

P.M.H. Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen. Het Nederlands militair-strategisch belied in Indonesië 1945-1950*. The Hague: SDU Uitgeverij, 1991. 359 pages.

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This monograph, written by the Dutch military historian Petra Groen and presented as a PhD thesis in history at the University of Leiden, is an excellent study of Dutch military strategy in Indonesia between 1945 and 1950. It offers a profound and detailed examination of the strategy and tactics applied by the Dutch military command and an evaluation of the outcome and results of this strategy.

Lieutenant-General S.H. Spoor was able to develop his strategic concepts for conducting the war against the Indonesian Republic with virtually no opposition from the civil authorities. Throughout the whole period, he persistently adhered to his chosen path, which consisted of a two-phase plan:

1. a massive, overall attack on Republican territory in Java and Sumatra in an attempt to profit from existing Dutch superiority in mobility, technical equipment, firepower, and aircraft. This surprise attack, it was expected, would result in the conquest of a large area, in the demoralization of the enemy, and in the dispersal of the TNI.
2. the "pacification" of the occupied areas through constant patrolling by small units in order to locate the remaining but scattered and continually moving guerrilla groups and eliminate them.

This strategy was called the "spearhead-strategy"; it combined the experiences and rules of modern, "European" warfare with those of prewar colonial campaigns. The first large-scale military action ("Police Action") in July/August 1947 failed to demonstrate the efficacy of this strategy, simply because the campaign had to be stopped halfway in response to international pressure. It was only during the Second "Police Action," in December 1948/January 1949, and its aftermath of guerrilla warfare, that the strategy could really be put to the test. It then became clear that it was an utter failure. The policy on which the military leaders (and the government) had placed all their hopes, not only did not result in the total elimination of the TNI, but it also did not lead to a quick and successful suppression of the guerrilla groups in the first months of 1949. Counter-guerrilla action proved to be too difficult an undertaking for the Dutch army. The result was a dramatic and tragic stalemate, from which neither the Dutch nor the Indonesians were able to escape by military means. Now for the first time in all those years, the Dutch had to compromise with the demands of the Indonesian leaders and to return once more to the negotiating table.

Why had such a strategy been developed and consistently applied? Did the Dutch army commanders not see the risks involved in this approach? Some, admittedly rare, critics had pointed out that to occupy first and pacify later would be a very dangerous thing to do; they thought it better, at least safer, to occupy a limited area and eliminate all resistance there once and for all, before occupying new areas. These critical voices, however, were easily ignored by Spoor and his Chief of Staff, Major-General D.C. Buurman van Vreeden. Dr. Groen points to the following three main factors that lay behind their strategy:

1. the underestimation by the Dutch military leaders of the political and military foundations of the Indonesian Republic. They considered the Republic to be no more than a product of the Japanese occupation, or—even worse—as the chimera of a group of semi-intellectuals without any support among the population. They ridiculed the Indonesian

army, the TNI, as a poor, badly organized group of amateurs, with a hare-brained command.

2. the overestimation of the Dutch superiority in arms and materiel, which would enable them, so it was thought, to strike a decisive blow and capture the key Republican areas before the Indonesians could even think of fighting back. It should be borne in mind that time was quickly running out for the Dutch with regard to the anticipated reaction from the international community. So, they had to act speedily, and this was the way to do it.

3. the economic necessity of recapturing the most productive agricultural areas and restoring production there as soon as possible. The First "Police Action" was called "Operation Product," a sign of the economic importance of the campaign.

In four chapters the author gives a detailed chronological analysis of the formulation and implementation of this strategy, starting with the initial phase in autumn 1945 and early 1946, in which the Dutch had to cooperate with the British. This is followed by a chapter on the preparation and conduct of "Operation Product" (1947); a chapter on the decision-making process for the Second "Police Action"; and finally, a chapter on the Second "Police Action" and the guerrilla war of the first half of 1949. From the very beginning it was obvious that the military leaders had chosen Java as the self-evident starting point for the recapture of the entire archipelago. Civil authorities initially advocated the reconquest of Borneo and East Indonesia first, in order to surround and isolate the Republic in Central Java. In 1948, Lieutenant Governor-General H.J. van Mook briefly defended this view again, but he was easily convinced by General Spoor that this approach would be unsuccessful.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the attention given to the usually successful attempts by General Spoor to influence the political-military decision-making process to his advantage. Time and again he succeeded in having his ideas accepted by the authorities in both Jakarta and The Hague. The First "Police Action," for example, had started with the intention of occupying a rather limited area in order to give the "moderates" among the Indonesian leaders the opportunity to come forward and compromise with the Dutch; yet within a few days General Spoor had already succeeded in changing this policy into one of a large-scale action against the Republic as a whole. As Groen says, General Spoor showed himself a "hawk" from the very beginning.

In the fourth and last chapter, the best of the book, Dr. Groen presents a very detailed analysis of the Second "Police Action" and the guerrilla war of the first half of 1949, including a critical evaluation of the results of the campaign. She also deals with the guerrilla methods used by the TNI and the establishment of *Wehrkreise*. This chapter includes no less than seventeen appendices with statistical material on the number of Republican attacks on Dutch troops; the number of patrol skirmishes in the first half of 1949; the number of casualties on Dutch and Indonesian sides; and the number of prisoners-of-war and arms captured. In a concluding chapter the author once more reflects on the basic premises of the Dutch strategy and compares the Dutch experiences with British and French experiences in their wars of decolonization.