, in part because Washington’s political weight was implicated. Instead, the British reluctantly granted permission for only one battalion to come ashore in Batavia, while the remaining men and their valuable military assets were diverted to Malaya.

Substantial areas of Java and Sumatra were already in nationalist hands when, in the wake of Brigadier General Mallaby’s death, the situation in Surabaya reached a fever pitch. Steady shelling from Allied warships, docked in Surabaya’s harbor, killed city residents and demolished public buildings and residential neighborhoods, while Mosquito and Thunderbolt fighter planes dropped as many as 500 bombs between November 10th and 13th. SEAC forces were also in possession of Sherman and Stuart tanks, which Indonesian *jibaku* squads (Japanese for suicide action), with explosives strapped to their bodies, attacked. Although SEAC commanders asserted that the 5th Indian Division in Surabaya had used restraint and applied only minimal force, numerous unarmed Indonesians were killed by machine-gun fire, while Allied aircraft strafed the columns of fugitives and evacuees crowding the road leading south to Sidoarjo. The official esti-
mates of the number of casualties on both sides vary, but as many as 600 SEAC soldiers were killed during these urban guerrilla battles between late October and late November. The death toll on the Indonesian side may have been as high as 6,000 people. The human and material costs of the bloody confrontation in Surabaya were obviously extensive, but they also carried symbolic significance for all parties involved. The memory of Surabaya’s courageous fighters became a “rallying cry” for Indonesian revolutionaries in years to come, whereas it made SEAC commanders acknowledge that protecting British national interests in the short-term required an assiduous commitment to neutrality and non-partisanship in the Dutch-Indonesian Question. For the Dutch, the battle of Surabaya represented a watershed, because it “shocked many of them into facing [the] reality” that Indonesian nationalism was more than just a gang of fanatics without a genuine popular following.

A similar but smaller conflict took place in Magelang, a strategically located city in central Java with a relatively comfortable climate because of its cool mountain air at night. The city accommodated large crowds of ex-internees of the Japanese camps, who had been repatriated to hospitals set up by RAPWI officials (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees). Magelang was also filled with Indo-Dutch and Chinese residents, who had fled the revolutionary turmoil elsewhere in central Java. Emboldened by news from Surabaya, members of the People’s Security Forces (Tentara Keamanan Rakyat or TKR) and affiliated nationalist groups attacked Gurkha posts on October 31. At the instigation of SEAC authorities, meanwhile, Sukarno was again called upon to bring about a truce, as he had tried to do a short while before in Surabaya. All these events made clear that during the autumn of 1945, Indonesian nationalists showed themselves, their former colonial overlords, and the rest of the world that they possessed the resolve and ability to mobilize popular support, even if the appearance of total pandemonium persisted. Nevertheless, while this ongoing violence continued Washington maintained a studious silence, despite British pleas for some kind of public statement concerning the Indonesian-Dutch conflict.

Finally, on December 19, 1945, the State Department issued a circumspect press release that no longer referred to Indonesians’ right to self-determination. The communiqué articulated US apprehensions about the contentious situation in Java and Sumatra; it also expressed the Truman Administration’s disappointment with the failure of “a realistic, broad-minded and cooperative approach” and the apparent refusal on the part of the antagonists to “reconcile differences by peaceful means.” Washington’s statement proceeded to call for a settlement that legitimized the “natural aspirations of Indonesian peoples” as well as Dutch rights and interests in the Southeast Asian archipelago. Despite its relative blandness, the press release, as Robert McMahon has argued, constituted a “diplomatic tri-
umph” for the United States. Without alienating either party in the dispute, the brief communiqué encouraged both sides to return to the negotiating table. SEAC Commander Christison viewed it as a “perfect and well-timed document.” He noted that Washington’s statement not only reinforced the British position but had also aided Van Mook’s efforts to convince the Dutch government in The Hague that a resumption of diplomatic talks with the Indonesian Republic’s representatives was the best option.

In the midst of these unsettling circumstances, it was conspicuous that Sutan Sjahrir emerged into the political limelight in mid-November as Prime Minister at the head of a new Cabinet, described by a sympathetic Dutch observer as consisting of “extremely gifted and mostly moderate” people “with immaculate reputations.” None of the new Republican leaders were tainted by a history of collaborating with the Japanese during World War II. This political transfer of authority from Sukarno and Hatta to Sjahrir also entailed a transition from an “American presidential” model to an “English parliamentary system,” which should effectively “diminish,” or even undermine, the personal stature of President Sukarno.

Because Sukarno and Hatta accommodated themselves to more of a background role in the Republic’s new headquarters and safe haven in Yogyakarta during the late autumn of 1945, Sjahrir could positively engage the British call for a negotiated Dutch-Indonesian settlement, an agenda that was
bolstered on December 19, 1945, by the State Department’s press release. Thereafter, the new Prime Minister’s dogged efforts to pursue a diplomatic solution even won him admiration from an unlikely source such as the Netherlands Army’s Commander-in-Chief, Simon H. Spoor, who conceded that “this little man Sjahrir is indeed a great figure; he is a man who possesses an enormous amount of personal courage.”

Once he had formally settled in as Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir submitted a demand for the Dutch acknowledgment of the Republic’s sovereignty over the entire archipelago. This proposal was, of course, unacceptable to the government in The Hague. But on behalf of their respective governments, Sjahrir and Van Mook were able to reach a compromise by March, 1946. The Dutch recognition of the Republic’s de facto authority over those regions of Java and Sumatra already under its control would be reciprocated by the nationalists, who agreed to cooperate in the formation of an independent federal state of Indonesia. This federal political entity would be configured as a constituent part—or as a component of a Dutch-Indonesian Gemenebest (Commonwealth)—within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The agreement was brokered by a seasoned British diplomat, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, who was London’s former ambassador to Moscow. The compromise established a common ground that could serve as the basis for further Dutch-Indonesian negotiations, which yielded guarded optimism. Van Mook and a delegation of Republican officials traveled with reasonable expectations to the Netherlands for a meeting with Dutch government officials that took place on the Hoge Veluwe in May, 1946. But their hopes were quickly dashed. Described by a conservative Dutch politician as “a week of disgrace,” the meetings proved to be a dismal failure because the Labor Party government in The Hague was convinced it could not muster the necessary parliamentary support to forge a settlement that would exact even a small degree of independence for the Indonesian Republic.

The abortive talks at the Hoge Veluwe, however, had a boomerang effect. The nationalist political parties represented in the Republican parliament (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat or KNIP) now demanded that Sjahrir make no more concessions. Instead, some Republican factions—the right wing of Masyumi (Liberal Muslim Party) and most members of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) as well as the smaller Partai Buruh (Labor Party)—began to express their opposition to any diplomatic efforts as long as the Dutch were building up their military presence in the archipelago. Of course, Tan Malaka’s independent nationalist federation, Persatuan Perjuangan (Fighting Front or PP), was most outspoken in its objections to all forms of negotiations with an adversary who was nothing but “a thief in our house.” Or as an entry in Lukisan Revolusi explained it: “What is the point of negotiations? They are nothing but a downpour of cold water on the raging fire of the Revolution.”
Sjahrir and Schermerhorn signing a preliminary agreement on November 15, 1946
Having already survived a parliamentary challenge in early March 1946, Sjahrrir’s second cabinet continued to pursue a diplomatic settlement, despite The Hague’s hardheaded refusal to take the Republican claim of sovereignty over parts of Sumatra seriously, or to assess all other Republican proposals in a constructive manner. The general elections in the Netherlands that took place in mid-May 1946, meanwhile, brought a changing of the guard. The electoral results put a more conservative coalition government in power, with Louis J.M. Beel as Prime Minister and the prewar expert on colonial affairs, Johannes A. Jonkman, as Minister of Overseas Territories. To jolt the two sides out of their entrenched positions, the British Foreign Office in consultation with US State Department colleagues applied renewed pressure, especially on the Dutch, to return to the bargaining table. In response, the government in The Hague authorized a Commission General, sanctioned by a Royal Decree, to negotiate with representatives of the Indonesian Republic.

The Minister of Overseas Territories, J.A. Jonkman, addressed the Commission General’s members as they were about to depart for Java in language that sounded hopeful: “As you leave, you carry within you the Dutch nation’s desire for peace. You depart to confirm emphatically that based on our historic calling, the Netherlands is willing and eager to construct a new political relationship in cooperation with the peoples of Indonesia.” The institution of the Commission General represented a placating gesture. It could also be seen, however, as a shrewd Dutch move to buy time and to secure leeway for the immense military preparations that were underway at the moment the Commission General departed for Java. The Foreign Office in London, at the same time, dispatched to Java yet another accomplished diplomat, Lord Killearn, to oversee a next round of Dutch-Indonesian talks. Under Killearn’s watchful eye – or in the company of his “witty and sagacious bulk” – new negotiations opened on October 7, 1946. During the course of the next month, on November 15, 1946, a preliminary truce was reached and further compromises were agreed upon in a draft agreement that eventually would become the Linggajati accord, formally concluded in the spring of 1947. The tentative agreement stipulated, for the first time, that the Netherlands conceded the legitimate existence of the Republik Indonesia in large parts of Java and Sumatra.

As these intensive discussions were transpiring in Southeast Asia, a curious event occurred on the other side of the globe in Washington DC, reported by the Chief of US Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Thomas B. Inglis, in a memorandum to the State Department. In his communication of late October 1946, Inglis recounted having met the Dutch Ambassador to the United States, Alexander Loudon, at a reception of Washington’s diplomatic community. Although the two had never been introduced before, Ambassador Loudon sought out Rear Admiral Inglis’ company in order to impart some very important information.
ing to the Naval Intelligence Chief, Loudon gave him a piece of his mind in “lan-
guage that was at times forthright and blunt to the point of being undiplomatic,
not to say unpleasant,” even though he emphasized that the Dutch Ambassador
was “stone cold sober,” despite the cocktail party setting.76
Loudon warned Rear Admiral Inglis that the situation in the Netherlands East
Indies was deteriorating to the extent “that nothing could be done about it now.”
He implied that both the United States and Great Britain “had let the Dutch
down.” Indonesia, after all, contained too many “different races, languages, reli-
gions, and ideologies” and the Dutch colonial government had embodied the
only “unifying” force in the archipelago. Loudon predicted that a “communist
infiltration into the vacuum created by the absence of Dutch influence” in the
Indonesian archipelago would inevitably occur. Many nations in the world
would “suffer,” and he ended his tirade with the prophecy that “blood would
flow.”77
In his outburst, Alexander Loudon vented his exasperation with the State De-
partment’s non-committal stance vis-à-vis the Dutch-Indonesian Question.
Loudon was known to some State Department officials as a “wrought up” char-
acter, who sometimes wore his emotions on his sleeve.78 Private feelings of frustration in his dealings with the State Department in 1946, therefore, may have played their part in his surprising tantrum. During the previous months, he had regularly visited both Dean Acheson as well as John Hickerson and his colleagues in the Office of European Affairs, but he was unable to break through the State Department’s reticence to define a clear cut US policy towards the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. In a meeting on July 11, 1946, for example, Dean Acheson had told Ambassador Loudon that it would be a “great disaster” if the situation were
to deteriorate to the extent that the Dutch would think military force was the only option. Such a course of action would be catastrophic and “could redound only to the benefit of communist propaganda.” Acheson then proceeded to flatter Loudon; he expressed his conviction that the Dutch would employ “all the resources of their colonial experience to reach political settlement.”

“In all frankness,” John Hickerson and his fellow officers in the European Affairs Office explained to Loudon about a month later, they thought that “as good friends of the Netherlands” they should nonetheless chastise the Dutch government “for being on a bad wicket as regards to worldwide opinion” in its dealings with the Yogyakarta Republic. Both Hickerson and his colleague Hugh Cumming offered the opinion that the Indonesian Question would “almost certainly be raised again in the United Nations, probably in the next meeting of the General Assembly.” Hence, they advised Loudon that he ought to encourage his government in The Hague to engage as soon as possible in “some constructive action” leading to a “satisfactory solution” prior to the next gathering of the UN Assembly.

John Hickerson was on good terms with Alex Loudon, as he called him. He later wrote that ever since Loudon began his tenure as the Dutch diplomatic envoy to Washington in 1938, the two of them had worked together productively and he harbored “a very high regard for his integrity.” Although Loudon had apparently experienced some “staff difficulties” in the Embassy and was currently “not in the good graces of the Netherlands Foreign Office,” Hickerson noted that these issues did not detract from his appreciation of Loudon as an honest Dutchman and a “good friend of the United States.” Hence, Hickerson’s avuncular advice was probably without ulterior motive. However, the State Department’s public stance of judicious neutrality—even if the appearance of impartiality masked the covert political and material support the United States provided to its long-standing Dutch ally—prevented Hickerson from giving the embattled Dutch ambassador any formal reassurances.

Until SEAC troops began to withdraw from Java and Sumatra in November 1946, most Dutch politicians and other observers had either mistrusted or resented the US-backed presence of SEAC in their colonial possession in Southeast Asia, although some army planners appreciated it as a blessing in disguise. SEAC’s discharge of its post-surrender responsibilities in the archipelago furnished the Dutch political and military establishment with a much-needed reprieve, enabling it to begin the huge efforts of raising a military force destined for the restoration of peace and tranquility in the Netherlands East Indies. In a relatively short period, the civilian and military authorities of the demographically small Dutch nation-state managed to mobilize a fighting force for the Southeast Asian Theater that in due course would swell to approximately 140,000 men, including the large number of KNIL soldiers already in place and functioning in Ja-
va and Sumatra. Some estimates have mentioned the even higher number of 170,000 Dutch troops in the archipelago. As the Dutch historian, Cees Fasseur, has highlighted, the enormity of this endeavor becomes even more striking when considering that the male population of the postwar Netherlands between the ages of twenty and forty-four was enumerated in the most recent census as consisting of 1,750,000. Thus, almost eight percent of the nation's men in the prime of their productive and reproductive lives were drafted as conscripts; others enlisted as volunteers, only to be shipped to the other side of the globe for the purpose of restoring law and order and defending vulnerable Dutch women, men, and children against nationalists' aggression. At the same time, their official charge consisted of protecting the overwhelming majority of presumably apolitical villagers in Java and Sumatra from a small gang of urban “extremists,” who were depicted as terrorizing their illiterate compatriots—a set of assignments that was justified as either a “mission of mercy” or “Peace Corps work avant la lettre.”

These Dutch troops would not be dispatched to the eastern regions of the archipelago or to the “great east” (*De Grote Oost*), however, because a contrasting situation existed there.

In August 1945, approximately 50,000 Australian troops, representing MacArthur's South West Pacific Area Command, were still operating in areas such as Borneo (Kalimantan), Celebes (Sulawesi), the Moluccan islands (Maluku), and New Guinea (now the Indonesian Republic’s province of Irian Jaya in the western part of the island and the Republic of Papua New Guinea in the east). Australian forces tended to accept and then execute Japan’s unconditional surrender in a different way. They were inclined to dump Japanese weapons into the sea and turn over Japanese prisoners to returning Dutch authorities as quickly as was feasible. They not only facilitated the return of Dutch residents to the region, but also accommodated personnel representing the newly configured Netherlands Indies Civil Administration, who were sent from either the Netherlands and Java or from other places abroad. Australian officers tolerated, too, the active involvement in the region of a quickly assembled combination of KNIL troops and ex-prisoners of war. Mobilized almost singlehandedly by the Netherlands liaison officer at Australian headquarters on Morotai, these ad hoc forces descended upon the eastern archipelago for the purpose of assisting in the disarmament of the Japanese and to accelerate the restoration of Dutch colonial control.

In the case of Australian troops in eastern Indonesia, the newly elected Labor Party government of Joseph Benedict Chifley was actually trying to bring them back home by Christmas, 1945, because the Prime Minister was convinced that his country’s soldiers should not become embroiled in the suppression of a genuine national liberation movement. In the rush to return to the homeland down under, members of the Australian military could also take advantage of the concrete political conditions left behind in the outer regions of the archipelago,
where officers of Japan’s Navy had wielded principal control. Whereas Japanese Army commanders in Java and Sumatra had actively nurtured an indigenous fighting force – on the assumption that they would eventually join in the military battle with the Western Alliance – Japan’s naval hierarchy in eastern Indonesia had censored and repressed most local attempts to form military organizations. As a result, the nationalist movement in eastern Indonesia was still in its infancy. For instance, when Australian troops landed at Kupang on West Timor on September 21, 1945, the local population welcomed the accompanying NICA representatives with “exceptional enthusiasm.” According to a Dutch official who participated in the operation, Kupang residents went “wild with joy,” which apparently was an “eye-opener” to the Australians.86 Only on the west coast of Borneo (Kalimantan) and especially in Makassar in the southern Celebes (Sulawesi) could the Republik Indonesia depend on a groundswell of popular support, forcing the Australian commander in Sulawesi to engage in preemptive action and take into custody a prominent nationalist leader.87

Yet another issue affected Australians’ handling of the Japanese demobilization of Indonesia’s eastern regions. The communist-led Australian Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) had begun to organize an anti-Dutch labor action in early September 1945. As a gesture of solidarity with fellow workers in the newly proclaimed independent Republic next door, the WWF encouraged its members to refuse to load the cargo of Dutch ships that were destined for the Netherlands East Indies. By late September, the dockworkers’ boycott had spread to every Australian port; when a lonely Dutch ship transporting military personnel and equipment accidentally strayed into Sydney harbor within the course of the next year, it was “pelted with stones, prompting the ship’s crew to aim a fire hose at the stone throwers.”88 The embargo lasted for several years, until it would finally be lifted in early June 1947.89 The boycott was imposed again less than two months later, however, as a protest against the Netherlands Army’s first surprise attack on the Republic in late July.90 Thus, during the period 1945-1947, the WWF embargo forced Prime Minister Chifley – himself a former union organizer – to walk a precarious tightrope between support for his natural electoral base on the left, on one hand, and a need to curry the favor of constituents located closer to the political center or the right, on the other. Bringing Australian servicemen home as soon as possible might deflate the public controversy and media coverage surrounding the WWF boycott.

The troops’ rapid return could also deflect a difference of opinion brewing between Prime Minister Chifley and his outspoken Minister of External Affairs, Herbert Vere Evatt. The latter advocated that it would serve Australia’s national interest to intervene in colonial Indonesia by calling for a truce and sending an Australian military force to Java, most likely to be selected from the units still operating in the archipelago’s eastern districts. Australian soldiers, Evatt argued in
late November 1945, should assist the overburdened SEAC troops in their post-
surrender tasks, after which they should stay on to function as peacekeepers
while an Indonesian–Dutch settlement was being negotiated.91 The candid ac-
count of Australia’s first emissary to Java in November 1945, W. Macmahon Ball,
may have motivated Evatt’s interventionist proposal. He warned the External Af-
fairs Minister that Indonesians’ “bitter and deep-seated animosity” towards their
former colonial masters was likely to smolder; he added that their anti–Dutch
sensibilities could possibly escalate into a full-scale “conflict between East and
West” with world-wide repercussions.92 Even though Prime Minister Chifley
may have agreed with Evatt’s idealistic views concerning Australia’s political
commitments to the fragile Republik Indonesia nearby, he wished to proceed at a
slower pace. It thus made sense to arrange for an expeditious homecoming of
Australia’s troops, enabling the Prime Minister to define his policies with regard
to the valid anti-colonial sentiments that animated a large portion of the millions
of people living in the neighboring archipelago, without having to worry about
the physical safety of Australian servicemen still operating in the region.

All these Australian considerations combined to produce a viable Dutch colo-
nial administration in the eastern archipelago that effectively re-established itself
in early 1946. This result represented a paradox, however, because Australia’s def-
inition of its geopolitical interests caused the Labor Party government to emerge
as a forceful pro-Republican factor in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. In doing
so, Chifley and his colleagues faced the “tough, self-righteous indignation” of the
Netherlands, which treated Australian support for the fractious Republic as a be-
trayal of both white-skinned solidarity and the memory of the sacrosanct Western
Alliance.93 However, Labor Party politicians in Canberra anticipated that in
the postwar era, national security and prosperity would depend to a great extent
on Australia’s peaceful coexistence with a petroleum, rubber, and tin producing
Asian giant next door rather than rely on its attachment to the British Common-
wealth or the capitalist world in the United States or Western Europe.

Besides, Australia occupied a unique position within Asia’s geography and in-
ternational relations. Many not-so-distant countries needed technical and edu-
cational assistance. Most of them, however, were reticent to request “one-time
colonial powers” in Europe for help, nor did they wish to establish “too close a
connection with US private enterprise.” Having the “inheritance of the West
without being a colonial or financial power,” as a senior official in Canberra’s Ex-
ternal Affairs Ministry noted, Australia could expect that its Asian neighbors
might ask for all sorts of “friendly cooperation, advice, and assistance” that could
be mutually beneficial; not responding positively to such pleas, in turn, would be
“defeatist and selfish.”94

Before Australia’s pro-independence pressure became a festering thorn in the
side of the Dutch government, however, the situation in Java and Sumatra re-
mained infinitely more complex and turbulent than it was or would be in the eastern archipelago. Armed clashes on these two islands had become routine events. As SEAC was preparing its withdrawal from the archipelago during the autumn of 1946, thus paving the way for the arrival of the Netherlands Army in full force, America’s armament resources and weapons industry became a principal target of the Dutch effort to procure military equipment. Even though the State Department in cooperation with military planners in the Pentagon embraced as official policy that the United States would not approve any “transfers of arms, munitions, or implements of war to either of the disputants” in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, the reality of US grants, loans, and weapons sales to the Netherlands revealed a contrary picture. Initially, the deployment by the Dutch military forces in Java and Sumatra of US Lend Lease equipment was defined as an “exception” to the rule rather than a “reversal of our policy.” Given the need to obtain military machinery for the Netherlands armed forces in Southeast Asia, however, Dutch officials could only turn to either the United States or England, because both countries were in the possession of large stocks of surplus equipment from World War II. Moreover, few nations in the democratic and capitalist postwar world other than the United States and Great Britain could boast of a weapons manufacturing industry able to fulfill Dutch demands.

In the period before the Netherlands Army’s first invasion of Republican-controlled territory in late July 1947, Britain had contributed the lion’s share of armaments and other materials to the Dutch, despite Australia and India’s almost daily interrogation of the British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, regarding his responsibility for single-handedly supplying the Netherlands with weapons that enabled it to subdue Indonesia’s legitimate nationalist revolution. A large percentage of Dutch military resources deployed in the Indies, however, were of American origin. This violated US policy as it was formulated on October 19, 1945, in response to Sukarno’s protest submitted to Washington that the Dutch were abusing “American weapons and munitions, clothes and uniforms.” The Truman Administration had replied that it would put an end to transfers of “lethal” military equipment. In addition, vocal opposition from the American public and certain members of the US Congress prompted Secretary of State Byrnes to order the removal of American insignia from US Lend Lease equipment in the possession of SEAC troops — material that was eventually passed on to Dutch forces. Starting in January 1946, the Truman Administration tried to distance itself further from the appearance of favoring the Netherlands by refusing the Dutch access to US shipping vessels for the purpose of transporting troops and armaments to and from the Netherlands East Indies.

In the eyes of some members of the US House of Representatives or progressive journalists, these anemic initiatives were inadequate. The criticism of US policy concerning anti-colonial movements came from different ideological van-
tage points. The controversial and conservative Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce, for instance, typified American actions vis-à-vis Indonesian nationalism as “moral laziness and moral cowardice.” At the same time, the progressive magazine, *The Nation*, labeled Byrnes’ instructions a “Pontius Pilate” gesture. Besides, British and Dutch compliance with the State Department’s order to remove American badges, decals, and other symbols from Lend Lease equipment was more than lax. Sukarno complained to Truman during the autumn of 1945 that Asians’ “goodwill towards the Americans” was seriously strained by the fact that the Dutch continue to wear US Army uniforms and use canteens marked USA. A few years later, during the Netherlands Army’s second attack on the Republic in December 1948, the American political scientist George McTurnan Kahin found himself in Yogyakarta as an eyewitness of the Dutch assault on the Republic’s capital. He noticed fighter planes in the air marked with the American white star on their fuselages; he also encountered Dutch officers wearing battle fatigues still emblazoned with the words “US Marines.” Kahin has suggested, in fact, that Byrnes’ request to remove the US emblems from military equipment was ignored so blatantly as to give rise to the suspicion that the Dutch were trying to make it appear that they enjoyed full American backing for their armed confrontation with the *Republik Indonesia*.

US Lend Lease equipment found its way to the Netherlands forces in Southeast Asia via SEAC’s discharge of its post surrender duties until late 1946. On November 30, 1946, the American government approved, free of charge, the transfer of 118 aircraft consisting of B-25 bombers, P-40 and P-51 fighter planes, 45 Stuart tanks, 459 jeeps, 170 artillery pieces, and an enormous array of firearms from SEAC to the Netherlands Army. Large numbers of army trucks and other surplus stock from the Pacific Theater also ended up at the disposal of the Dutch armed forces. A US-Dutch agreement enabled the Netherlands Army to purchase 65,000 tons of non-lethal military supplies located in a US Army dump in Finschhafen, New Guinea. The Dutch East Indies government paid 20,000,000 dollars for the US-equipment from a “surplus property credit” of 100,000,000 dollars granted by officials in Washington. A study, conducted by the State-War-Navy-Coordination Committee (SWNCC) in 1946, revealed that a considerable portion of this loan, designated as financial “aid aimed at assisting Indonesia’s rehabilitation and the resumption of trade” ended up being used, instead, for the procurement of goods consisting of “wartime installations and army supplies in New Guinea and other areas. This property has contributed little to the economic rehabilitation of the Indies.” From this credit allocation, Netherlands officials had already expended 68,353,314 dollars by May 1947.

Even though the State Department had rejected a Dutch request for further US Marine Corps training of an additional 2,000 Dutch men, and also disapproved a transfer of more arms and equipment through a Land Lease accord to

191
the Dutch Marine Brigade already in the Indonesian archipelago, Washington did not object to a straightforward purchasing contract. Thus, the Netherlands Indies government was able to buy a large number of tanks and hundreds of other military vehicles. In late 1946, when the crack Dutch Marine Brigade needed replacement of “non-war type” materials, Under Secretary of State Acheson made no objection to the transaction — which included trucks, jeeps, spare parts, and personal gear — for which the Dutch paid from US loans.  

Officially, this only concerned the purchase and sale of non-lethal equipment, but the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, Simon Hendrik Spoor, reported gratefully in December 1946, that Washington had also consented to a Lend Lease transfer of heavy tanks for his highly prized Marine Brigade. Although legally all this Lend Lease equipment was under America’s right of recapture, the US Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, reassured the Netherlands Ambassador in Washington in February 1947, that the US government had not in the past and did not intend in the future “to exercise its right of recapture,” thus effectively turning the Lend Lease material into a donation to the Dutch.

In July 1947, after the first Netherlands Army attack on the Indonesian Republic had shattered the hope that the cease fire agreement brokered at Lingga-jati would resolve the situation pacifically, London issued a strict boycott of all arms sales to the Netherlands East Indies. It is conceivable, though, that some British weapons were nonetheless delivered after the embargo was imposed, due to previously contracted agreements. Washington officially maintained its existing restrictions on weapons sales and loans, but the US government was less particular about enforcing them than the British. The Truman Administration, in fact, circumvented the self-imposed regulations issued earlier. In October 1947, a War Assets Administration (WAA) credit to the Netherlands East Indies government was denied on political grounds. At the same time, however, a WAA credit of 26,000,000 dollars to the government in The Hague was approved, after which Dutch officials immediately calculated the risks of secretly financing the acquisition of military material for its army in Java and Sumatra from these newly available American funds. Worrying about leaks to the press and the negative impact such disclosures might have on American public opinion, the recently appointed Netherlands Ambassador to Washington, Eelco van Kleffens, initially warned against these furtive plans; he admonished that such deceitful actions would inevitably encounter resistance from State Department circles. The Foreign Minister in The Hague, however, was demanding and persistent. He suggested in November that weapons could be financed through WAA credit and shipped to the Netherlands first, in order to avoid adverse publicity, before they were diverted to Southeast Asia. In the end, Van Kleffens relented, but only after he realized that he had underestimated Washington’s willingness to cooperate with the Dutch. In mid December 1947, the State Department informed him
that it harbored “no objection to purchases for the Dutch East Indies from WAA credit allocated to the Netherlands government.”

A few weeks earlier, the KNIL Quartermaster General, Major General J.J. Mojet, conspicuously dressed “in civilian clothes,” paid a visit to Washington to try to arrange with the State Department’s Office of Foreign Liquidation the transfer of American trucks, jeeps, and other vehicles from US Army surplus material still located in the Pacific. During Mojet’s subsequent journey to Tokyo to meet with General Douglas MacArthur, the latter offered to donate this material, embodying only a fraction of the enormous supplies he controlled as strategic reserves in the Pacific, in the form of a “gift to a former ally,” pending the State Department’s approval. The formidable Allied Commander-in-Chief in Japan also told Mojet that, if given the green light by Washington, he would gladly transport the goods on board “American ships manned by Japanese crews.” He was willing to do so because he worried that if the Netherlands Army withdrew too precipitously from the Indonesian archipelago, the same atrocities might occur as were taking place at that very moment during the Partition of India, “where the loss of human life already exceeds the total casualty rate suffered by the United States during World War I and World War II combined.”

In the course of 1948, as the Dutch need for spare parts and military hardware mounted, the acting chairman of the Nederlandsche Aankoop Commissie (Netherlands Purchasing Commission or NPC) – a man with the surprisingly appropriate name of Colonel E. Baretta – revealed the NPC’s clever methods of acquiring American-made weapons for the Dutch Army in the Indonesian archipelago. It has been our practice, he wrote in a hand-written report addressed to the nervous Dutch ambassador in Washington, to ship “equipment of a somewhat ‘dubious’ sort first to the Netherlands. Among these are commodities of an undeniable military character,” such as “spare parts” for bomber and fighter planes, “light armaments,” and indispensable items for the “maintenance of tanks.” Baretta also wrote that “the NPC knows, of course, that this material is then exported again to the Indies.” He added a caveat, however, that “any form of [detrimental] publicity” generated by shipping these materials directly from the United States to the Indonesian archipelago could potentially “cause Washington’s sympathy and cooperation to vanish because of pressures exerted by the media.”

In addition, Colonel Baretta further cautioned that the State Department’s forbearance towards such questionable Dutch military appropriations could also waiver due to the partisan “political party emotions of the moment” because Democrats in the US Congress, who supported Truman’s re-election, faced Thomas E. Dewey’s Republican challenge in the close race for the US Presidency during the fall of 1948. Henry Wallace’s participation in the widely contested presidential election of 1948 as a Third Party candidate – while the “Dixiecrat” from South Carolina, Strom Thurmond, representing the States’ Rights Party, had en-
tered the fray as a fourth contestant — also mandated Dutch discretion concerning its habit of allocating US funds granted officially to the Netherlands, instead, to military purchases destined for the Dutch Army in the Indonesian archipelago. If this news were to reach the Progressive Party’s campaign staff, Wallace could possibly expose the complicity of Truman’s State Department and thus jeopardize NPC’s military procurement of American-made weapons for the Dutch East Indies in the immediate future.  

The acting chairman of the Netherlands Purchasing Commission, therefore, tried to reassure the Dutch Ambassador in Washington that no more than ten percent of the armaments and machinery deployed by the Dutch Army in Southeast Asia was of American origin. The truthfulness of this claim, however, was undermined when considering that five percent of Dutch combat forces already in Java and Sumatra consisted of an expertly US trained and superbly equipped Marine Brigade. The NPC’s acting chairman also alleged that Dutch air power in Southeast Asia consisted only of American aircraft bought during World War II. Colonel Baretta claimed that no new planes had been acquired after August 1945. This statement was a straightforward fabrication, as Van Kleffens must have known, because it was during his tenure as Dutch spokesman at the United Nations in New York that the State Department had approved, in late November 1946, the Lend-Lease transfer of 118 US aircraft from SEAC to the Dutch military forces in the archipelago. These fighters and bombers were both preceded and followed by the acquisition of sundry American-made vehicles and lethal equipment, for which the Dutch in many instances paid enormous amounts of money.

The military expenditures that the Netherlands government in The Hague contracted in 1946 were three times larger than the ones incurred by Dutch authorities in Batavia, clearly indicating that the Netherlands government proper bore the financial brunt of the military build-up in Southeast Asia. In 1947 the discrepancy in financial outlays between the two political entities became smaller, but The Hague still outspent Batavia by almost 200,000,000 guilders. Overtly, the burden of the military costs was shared equally between The Hague and Batavia during 1948 and 1949, even though during these years the Netherlands government funneled substantial loans to the Dutch administration of the Indonesian archipelago. In fact, the Netherlands Parliament approved a loan of 850,000,000 guilders to Batavia in early 1949, at a time when US Marshall Aid for the economic recovery of Western Europe had already flowed freely for a year or so. Moreover, portions of the massive financial burdens assumed through the intensive military procurement program pursued in 1946, and on a smaller scale in 1947, relied on deferred payment schedules, thus allowing the Netherlands government to discharge a major share of its debts at a later date when the nation’s economy was functioning again, in part due to America’s ECA assistance. Moreover, the costs associated with the covert re-shipping of US-made military
hardware via the Netherlands to the Indies must have added to the financial burdens of the government in The Hague.

As complicated as the issue of tracing the financial sources of the military efforts of the Netherlands in the Indonesian archipelago during the period 1945-1949 may be, it seems reasonable to contend that outright American aid, unencumbered US loans allotted for the economic recovery of the Netherlands and its colony, or property surplus credits and other financial assistance granted by such agencies as the War Assets Administration, enabled the Dutch nation not only to rebuild its economy but also to disburse huge amounts of funds for its military campaign in Southeast Asia. Whether or not the Netherlands was “only kept afloat thanks to USA assistance,” as the State Department’s Chief of the Far Eastern Affairs Office told a visiting Australian diplomat in February, 1948, the net result was that America’s substantial support of the Netherlands may have created a sense of impunity in Dutch politicians and their constituencies with regard to the Indonesian Question.117

In a lengthy, classified memorandum composed by the State Department’s Economics Division (ED) during the early spring of 1949, entitled “The Drain of Indonesian Military Operations in Relation to ERP,” Harry H. Bell tried to decipher the financial details of the Dutch military campaign in Java and Sumatra in light of the European Recovery Program (ERP). He regretted that no data concerning the Netherlands “complete military appropriations” were published, although he made an attempt to reconstruct annual disbursements for the years 1946, 1947, and 1948. Even if such official Dutch data had been available, he continued, “it would be impossible to state what proportion of the expenditure should be attributed to the Indonesian operations and what proportion to ‘normal’ metropolitan defense programs.” In a sophisticated effort to calculate “the direct and indirect guilder cost” as well as “the foreign exchange cost of the Indonesian campaign in relation to ECA assistance,” Bell concluded that it would be “unjustifiable” to claim that the Marshall Plan allocations directly financed Dutch military operations in Indonesia. But Bell quickly qualified and undermined this comment with crucial observations articulated in terms of neo-classical economics:

The marginal importance of the resources supplied from abroad [i.e. US Marshall Aid], however, is such that there would be a multiple loss of Dutch national production resulting in inflationary pressure that would most severely affect civilian investment, consumption levels, political stability in the Netherlands, and the defense effort expected of the Netherlands by her Western Union and Atlantic Pact partners.118

195
Harry Bell continued his investigative report by citing published documents of the Second Chamber of the Netherlands Parliament since the creation of the Marshall Plan, which revealed that in 1948 the financial ordeal of maintaining the Dutch Army, Air Force, and Navy amounted to 1,578,000,000 guilders, which translated into almost 600,000,000 dollars at the prevailing exchange rate, fluctuating between 2.65 and 2.70 Dutch guilders per US dollar at that time. These expenses were almost equally shared between The Hague and Batavia. The amount of ERP assistance allotted to the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, since the Program’s inception, comprised a total of 651,000,000 US dollars, of which 84,000,000 dollars were granted directly to authorities in Batavia. These revealing numbers shed additional light on the concepts of “marginal utility” and “differential resource allocation” that Bell applied in his analysis of the political economy of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Without Marshall Aid, the Dutch government’s immense expenditures on the Indonesian military campaign would have seriously slowed down Dutch economic output. Washington’s financial assistance not only prevented growing inflation and encouraged both infrastructural improvements and civilian investments, it also cultivated consumption levels. According to Bell’s State Department memorandum, Marshall Aid funds also prevented the Netherlands government’s huge disbursements on army operations in Southeast Asia from plunging Dutch society into political instability. As a postscript, Bell added that US financial assistance also facilitated the Netherlands’ capacity to build up its regular defense programs in Northern Europe itself, as demanded by Western allies and partners in what would become NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization).119

Until the summer of 1948, Washington maintained its illusion of neutrality, despite these ad hoc decisions that enabled the Dutch to purchase as many US-made weapons and other equipment as they needed for their military campaign in Java and Sumatra. Washington’s emissary in Batavia, however, probably did not know about the intricate decision-making processes within the State Department concerning the sales of American equipment to the Dutch. It was reasonable to assume, though, that Walter Foote was fully aware of the Netherlands Army’s use of US war materials in its confrontation with the Republic. Willem Schermerhorn, in fact, noted in his diary that “Foote knows precisely. If he has not seen it himself in Batavia, he must have received reports from Surabaya, where heavy [American} tanks and massive war materials are being unloaded.”120

Foote’s service as US Consul General in Batavia was terminated in October 1947, when he abdicated his post under a cloud of allegations of improper conduct, even though he stayed on in Batavia until early 1948. Six months before Charles Livengood replaced him as US Consul General, Foote had mailed a long delayed dispatch to the Secretary of State in Washington concerning “The Signing of the Linggajati Agreement,” which had taken place on March 25, 1947.”121
It was odd that Foote did not submit his detailed report on the official ceremony, ratifying what seemed at that moment to be a major diplomatic breakthrough, until three weeks after the fact. His tardiness may have been related to a sense of being overwhelmed by the heavy burdens of his diplomatic tasks. In December 1948, when he had already moved to his new diplomatic assignment in the US Legation in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Foote wrote a defensive letter to Garret G. Ackerson, Jr., the Chief of the Division of Foreign Service Personnel in the State Department. Concerning his previous tour of duty in Batavia, he claimed he had been “harassed beyond words.” He complained that between 1945 and 1947, the US Consulate General in Batavia was miserably understaffed; he lamented he could not even rely on the services of an American stenographer or typist. This grievance seemed legitimate. At about the same time, the vocal Asianist in the State Department, Abbot Low Moffat, in a spirited attempt to strengthen US diplomatic missions in the Southeast Asian region, presented a similar argument by comparing America’s low key representation in Southeast Asia with the copious number of Foreign Service officers posted in Latin America.

In an effort to exonerate the sluggish discharge of his duties, Foote turned his lack of staff into a pathetic lament. In his letter, he claimed that he often had to type “until midnight or later” to file his reports. Nor did he have an American bookkeeper at his disposal in the Batavia Consulate, so he was forced to do his “own accounting” with the help of a Chinese clerk. At the same time, he had to keep abreast of developments in “the very chaotic political situation” from 1945 until his departure. He ended his missive with a pitiful, although not entirely believable, comment about his girth; he claimed that “the load of work almost broke me down. I lost 100 pounds in weight and was very ill, or overly tired, when I saw you in Washington.”

Ackerson had written a stern letter to Foote in Colombo, questioning him about reports that while he headed the US Consulate General in Batavia, he had allowed his employees to trade their dollars “at the open market rate,” yielding a much higher return than the official exchange rate regulated by the Java Bank. Since the State Department provided salaries and living allowances to Americans posted in Southeast Asia on the basis of the official exchange rate, Ackerson was perturbed. This practice could have doubled or tripled the income of Americans assigned to Batavia, which was unfair to colleagues who lived and worked in places where such options were not available. Besides, trading American dollars on the black market was a violation of Foreign Service protocol. The implication of Ackerson’s critical letter was that Foote had engaged in the black market exchanges himself, even though he had telegraphed the State Department on February 7, 1947, that “payment of contingent expenses and salaries are made by cashing drafts to the Java Bank at 2.65 guilders for one dollar.” If he had availed
himself to the black market, Foote had not only set an inappropriate standard of behavior for the rest of the Consulate’s staff, but had also deceived his superiors in Washington.

This was not the first time that State Department officials or other foreign observers had raised questions about either Foote’s competence or his ethics. In the postwar era, his superiors in Washington began to rate his performance as a mediocre and half-hearted one. The director of the Office of European Affairs typified Foote’s dispatches in 1947 as “scanty.” When asked to grade Foote’s accomplishments, a member of the Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs Division (PSA) commented that his reporting was too disjointed. Although he occasionally managed to produce a political analysis of “some merit,” most other reports tended to be little more than a regurgitation of the self-interested views of his many Dutch acquaintances in Batavia, which he reproduced in his dispatches to the State Department without any form of critical appraisal.

Officials in the State Department’s Philippines and South East Asian Division were not the only ones to complain about the low quality of work delivered by the US mission in Batavia. During its preliminary diagnosis of problems in Southeast Asia in early September 1947, George Kennan’s recently established Policy Planning Staff (PPS) discovered a serious hiatus in the flow of information from the region. John Paton Davies, as a member of the new PPS staff, notified the Office of Far Eastern Affairs that he was struck by the contrast in analytic coverage from two “critical regions in that area – Indochina and Indonesia. The reporting from Indochina strikes us as penetrating and sound. The reporting from Indonesia leaves us with no clear picture of the forces at work in the region. For planning purposes, we feel that it is important that the Department receive far more information than it has thus far from Indonesia.” During this period, a Vice Consul normally represented the United States in Hanoi, whereas the US diplomatic mission in Saigon was no more heavily staffed than America’s Legation in Indonesia. It was clear that the Consulate General in Batavia during the Foote era was not at a structural disadvantage that could explain the low caliber of the dispatches concerning the political situation in the archipelago. In Foote’s defense, a State Department official argued that “such a long stay in one post without variety of experience...tends to destroy an officer’s objectivity and critical sense, and he becomes so familiar with the ideas expressed by his local friends that he proceeds to accept them as his own without [critical] inspection.” Pro-Dutch propaganda, as George McTuan Kahin experienced a year later when he received an officious briefing at the US Consulate General in Batavia before crossing the border into Republican territory, had distorted the “intelligence gathering efforts” of American diplomats such as the Legation’s political attaché, Glenn Abbey, and revealed its “appallingly poor” quality. Hence, when Foote wrote his overdue report to the Secretary of State about the signing of the
Linggajati Agreement, policymakers in Washington had long since been briefed about the agreement by the US Embassy in The Hague, which was staffed with superior American diplomats.

In his tardy report, Foote noted that the weeks prior to the agreement’s ratification on March 25, 1947, had been “filled with doubt, suspicion, and no small degree of fear” that a full-fledged armed struggle might erupt if the Dutch and Indonesian delegations could not achieve a settlement. However, after daily rounds of intensive negotiations, Foote noted that the Linggajati Accord produced “an extraordinary improvement in the political situation,” if only because the Dutch and Indonesian press suspended their “bitter attacks” on each other. He commented on the reception held in the Governor General’s palace in Batavia after the signing ceremony as one of the most remarkable gatherings he had ever attended. The celebration was characterized by “an unusual air of cordiality and courtesy” that was crowned by a magnificent fireworks display at night. He reported that “relief and pleasure” prevailed among former colleagues and old friends in the Dutch and Indonesian communities, who had been estranged since the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945.131 Van Mook, for his part, joked about the ear-shattering noise of the fireworks at the reception’s end that it sounded as if “all the ammunition was being detonated, presumably because it is no longer needed” now that the Linggajati Agreement was concluded.132

Curiously, only a week earlier Foote had rushed a telegram to the Secretary of State in which he claimed he had been approached with the question whether the signing ceremony of the Linggajati agreement could take place in the American Consulate.133 In his “most urgent” telegram, Foote asked the Department to “please instruct if such a request may be granted.” However, a very different story emerged from Schermerhorn’s diary, who maintained that Foote himself had extended the invitation to use the US Consulate for the ceremonial occasion, rather than the other way around.134 These contradictory statements raise the question whether Foote, without the State Department’s concurrence, tried to insinuate the United States into the Linggajati Accord that was generally viewed as resulting from arduous British diplomatic efforts from which the United States had remained aloof.