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On January 2, 1999, a daily newspaper in the Netherlands, the *NRC Handelsblad*, published a bulky Saturday Supplement entitled "Onze jongens en hoe Indië verloren ging" (Our Boys And How The Indies Were Lost). It was the first installment in what will undoubtedly be a year full of remembrance and soul searching. It seems likely that in 1999 the print and electronic media in the Netherlands will devote much time and effort to give meaning to the fiftieth anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty over the Indonesian archipelago from the Netherlands to the independent Republic on December 27, 1949. Underneath a heart-rending picture on the NRC Supplement's opening page of two emaciated Javanese women dressed in filthy rags, seated on a sidewalk in Tanjung Priok during the fall of 1945 with a dead baby lying by their side, the caption rehearses a persistent myth: "The Americans were fiercely opposed to Dutch efforts to transform the Indonesian Republic into the Netherlands Indies again."

This apocryphal story maintains its currency in the United States, too. In 1995 the Suharto regime published a huge commemorative album filled with garish pictures and cheerful reports about economic development and social progress, entitled *Indonesia 1945- 1995: The First Fifty Years*. Oblivious to the possibility that economic crisis could reduce Indonesian society to social chaos and political bedlam once again, Suharto's gigantic coffee table book extolled the dramatic transformation of the Indonesian archipelago from a Dutch colonial possession into an emerging world power. Next to a glossy photograph of numerous dignitaries, the ceremonial volume also recorded the official congratulations offered by prime-ministers, presidents, kings, and queens from around the world. In his celebratory message, America's Bill Clinton noted that "strong diplomatic support for your struggle for freedom came from President Truman and our Congress while your nation was being born."

When Clinton sent his good wishes to Suharto he bent the truth a little, although some loyalists might argue that his statement was not entirely incorrect. It could be that advisers told him about the first US Ambassador to independent Indonesia, H. Merle Cochran, who had assiduously propagated this story during the early 1950s, to the extent that it began to annoy President Sukarno because he knew better. It is also plausible that Clinton was alerted to the presence of several State Department officials and US journalists who had articulated their enthusiastic support for the Republic during the early years of its violent independence struggle. In the course of their professional engagement with the Indonesian Revolution in the post-World War II era, these Americans could not help but admire nationalists' efforts to establish their "hundred percent freedom" from all forms of Dutch colonial exploitation.

It is conceivable, too, that Clinton was told about some members of the US Congress who developed a particular interest in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, even though disparate issues motivated legislators' concerns with Indonesia's independence

struggle. Some among them were committed Democrats in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. They firmly believed in any nation's right to self-determination, which obviously applied to the Indonesian Republic as well. But the historical record shows that until late 1948 the support for Indonesian independence among some liberal Democrats was politically neutralized by other members of the Senate and House of Representatives who worried about the American economic interests that had been damaged or completely destroyed during the Japanese occupation and post-war turmoil in Java and Sumatra. Before the outbreak of World War II, such investments had included lucrative oil refineries and rubber plantations, and many politicians in Washington presumed that they could be rebuilt in an expeditious manner and recover their former profitability only if the Dutch colonial presence in the archipelago were to be maintained.

Yet other Washington politicians presented themselves as anti-communist crusaders who were terrified that Indonesia's leaders might not be able to withstand the manipulative tentacles of the Soviet Union. One of the more outspoken politicians on this score was John Davis Lodge of Connecticut. He held forth in a speech in the US House of Representatives on July 25, 1949, declaring that many of the "so-called Indonesian Republicans are hardly imbued with the lofty spirit of 1776." Instead of viewing Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta as modern reincarnations of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in southeast Asia, he counseled Americans to learn the truth about the upstart rulers of the so-called independent Indonesian Republic. All these opportunistic men, he intoned, "have been enslaved by godless, communist imperialists."¹ Thus the loud voices of men such as Lodge also managed to silence their colleagues who argued in favor of Indonesia's right to self-determination.

When the Congressman from Connecticut delivered his stentorian warning during the summer of 1949, however, the American foreign policy establishment had at long last turned a crucial corner, leading in a direction that differed from the one charted by Lodge and his red-baiting colleagues. Nonetheless, as George McTurnan Kahin has shown in his classic *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, published in 1952, which no scholar has disputed convincingly since, it had taken close to four years for America's foreign policy establishment to stop hedging its bets by initiating a policy of unequivocal support for Indonesia's independence. Before then, as members of the Australian diplomatic corps grumbled repeatedly, "confusion and delay" in resolving the Indonesian question was "due almost entirely to the attitude of the United States which varies from day to day and is unpredictable."²

Before January 1949, the State Department in Washington had given precedence to the democratic revival and capitalist reconstruction of countries in western Europe. US foreign policy makers viewed the nationalist upheavals in southeast Asia as mostly marginal to America's political priorities. Hence, despite avowals of neutrality and impartiality, the Truman administration quietly backed their trusted Dutch ally in its bloody confrontation with the Indonesian Republic. As a cablegram on August 5, 1947, from the Department of External Affairs in Canberra to Australian Envoys to

¹ *Congressional Record—Appendix* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1949), July 25, 1949, p. A4966.

² This particular statement was made by the Australian delegation to the United Nations on August 24, 1947, Vol. 1, Doc. 297, p. 278.

Washington and the United Nations in Lake Success, New York, stated: "The Americans can't handle the situation . . . they know only the Dutch point of view."³ The Netherlands, after all, was one of America's staunchest allies in Europe, exhibiting after World War II an "obstinate Atlanticism" that rendered the Dutch nation's policies towards its European neighbors contingent on its "Atlantic policy and not vice versa."⁴ Dutch politicians also shared US opinion regarding the post-war need to rebuild Germany's industrial viability, not only to insure that it would serve as a structural buffer between western Europe and the Soviet Union, but also to establish the German nation as an economic shield that should be firmly implanted in the democratic traditions and capitalist practices of the West. Although American dollars facilitated both directly and indirectly French and British efforts at imperial reconquest, it was a revealing sign of US backing for its faithful Dutch partner that in the details of the Marshall Plan only the Netherlands East Indies were earmarked as an official recipient of Marshall Plan funds. In doing so, the architects of Washington's European recovery program refused to acknowledge the economic needs of the territories in Java and Sumatra held by Indonesian nationalists. The Truman administration allowed the Netherlands Army in Indonesia to deploy American Lend Lease material, too, and the Dutch government spent a twenty-six million dollar credit granted in October 1947 by the War Assets Administration (WAA) in Washington on purchasing arms and supplies for its military forces in southeast Asia through the use of clever accounting techniques, again without publicly stated American objections.⁵ The US also voted against the Republic's associate membership in the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) in late 1948⁶; according to the Secretary of Australia's Department of External Affairs, this ill-advised American decision had been "interpreted" by the Dutch "as a green light" to go ahead with their surprise military attack on the Yogyakarta Republic on December 18, 1948.⁷

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that without the post-war rehabilitation funds received through the Marshall Plan, as well as earlier credits, the Netherlands might not have mustered its massive neo-colonial enterprise in Southeast Asia.⁸ If American dollars had not greased the wheels of the post-war Dutch economy, the costly military expedition in Indonesia would have exacted enormous sacrifices from Holland's civil society, which comprised a community that was traumatized by the

³ Vol. 1, Doc. 241, p. 222.

⁴ Quoted by Monica Sie Dhian Ho, "Federalist Champion or Faithful Ally: Dutch policy on European and Atlantic Cooperation," in R. E. van Ditzhuyzen, A. E. Kersten, A. L. M. van Zeeland, and A. C. van der Zwan, eds., *The Foreign Ministry: 200 Years* (The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1998), p. 286.

⁵ Colonel Baretta to Eelco van Kleffens, September 8, 1948, in S. L. van der Wal, P. J. Drooglever, and M. J. B. Schouten, eds., *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1988), vol. XV, p. 64 (fn).

⁶ Vol. 2, Introduction, p. xxi.

⁷ Vol. 2, Doc. 415, p. 462.

⁸ Pierre van der Eng, "Marshall Aid as a Catalyst in the Decolonization of Indonesia, 1947-1949," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19,2 (1988): 335-352, and George McT. Kahin, "The United States and the Anti-Colonial Revolutions in Southeast Asia," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*, ed. Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye (Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), p. 356. Gerlof Homan, in contrast, came to an opposite conclusion in "American Military Assistance to the Netherlands during the Indonesian Struggle for Independence, 1945-1949," *Mededelingen van de sectie militaire geschiedenis* 8 (1985): 155-162.

legacy of the five-year Nazi occupation. In fact, one could argue that America's financial disbursements licensed the Netherlands' military aggression in the archipelago and enabled it to impose a devastating economic blockade on the Republic in Yogyakarta. As the State Department's Head of the Far Eastern Division admitted straightforwardly to a visiting Australian diplomat in February 1948: "Holland is only 'kept floating' by USA assistance."⁹ Such lavish American aid, in turn, may have created a sense of impunity in Dutch politicians and their voters with regard to the Indonesian question.

Despite its financial largesse, though, America was reluctant to put pressure on the Netherlands to make concessions—a reticence that baffled and angered Australia's foreign policymakers. Because the Dutch depended both "materially and politically" on American support, as an acerbic telegram sent on October 13, 1948, from Canberra to its representatives in Washington, London, The Hague, and Jakarta indicated, the Truman administration could singlehandedly resolve the Dutch-Indonesian conflict if it wanted to do so. By "using its influence" and preventing the Dutch from "rendering the negotiations futile" once again through the submission of a new series of "unacceptable counter-proposals," America could push the deliberations towards a successful conclusion.¹⁰ But to the dismay of officials in Canberra's Department of External Affairs, even after the second police action in late December 1948, the US still continued to supply equipment and thus "maintained" the 130,000 Dutch troops in Indonesia by fulfilling "orders already placed."¹¹ It would not be until January 1949 that the Truman administration was willing to take a stand on behalf of Indonesians' right to self-determination; it finally did so by voting in favor of the UN Security Council's sanctions of the Netherlands Army's aggression and by condemning Dutch attempts to reclaim colonial authority in Indonesia. As a consequence, America's sudden willingness to intervene managed to end the "foolish dithering" (to cite Alan Levine's irreverent phrase) in less than one year, "dithering" that had caused the Dutch-Indonesian confrontation to drag on too long and at too great a human cost.¹²

Hence, Clinton's assertion in 1995 that the American President and US Congress provided "strong diplomatic support" to Indonesia as the "Indonesian nation was being born" can be called an overstatement or evidence of wishful thinking. Harsher critics might call it disingenuous. The impassioned pleas on behalf of the Indonesian Republic articulated by a tiny crew of American foreign service officers and legislators, or journalists and academics, were ignored by Harry Truman and senior policymakers in Washington DC, who silently enacted pro-Dutch policies until 1949. But Clinton's entry in Suharto's coffee table book has emerged as a comfortable cliché. The myth describing the unequivocal American support for the nascent Indonesian Republic is an attractive one. It is an inspiring story that appeals to Americans' self image as champions of freedom and democracy everywhere in the world.

⁹ Vol. 2, Doc. 51, p. 56.

¹⁰ Vol. 2, Doc. 277, p. 323.

¹¹ Telegram from Canberra to Washington, December 28, 1948, Vol. 2, Doc. 483, p. 527.

¹² Alan J. Levine, *The United States and the Struggle for Southeast Asia* (Westport CT/London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 45.

Most historical myths gain their vigor and allure from an ability to persuade and entice at the same time. But myths have a connotation of being half-truths at best, whether or not ample documentary evidence is available.¹³ In the convoluted project of converting the past into official histories, semi-truths, or full-fledged mythologies, pragmatic political actors join hands with historians and novelists, because fictions about the past are often concocted or dismantled in order to pursue goals that are immediate and mundane. The imaginary anti-colonial parallels between the United States in 1776 and Indonesia in 1945 may have influenced Bill Clinton, too, when he sent his congratulations to President Suharto in August 1995. How could his predecessor Harry Truman not have nurtured a fledgling nation, Clinton might have wondered, especially a young nation that issued a Declaration of Independence from a European colonial power similar to Britain and celebrated its newly proclaimed freedom with slogans such as "Life, Liberty, And The Pursuit Of Happiness" and "All People Are Created Equal?"

A similar narrative about steadfast support for the Indonesian Republic is told in contemporary Australia. When Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed independence in August 1945, the story suggests, Australia's Labor Government rose to the challenge at once and played the role of "St. George" by helping to slay the Dutch colonial dragon(s) in every corner of the vast archipelago.¹⁴ But contrary to the fictional tale that continues to linger on in the historical memories of some Americans and many Dutch people, the Australian narrative is grounded in solid historical facts that are richly documented in Philip Dorling's and David Lee's hefty, handsome, and well-edited volumes. The approximately 1600 pages of correspondence between high-ranking officials in the Department of External Affairs in Canberra and Australia's envoys in Jakarta, Singapore, New Delhi, The Hague, London, Washington DC, and at the United Nations in New York, furnish eloquent testimony of the nation's clear-headed and consistent efforts to sustain the embattled Indonesian Republic.

Several considerations—both geo-political and domestic ones—influenced Australia's decision to throw its hat in the ring on behalf of the independent Republic, even if the Prime Minister, Joseph Benedict Chifley, and his Labor Party colleagues could have predicted the "tough, self-righteous indignation" the Netherlands would shower on them. After all, Australia was a "white neighbor and ex-ally." From a Dutch perspective, taking sides with the fractious Republic was tantamount to a betrayal of racial solidarity; it also seemed to disparage the memory of the sacrosanct Western Alliance that had finally defeated the hated Japanese empire in the summer of 1945.¹⁵ If Australia's Liberal Party, rather than the Labor Party, had come into power as a result of the national elections on July 13, 1945, it might have happened that governmental support for Indonesian independence would have been either tepid or non-existent. The conservative and sometimes xenophobic policies of Chifley's

¹³ Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys. The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 212; see also Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 55-57.

¹⁴ Although increasingly critical of Dutch policy, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, W. E. Dunk, cautioned that "We can't be St. George to every maiden," quoted in Vol. 1, Introduction, p. xviii.

¹⁵ Ambassador F. K. Officer in The Hague to Secretary of External Affairs W. E. Dunk in Canberra, September 2, 1947, Vol. 1, Doc. 310, p. 291.

successor—the long-lived Liberal Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, who dominated Australia's political scene from December 19, 1949, to January 26, 1966—render such a speculation quite plausible. But prescient diplomats and civil servants who assumed their positions in Canberra's foreign policy establishment after Labor's electoral victory in July 1945 understood that success in laying the groundwork for a harmonious coexistence with an oil, tin, and rubber-producing Asian giant next door far outweighed the discomfort of frosty diplomatic relations with an inconsequential ex-ally in northern Europe.

Australia's Labor Party politicians anticipated that in the post-war era national security and prosperity would depend on their nation's peaceful and productive relations with Asian countries nearby rather than derive from its affinity with the white-skinned capitalist world in the far off West. Besides, Australia occupied a unique position within the Asian landscape. Many not-so-distant countries needed technical and administrative assistance. Most of them, however, were loathe 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," Australia could expect that these Asian neighbors might turn to it for mutually beneficial and "friendly co-operation, advice, and assistance," as the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs prophesied in January 1949. A refusal to respond to such pleas would be "defeatist and selfish," he noted, because the topography of Asia would shape Australia's future rather than its membership in the British Commonwealth.¹⁶

Australia's genuine concern with Indonesia was also related to the large number of ordinary citizens all over the country who were personally engaged in the political drama taking place in the archipelago next door. Many Australians' husbands, fathers, or sons had fought the Japanese Army in the eastern regions of the Netherlands Indies during World War II. At the time of Japan's surrender in mid-August 1945, approximately 50,000 Australian soldiers were still stationed mostly in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and New Guinea, while relatives back home eagerly awaited the return of their loved ones.

Yet another domestic issue attracting front-page attention in the media was a strike which the communist-led Australian Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) had begun to organize in September, 1945. The WWF encouraged its members to refuse to load the cargo of Dutch ships that were destined for the Netherlands Indies as a gesture of solidarity with fellow workers in the newly proclaimed independent Republic. By late September the dockworkers' boycott had spread to every Australian port, and the embargo would last for years to come, forcing Prime Minister Chifley—himself a former union organizer—to walk a precarious tightrope between support for his natural electoral base on the left and having to curry the favor of potential voters located closer to the political center. After endless diplomatic haggling, especially on the part of the Dutch ambassador in Canberra whose constant complaints provoked caustic responses from officials in the Department of External Affairs, the ban was finally lifted in early June 1947.¹⁷ But it was imposed again less than two months later, as a

¹⁶ Vol. 3, Doc. 116, p. 110.

¹⁷ Vol. 1, Doc. 265, p. 246, Doc. 319, p. 299, Doc. 438, pp. 422-425.

protest against the Netherlands Army's first surprise attack—or the first so-called police action—on the Republic in late July.¹⁸

These different factors combined to implant the Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the consciousness of both policymakers in Canberra and a large segment of the general public. Hence, in order to ascertain the popular base of the nationalist movement and to evaluate the personal integrity and ideological orientation of the Republican leadership, Canberra's Department of External Affairs dispatched an emissary to Java as early as November 1945. The resulting reports confirmed the Department's suspicions. W. MacMahon Ball warned that Indonesians' "bitter and deep-seated animosity" towards their former colonial masters was likely to fester and could potentially escalate into a full-scale "conflict between East and West" with world-wide repercussions.¹⁹

While Ball and his successors recorded highly favorable impressions of Indonesian politicians in their reports to the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, they conveyed a mixture of bewilderment and exasperation with the obtuse pronouncements and uncooperative behavior of many Dutch officials. The Dutch were lost in a "dream world bounded by their pre-war prejudices"; they hid behind an "icy formality," were "frigid in manner," and "maintained a very intransigent attitude" because they continued to "regard the Republicans as bandits." The Netherlands representative to the UN Security Council indulged in "an emotional bitter attack" on the Indonesian Government, and in the process he also impugned the personal integrity of the Security Council's members.²⁰ Gradually, Australians' wry and low-key remarks rose to more forceful rhetorical heights. After the second military attack on the Yogyakarta Republic in late December, 1948, Australia's staunchly leftist foreign minister, Herbert Vere Evatt, proclaimed it was high time "to show the Dutch that the old time imperialistic methods are detestable." And on January 17, 1949, Thomas Critchley, the Australian representative on the UN Security Council's Good Offices Committee (GOC) in Indonesia, denounced the Dutch proposal for Indonesian independence as nothing but propaganda and a "complete fraud," "worthless," and "unreliable."²¹

Various Australian analysts portrayed Indonesians, in contrast, as "academic idealists with considerable psychological sensibility" or as "well-educated and restrained men"; they expressed their admiration for Sutan Sjahrir's "skillful political maneuvering" and described Sukarno as "a beautiful looking man with a dominant vibrant personality."²² Over time Australians became more discerning in their judgments of particular Republican officials. For example, when Mohammad Rum replaced Amir Sjarifuddin as head of the Indonesian delegation to the UN-sponsored negotiations after the latter resigned as Prime Minister on January 23, 1948, in the

¹⁸ Vol. 1, Doc. 319, p. 299, and Doc. 89, p. 90, fn. 1, indicating that W. P. Ashley, the General Secretary of the WWF, had agreed to lift the ban "for the benefit of the Indonesian people" on June 6, 1947.

¹⁹ Vol. 1, Introduction, Vol. 1, pp. xiii, xvii.

²⁰ Vol. 1, Introduction, pp. xiii, xvii; Doc. 267, p. 117; Doc. 267, p. 247; Doc. 297, p. 280 (the Dutch representative at the UN was Eelco van Kleffens); Vol. 2, Doc. 70, p. 76.

²¹ Vol. 2, Doc. 442, p. 488; Vol. 3, Doc. 102, pp. 98-99.

²² Vol. 1, Introduction, pp. xiii, xvi, xix, Doc. 211, p. 198.

wake of the Renville Agreement, the Australian member of the UN Good Offices Committee noted that Rum was well-liked albeit less capable than his predecessor and overly sensitive to the opinions of the American GOC representative.²³ But on the whole Australians continued to be impressed with the abilities and sophistication of the Republican leadership. As the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs summarized the situation in late January 1949: "eighty million Indonesians with highly trained and competent and cultured leaders must in the not so distant future determine their own destiny."²⁴

The stalwart support of the Labor Government under Joseph Benedict Chifley for the Indonesian Republic as it struggled to achieve autonomy is a heartwarming story, and Philip Dorling and David Lee have brought it to life in admirable fashion. They have done so not only by means of judicious editorial work but also thanks to the succinct but elegant introductions to each of the three volumes. The diplomatic correspondence itself reveals a tenacious, no-nonsense quality, but it constitutes a splendid source for a clearer understanding of the international pressures and Cold War rhetoric that whirled around Indonesia's struggle for independence. Throughout the period 1947–1949 Australian officials doggedly defended Indonesians' right to define their "own destiny," whether they observed the explosive events unfolding in the archipelago from Canberra and other faraway places or were active participants in the endless Dutch-Indonesian negotiations in Jakarta and Kaliurang. What these thick volumes reveal, too, is that the Labor Government's emissaries were stubborn but subtle in their efforts to convert the State Department in Washington DC to a more pro-Indonesian posture. Once they had achieved their goal, Chifley as well as Evatt and his feisty colleagues in the Department of External Affairs could join their southeast Asian neighbors in celebrating the international recognition of Indonesia's political autonomy only one year later, on December 27, 1949. Rejoicing in Indonesia's official independence, however, was probably scant consolation for Labor's demoralizing defeat in Australia's national elections by Robert Gordon Menzies's Liberal Party on December 19, 1949—a mere eight days before the historic transfer of sovereignty took place in the Royal Palace on Dam Square in Amsterdam.

²³ Thomas K. Critchley, the second Australian representative on the GOC, repeated this opinion about Rum several times, Vol. 2, Doc. 39, p. 45; Doc. 70, p. 77.

²⁴ Vol. 3, Doc. 116, p. 111.