

**OPAQUE INTENTIONS:
U.S. DIPLOMACY AND COVERT ACTION IN INDONESIA, 1945-1958**

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INTRODUCTION

In his classic work *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams argued that above all, American foreign policy in the Cold War and beyond was characterized by a “continuing, even increasing disparity between the actuality and the rhetoric.”¹ Acting on these disparities and contradictory truths would ultimately lead to turmoil and crisis, the purported struggle between good and evil ending in tragic waste and a lack of poetic justice of any kind. In literature, these are the fundamental elements of great tragedies. In American history, this is the story of the United States and Indonesia.

U.S. foreign policy towards Indonesia during the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies was formulated upon the basis of several inconsistencies in ideology and priorities. From 1945-1958, these inconsistencies played out in an especially tragic fashion, leading to covert intervention, civil war, violence, and international uproar. While many historians credit anti-communism as the primary informant of U.S.-Indonesia relations during the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies, pragmatic concerns played equal—if not greater—roles in determining the United States’ position on the newly independent Southeast Asian nation. Colonialism, economic concerns, international reputation, and a need for political alignment shaped the initial diplomatic initiatives of the Truman administration and would later serve as the justification for an extensive yet frequently overlooked covert war conducted by the CIA during the Eisenhower years. Although the official narrative expounded an ideological love of democratic liberty, conflicting and paradoxical diplomatic aims led to the use of covert action as a way to achieve objectives that were largely unrelated to a conceptual opposition to communist governance. In this American drama, the disparity between rhetoric and reality had disastrous effects.

¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, N.Y.: Dell

Indonesia: Economization, Colonization, and Liberation

Indonesia is a country of several islands, cultures, beliefs, and agendas. The country of over 260 million people—the largest country in Southeast Asia both then and now—is comprised of multiple ethnic groups spread across several different geographic regions. Dutch ships first sailed into the archipelago in 1595, and although the small European nation was only the second Western power to explore and trade in what is now known as Indonesia, the Dutch East India Company quickly began to dominate the spice, coffee, and tobacco trade.² Further, the government of the Netherlands gave the company permission to wage war and establish settlements in the country. The quasi-economic colony was formed into an official colony of the Dutch Empire in 1800 that featured strict colonialist and hierarchal laws along racial lines. Although the Dutch dominated much of the archipelago, certain areas of what came to be defined by the late nineteenth century as “Indonesia” remained at least partially independent of colonial rule, including places such as Borneo and Bali.³ While other Western nations began to trade with the colony during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the colonial government maintained restrictive economic policies to ensure much of the economic benefit of the colony reached the mother country. These policies frustrated nations such as the United States, which saw opportunity for a vast raw materials trade in the region and fought to loophole their way into increasing their dependence on Indonesian oil, tin, and rubber. However, forced foreign economization and colonial subjugation was not easy for the European power. Dutch rule was tenuous and sparked several wars during the nineteenth century, and conflict between Dutch

² Anne Booth, *The Indonesian Economy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A History of Missed Opportunities* (New York, N.Y.: MacMillan Press LTD, 1998), 14-16.

³ Ibid.

colonizers and their subjects would last until the invasion of the Japanese during World War II. Originally treated by native Indonesians as liberators, the Japanese empire was interested in Indonesia for many of the same reasons as their Western counterparts: raw materials. Receptive to the idea of Indonesian independence at the outset, Japanese colonizers eventually sought to silence calls for liberation.

After the war, the Dutch government fought to hold onto their vast colonial holdings in Southeast Asia, while native Indonesians—ignited by an independence movement with Western-educated and charismatic leaders such as Indonesia's first president Sukarno and first vice president Mohammad Hatta, desired complete autonomy in the modern world. Sukarno and Hatta's leadership and criticism of the colonial system and Western rule would prove essential in determining Indonesia future path and relationship with great powers for decades to come. In the immediate post-World War II era, the debate over Indonesian independence posed a substantial foreign policy question for the United States in their relationship with both Europe and aspiring post-colonial nations around the world. Truman-era decision makers such as Secretary of States James Byrnes (1945-1947), George Marshall (1947-1949), and Dean Acheson (1949-1953) and experts on Asia within the Department of State played crucial roles in defining and negotiating the U.S. position and eventual action on the conflict during this time period.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore how, despite the United States' rhetoric on communism and democracy, Truman-era policy objectives in the pre and immediate post-Independence era were predicated on practical, less altruistic or ideological concerns. Later, I will demonstrate how this disparity between rhetoric and reality was perpetuated, used to justify an extensive CIA covert action, and ultimately translated into crisis and tragedy.

Cold War Complications and Covert Action

In the early twentieth century and through the Truman presidency, the U.S. relationship with the Dutch East Indies was marked by economic dependence on the raw materials trade as well as discussions of nationalism and colonialism. After Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1949, the United States embarked on a somewhat redefined but largely similar mission in its relationship with the newly independent nation. As Indonesia started to define its own institutional path and President Sukarno began to give some representation to communist political groups, American decision makers became increasingly concerned about Indonesia's trajectory in the Cold War political system. A fresh set of policy makers took office with the inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, most notably including the dynamic pair of Dulles brothers—John Foster leading the Department of State and Allen Dulles at the helm of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which had only been formed a few years earlier in 1947. While the ideological rhetoric and practical policy goals surrounding Indonesia remained virtually the same from the Truman years to the Eisenhower presidency, disparities between actuality and rhetoric came to a head in the late 1950s.

Acting on what many historians have thought was an ideological opposition to communism, the CIA under Eisenhower carried out an extensive covert action from September 1957 to May 1958, providing in-person, American operative-led paramilitary advising, arms deliveries, and air support to rebel groups that had formed in opposition to President Sukarno's new Indonesian government. While Operation HAIK was supposedly initiated on the belief that Sukarno's government was at risk of going communist in the late 1950s, primary sources from the State Department and others show that Indonesia was not practically on the brink of a holistic communist takeover. Here, again, the actuality was entirely different from the rhetoric. Except

this time concerns over trade and sunk costs, colonialism and racism, and Indonesia's policy of nonalignment led to an extensive covert war in which the United States and its operatives were publicly implicated in a scheme to confront a nation they had purported to support on the basis of democracy and liberty for all people. The second chapter of this thesis will explore this often-overlooked episode in American intelligence history and analyze how and why U.S. rhetoric differed so substantially from reality.

In 2018, the conflict between narrative and actuality in policy towards Indonesia during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations still yields important implications for decision makers in responding to national security threats and providing reasoning for the implementation of intelligence initiatives. In addition to reconnecting the various pieces of policy and action mentioned in the work, the conclusion of this thesis will seek to briefly speak to these implications.

A Note on Sources

The source base for this thesis is unique. I was fortunate to discover a link between Truman-era policy and the president of the University of North Carolina system at the time, Frank Porter Graham. The Frank Porter Graham collection at the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection archive thus served as an essential source base for my work. The use of this collection in U.S. intelligence history is new and original. In addition to Graham's papers, my work relies heavily on material collected in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* as well as online material from the Truman and Eisenhower presidential libraries. I am grateful to each librarian and archivist who spoke to me and patiently and graciously provided guidance on this project. Furthermore, while a large volume of secondary sources on U.S. policy

and covert action towards Indonesia does not yet exist, I am indebted to those scholars who have written on the subject for providing direction and inspiration on primary sources.

CHAPTER ONE

“In the aftermath of the most terrible war in history, the people of the world need spiritual rehabilitation, economic reconstruction, and political and social advance through peace and cooperation. A prolonged dispute in any part of the world is a shock to the nerves, and a setback to the hopes of the people in the human pilgrimage toward a world of international cooperation for lasting peace and maximum production.”

- *Frank Porter Graham on behalf of the United Nations' Good Offices Committee (GOC) on Indonesia, 1947⁴*

⁴ Frank Porter Graham, “Security Council: Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question,” 29 November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 52, Frank Porter Graham Papers, in Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

By the end of World War II, Indonesia had surfaced as one of the most important strategic locations in the postwar and emerging Cold War world. The conflict in the East Indies between the Indonesian nationalists and Dutch colonialists meant more than just a run-of-the-mill struggle for independence against a colonial power; the struggle was also one of the most prominent faces of a world-wide movement that would end centuries of European colonialism across the Third World. While the conflict between The Netherlands and Indonesia embodied the fall of a nearly 500-year-old colonial empire, the involvement of the United States in the conflict signified an entirely new approach to foreign policy that would continue for the course of two presidencies, include various monumental policies, and eventually result in a poorly justified covert action. Just as it is necessary to understand the psychological and political conditions of the Cold War to understand policy towards Indonesia, it is equally necessary to understand U.S. policy toward Indonesia to properly understand the Cold War. This chapter will analyze the policy objectives of the Truman administration from the approximate end of World War II until the late 1940s and early 1950s. In doing this, exploring the prewar and wartime conditions of the U.S. relationship with the Dutch colony of Indonesia will prove essential in understanding the context that later influenced U.S. policy.

Cold War historian Andrew Roadnight calls the Truman approach towards Indonesia “an illuminative example of U.S. Cold War policy as it developed.”⁵ If U.S. strategy on Indonesia truly mirrored the objectives of the Cold War, then U.S. policy during the Cold War was infinitely complex, frequently masked in surreptitiousness, and often contradictory. Over the course of the Indonesian struggle for independence against The Netherlands (August 1945 –

⁵ Andrew Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia in the Truman and Eisenhower Years* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), x.

1953), American diplomacy sought to achieve three markedly Cold War objectives in the peripheral, Third World country: to maintain economic access to the Indonesian economy, to maintain political stability and seek democratic alignment, and finally, to mask U.S. involvement in Indonesian affairs and satisfy American public opinion while simultaneously maintaining a large degree of influence in the region. Supported by circumstances cultivated in the prewar and wartime years, these objectives resulted in a line of developmental policy that was both ideological and practical, silent but vocal, and brave yet cowardly—an approach that was distinctly Cold War and directly related to later covert developments a decade later.

The United States and Indonesian Nationalism in the Pre-War and Wartime Years

During the prewar and wartime period, the U.S. relationship with Indonesia—or the Dutch East Indies as it was known at the time—was marked by discussion of democratic and nationalistic principles, conflicting viewpoints on colonialism, and perhaps most importantly, a substantial dependency on raw materials exports from the Dutch colony. The United States, as the original “post-colonial” country, functioned as an important part of the Indonesian nationalists’ vision for their republic and American imagery constituted a significant part of the nationalists’ propaganda repertoire. While the United States served an important role for the fledgling Indonesian Republic, the United States viewed Indonesia as a vital strategic location in both the prewar and wartime world. By the middle of the Second World War, the future of the Dutch East Indies was a critical question of American postwar planning committees who were tasked with balancing U.S. anti-colonial rhetoric with its significant raw-material driven economic interests in the region—a mission that would not end with the conclusion of the war.

The idea of the United States as a staunch ideological opponent of colonialism had cemented itself as a “staple of standard American ideology” by the beginning of the twentieth century, and frequent, elaborate statements by individuals such as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt affirmed this impression in the American psyche. While the notion of the United States as an anti-colonial nation dates to the Revolutionary War, Roosevelt was likely the first and certainly the most vocal contemporary anti-colonial president. According to an account of his son, Elliot, the President thought “colonies and colonial markets” were “the problem... at the core of all chances for future peace.” Drawing on American standards of government, Roosevelt made statements in the prewar and wartime period that implied he was both practically and ideologically motivated against colonialism, even specifically mentioning “Java” in his statements on the subject:

“The colonial system means war... exploit the resources of an India, a Burma, a Java; take all the wealth out of those countries but never put anything back into them, things like education, decent standards of living, minimum health requirements—all you’re doing is storing up the kind of trouble that leads to war.”⁶

In addition to its prominent role in the political psyche of American citizens, the reputation of the United States as an anti-colonial nation permeated beyond its native borders. Addressing the Dutch-Indonesian conflict to audiences in the United States, a British officer complained in a *Harper’s Magazine* opinion editorial, “Give us liberty or give us death... Your damned American revolution is still giving us trouble.”⁷ Despite the “trouble” that the U.S.’s so-called anti-colonialism gave its allies, anti-colonialism continued to be an active and conspicuous part

⁶ Elliot Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York, N.Y.: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 74-75.

⁷ Frederick E. Crockett, “How the Trouble Began in Java,” *Harper’s Magazine*, March 1946, 279-80. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

of American rhetoric throughout the wartime and postwar period, with Truman Secretary of State Dean Acheson referencing the U.S. colonial past as deep into the conflict as 1954, stating, “We ourselves are the first colony in modern times to have won independence. We have a natural sympathy with those who would follow our example.”⁸ In at least two examples from the wartime period, the United States appeared to put actual policy to their anti-colonial discourse, giving hope to colonized people and nationalists in not only Indonesia, but across Asia as a whole.

The Atlantic Charter and the Decolonization of the Philippines

For Americans and nationalists around the world, the Atlantic Charter of 1942 seemed to confirm the U.S. commitment to political freedom and liberty for all oppressed peoples, including those colonized by European powers. Published on August 14, 1941 with both Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill as signees, the charter put forth eight “certain common principles” and “national policies” that rightly excited hopeful nationalists and those under oppressive colonial governments. Particularly relevant to such causes were the following principles relating to Allied governments:

“First, their [Allied] countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned; Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them; Fourth, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity; Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with

⁸“United States Department of State, “U.S. Department of State Bulletin June 21, 1954,” “Indonesia.” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Southeast Asia*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989.

the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security.”⁹

The charter posits that these statements are the principles “on which [the Allied powers] base their hopes for a better future for the world.” Later confirming its worldwide applications, Roosevelt stated in a radio address that the charter “not only applies to the parts of the world that border on the Atlantic, but to the whole world.”¹⁰ With promises of territorial, economic, political, and social autonomy for “all peoples,” it is easy to understand why many people considered the Atlantic Charter a condemnation of postwar colonialism.

Furthermore, the promised decolonization of the Philippines by the American government served as a specific rallying point of hope for Asian populations colonized by Western powers and seemed to assure other groups of Asian nationalists that the United States would side with the cause of decolonization in the postwar era. Despite their supposedly anti-colonial heritage, the United States had brutally colonized the Philippines since winning the rights to the territory in the Spanish-American War. After that war killed several thousand combatants and resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, the United States administered a colonial government not unlike those mandated by their European counterparts. The United States declared its intention to decolonize the Philippines following the onset of the war and the occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese for various pragmatic and ideological reasons. Although the United States stated their intention to free the territory in the middle of the

⁹ “The Atlantic Charter,” 14 August 1941, Yale Law School: The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

¹⁰ Frederick Gruin, “OUTSTANDING EVENTS AND MAIN TRENDS OF THE YEAR IN REVIEW.” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, Dec 27, 1942. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

war, the Philippines were officially granted independence on July 4, 1946.¹¹ Only a few decades removed from a bloody colonial war, the United States wasted no time in appropriating Philippine independence into their supposedly anti-colonial image. Secretary of State Hull stated in 1942 that “The President and I and the entire Government, earnestly favor freedom for all dependent peoples at the earliest date practicable,” arguing that “dealing with the Philippines situation” offers “a perfect example of how a nation should treat a colony or dependency.”¹²

American history, rhetoric, and contemporary actions such as the Atlantic Charter and the liberation of the Philippines resulted in praise from various and sometimes-surprising Asian nationalist leaders—including Ho Chi Minh and Mao Zedong. Consistent with U.S. rhetoric about their anti-colonial heritage, Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese revolutionary, expressed admiration for Jefferson, Lincoln, and “the traditional American devotion to freedom, believing that the United States would oppose the reimposition of colonial rule in Asia [after the end of World War II].”¹³ Even Mao Zedong, the Chinese communist revolutionary, expressed admiration for George Washington. For these and other nationalist leaders, the Atlantic Charter, the liberation of the Philippines, and the eventual charter of the United Nations (UN) in addition

¹¹ A.B. Feuer, *America At War: The Philippines, 1898-1913* (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2002), xi.

¹² Cordell Hull, “Secretary Hull to John Winant,” November 20, 1942, in *Foreign Relation Indonesia 1942*, 746-47. Cited in Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War: The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-49* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 56.

¹³ Ibid.

to American historical and cultural factors implied that the United States would give oppressed peoples a “sympathetic hearing” in their struggles against colonial powers.¹⁴

Indonesian Nationalists

Given U.S. anti-colonial statements and actions, Indonesian nationalist leaders were vocal and specific about their admiration for American political ideals, and leaders borrowed the American vernacular of liberty and freedom (sometimes literally) for propaganda purposes in their struggle for independence. In a report from during the war, agents stated that Indonesian pro-nationalist propaganda often quoted Abraham Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence. At times, the quotes could be seen on the sides of buses or buildings, especially early in Japanese occupation, when nationalist propaganda was tolerated and even cultivated by occupation leaders. Nationalist leaders were further encouraged by America’s proactivity in signing the Atlantic Charter and stating their intention to make the Philippines an independent nation. Arguing for the support of the United States in 1945, Hatta asked, “Does not the Atlantic Charter carry the solemn assurance of the Big Powers that they ‘recognize the right of all peoples to live under a government of their own choice?’”¹⁵

Economic Interests

Despite anti-colonialism’s prominent place in American rhetoric and propaganda, economic interests most prominently motivated U.S. policy towards Indonesia in the prewar and wartime years. In *Colonialism and the Cold War*, Robert McMahon argues that at times American

¹⁴ McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 57.

¹⁵ Ibid, 41.

officials “overemphasized the moralistic and idealistic underpinnings of anti-colonialism, almost to the exclusion of other factors,” in relation to Indonesia when, in reality, “the U.S. interest in the Netherlands East Indies lay primarily in maintaining equal access to the rich resources of the islands.” Data from the U.S. Department of Commerce confirm this assertion. Even in 1929, over a decade before the start of World War II, the American share of the Indonesian export market was 9.7%, and its share in the export trade was 13.5%.¹⁶ By 1940, the East Indies was the largest source of American imports in Asia, and the colony was the U.S.’s fourth largest export market in the Asia-Pacific region. This market penetration, while significant in itself, would likely have been much greater if not for Dutch regulation that excluded American businesses from a larger share of the colony’s raw materials, an issue that led Secretary of State Cordell Hull, in a statement on the U.S. relationship to the East Indies, to call for “equality of opportunity in trade and enterprise.”¹⁷

In comparison to the American ideal of free market capitalism, the Dutch colonial economic model served to primarily, “if not exclusively,” benefit the colonizing European mother country. Following this model, the Dutch imposed several trade regulations that were especially damaging to U.S. interests in the raw materials of the Dutch East Indies. Without these restrictive trade policies, the United States would have greater access to the Indonesian economy—leading some officials to consider the possibilities if the Dutch were eliminated from the region.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Division of Regional Information, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Far Eastern Section, “Markets of the Netherlands East Indies,” Trade Information Bulletin no. 509 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928).

¹⁷ Joseph Grew, “The Ambassador in Japan to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS 1940 IV*, 381-7. Cited in Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia in the Truman and Eisenhower Years*, 3.

American oil companies relied substantially on exports from Indonesia but were constantly forced to fight against Dutch regulations to operate in the colony. With its rich oil reserves, the Dutch East Indies was a popular location for transnational oil corporations, and American oil companies had been involved in the territory since the early twentieth century. By 1915, Standard Oil Company was well established on the island of Sumatra, and other U.S. corporations such as Texaco and Gulf were preparing to enter into business in the East Indies. However, the Netherlands government soon determined that Dutch interests were damaged by the increased competition from international companies, and in 1917, the colonizing government passed a law mandating that all petroleum companies operating in the Indies be truly Dutch controlled and capitalized. The law also gave the government the option to “buy back and develop any promising oil fields uncovered by foreign firms.” While Standard Oil was able to negotiate a deal with the Netherlands government, other American firms were effectively barred from operating anywhere in the colony. By 1941, these restrictions enabled the Royal Dutch Company to produce nearly seventy-five-percent of oil in the Indies. American oil holdings in the territory remained substantial despite these regulations. That same year, U.S. oil investment was valued at seventy million dollars, with Standard Oil producing almost all of the remaining twenty-five percent of petroleum in the region.¹⁸

Before the invention of synthetic rubber during World War II, the United States also relied heavily upon rubber exports from Indonesia, but were again jilted by heavy Dutch regulations—leaving American officials concerned about the possibility of a “shut out” in the postwar period. Southeast Asia was the world’s largest exporter of rubber, and the raw material was essential to not only American industry, but also to a large variety of daily, average activities. Between thirty

¹⁸ *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 48-51.

and forty percent of American rubber was imported from the East Indies by the year 1940.¹⁹ Similar to oil production, however, Dutch economic restrictions greatly limited the trade of rubber. These restrictions were “equally” as damaging as oil regulations, and led Abbot Moffat, the Chief of the Southeast Asian Division at the time to accuse the Netherlands of forming a “rubber cartel.” In the view of the American government, the United States economy was suffering “as a result of the European colonial powers’ control over a vital resource—a condition that American officials would not soon forget.”²⁰

During the prewar and wartime periods, the U.S.’s anti-colonial rhetoric was ultimately always mixed with, if not dominated by, economic aims when the future of Indonesia was concerned. While Dutch regulation prevented true free market access to raw materials in the region, the United States nevertheless remained heavily dependent on the colony. Ultimately, this reliance restricted, mitigated, and at some times, prompted the U.S.’s anticolonial rhetoric. This trend would continue into the Truman era.

Policy Objectives in the Truman Era

Given their newly affirmed world power status, their prewar and wartime anti-colonial rhetoric, and their sustained economic interests in the region, the United States government and the Truman administration in particular was in a unique position to influence the conflict between the government of the Netherlands and Indonesian nationalists. Combined with the pressures of the developing conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, these

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Industrial Reference Service, “U.S. Trade with the Netherlands Indies in 1940” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 4.

²⁰ McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 51.

conditions led the Truman administration to pursue three specific, contradictory, and characteristically Cold War policy objectives in relation to Indonesian independence. These objectives were to secure access to the Indonesian raw materials market, to maintain political stability and seek democratic, Western alignment with whatever government structure emerged in the colony, and finally, to exert a substantial amount of influence while avoiding direct, public intervention in the conflict.

Securing American Economic Interests

In formulating American foreign policy towards Indonesia, the first, and perhaps primary, U.S. objective was opening the region to free market capitalism and American investment. For the previous three decades, Dutch regulation had stifled American interests in resources such as rubber, oil, and tin—materials that would be just as essential in the postwar period. Whether this market access was achieved under an independent Indonesian government or a European colonial government was of substantially less importance to policymakers in the Truman administration. Thus, the Truman administration sought to support policy that first and foremost ensured American access to the economy of the territory in question.

Soon after the Netherlands' repossession of Indonesia, an American cargo ship was boarded and subdued by Dutch authorities in a Javanese port under allegations that the ship had violated the Netherlands' increasingly strict export and import regulations—this instance, in particular, would prove incredibly important as American policy makers determined whether colonialism or independence would ensure greater market access for raw materials. After the reoccupation of much of Indonesia by the Netherlands, the United States presumed the colony to once again be open to trade. In 1947, the Isbrandsten Steamship Company, an American firm, sent the S.S.

Martin Behrman to Cheribon on a mission to pick up raw materials cargo. State Department communication between Foote and the Secretary of State communicate knowledge of the expected arrival of the *Martin Behrman* as well as knowledge of the increased amount of regulation the Dutch had placed on trade since their reoccupation. Per Dutch regulations, only a select few products could be exported from Indonesian ports. Materials gleaned from European-owned plantations were exclusive to the Dutch, and among the “native” products available, only coffee, rubber, tobacco, and rattan originating from Sumatra could “presumably” be exported to countries other than the Netherlands.²¹ In the face of these regulations, the State Department received assurance from the Dutch colonial government that the American cargo ship was safe to enter Indonesian ports. However, from the time the *Martin Behrman* left its point of origin in the Philippines on January 29 to when it arrived in Cheribon on February 5, the Netherlands government had introduced even greater regulations on foreign trade. Upon arrival, the Dutch navy boarded the American commercial ship, confiscated its cargo, and subdued its crew. The incident caused an upheaval in both public opinion and diplomacy. In a letter from the Secretary of State, Marshall, to the Dutch ambassador dated March 3, 1947, the Secretary wrote,

“While the avowed purpose of regulations is to prevent export stolen property and assure compensation [sic] lawful owners, practical effort is to paralyze trade with NEI, and to prolong and intensify economic disturbances already resulting from world shortages commodities covered by these regulations. Moreover, regulations are so inclusive as to prohibit importation to NEI of many articles urgently needed for civilian needs.”²²

²¹ Foote, “The Consul General at Batavia to the Secretary of State,” Batavia, 11 February 1947, United States Department of State, “Netherlands East Indies.” *Foreign Relations of the United States, East Asia, 1947, Volume IV* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), 898-899.

²² Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy of the Netherlands,” Washington, 3 March 1947, *FRUS* “Netherlands East Indies,” 1947, 899-890.

The Secretary ended his letter by urging the Dutch ambassador to consider “the broader consequences” the Dutch regulations would “have in relation to political and economic world stabilization.” Although the United States never received a formal apology for the incident, the *Martin Behrman* illustrates the emphasis the Truman administration placed on economic access for not only the benefit of their own citizens, but for “practical stability in the Indies and South East Asia as a whole.” For these reasons, the administration sought a quick and effective way to ensure market access during the conflict.

With its poor structure and hastily approved timeline, the Truman administration’s favored solution for the Indonesian conflict—the Linggadjati Agreement—exemplifies the primary importance of raw materials procurement in the minds of American policy makers. Originally negotiated under the necessity of a cease-fire, the Linggadjati Agreement shallowly stabilized relations between the nationalist republicans and Dutch delegation and opened up so-called “republican” ports to international trade. The agreement did not set terms for future arbitration on the topic of Indonesian independence, nor did it establish enforcement mechanisms for ensuring international access to the NEI’s economy. Arbitrated by the Lord Killearn, who represented the United Kingdom’s dominion over the territory per the Potsdam Agreement, Linggadjati also allowed for the withdrawal of the British from the conflict.²³ After the *Behrman* incident, both American and British officials pushed strongly for the Dutch and nationalist parties to consent to Linggadjati, with Secretary Marshall stating before its ratification that the U.S. government “earnestly urges that some procedures be effected [in the agreement] by means of which commodities covered in regulations can promptly reach channels of world trade subject

²³ McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 133-152.

protection rights of lawful owners whatever nationality.”²⁴ The agreement was ratified following the *Behrman* incident on March 25, 1947. While the State Department officially argued that the agreement represented “an equitable and working compromise,” Secretary Marshall expressed doubts about its precarious nature to President Truman, calling it “problematic.”²⁵ The Secretary’s reservations proved prescient, as the agreement fell apart soon after its ratification, and military stand offs between the nationalist military and Dutch colonial forces as well as Dutch regulations against the international trade of Indonesian goods ignited once more. Nonetheless, the staunch U.S. support of Linggadjati, an unstable agreement without any set terms for decolonization or political freedoms for Indonesian nationalists, exemplifies the foremost importance of economic access in the minds of Truman policymakers. One lasting effect of the agreement, however, was the withdrawal of the British from post-war governance of the territory. With the Dutch and Indonesian nationalists in a seemingly never-ending military and political dispute, Britain’s withdrawal left a power vacuum in the region. Taking a distinctly Cold War approach and believing that some form of nationalist government would eventually prevail, the Truman administration believed that the United States had a responsibility to fill the vacuum before the USSR did.

Political and Economic Stability

The Truman administration’s second objective was to maintain political and economic stability and seek democratic alignment, a simple goal complicated by both the demands of the

²⁴ Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy of the Netherlands,” Washington, 3 March 1947, *FRUS* “Netherlands East Indies” 1947, *Volume IV*, 899.

²⁵ McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 152.

developing Cold War world and the U.S.'s traditional alliances and commitment to rebuilding Europe in the immediate postwar era. In the developing Cold War world, policymakers designated colonies as the frontlines of the fight against communism, with officials arguing "the very existence of the United States would be at stake if the Soviets replaced the European powers in their colonies."²⁶ Nonetheless, American officials realized the delicate nature of their anti-colonial reputation and, in turn, how quickly a nationalist nation could turn towards communism if the United States proved disingenuous in its rhetoric. By 1948, the State Department and administration as a whole had come to believe that Hatta and Sukarno's nationalist government's "survival" was "essential both to defeat the communist threat and allow a settlement to be reached."²⁷ Given Indonesia's importance in confronting the USSR, one of the administration's first priorities became to "firmly align" Indonesia with the "West."²⁸ On the European front, the Marshall Plan, an equally distinctive Cold War policy, demanded that the United States simultaneously work to support the postwar Dutch economy—an economy that would be badly damaged by the loss of its colony in Southeast Asia. In order to preserve political and economic stability in both Indonesia and the Netherlands while simultaneously seeking democratic alignment with the nationalist government, the United States pursued a policy of maintaining surface-level good will with both parties, remaining officially unallied in the conflict. Combined with pressure to recognize "the natural aspirations of the Indonesian peoples," the administration defined an objective that was two-fold and conflicting.

²⁶ Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia*, 48.

²⁷ Ibid, 49.

²⁸ Ibid, 80.

While the administration sought to protect the struggling Dutch economy, policy makers increasingly realized the potential of the Indonesian nationalist movement as one of the best defenses against communism. Rather than taking a firm position on the side of either party, the United States decided to maintain the good will of both parties, remaining politically ambiguous while simultaneously speaking to the value of both positions. This sharply limiting strategy was, in the view of the Truman administration, the only alternative to the logical extension of their anticolonial and anticommunist rhetoric.

For centuries, the Dutch economy had relied on their colony for much of their prosperity, and in the postwar world, the United States viewed economic strength as the primary requirement of building political stability on the European continent. Thus, the United States attempted to maintain good will with the Dutch by attempting to never question their colonial authority outright, and even quietly providing aid to the colonial government in the immediate postwar years. As McMahon quotes, some Dutch imperialists in the postwar era were fond of saying that Indonesia was “the cork on which The Netherlands’ prosperity floats.”²⁹ Fearing a collapse of the Dutch economy if the United States were to outwardly support independence, some actors in the State Department believed that the Dutch could protect the colony from “communist subversion” while simultaneously promoting stability in the region.³⁰ In the immediate postwar years, the Truman administration provided monetary aid in addition to excess military equipment, including vehicles, clothing, and other non-weapon items to the colonial

²⁹ McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 45.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

government as a sign of good will.³¹ In an effort to broadcast neutrality, American officials mandated that all U.S. insignia be removed from gifted materials. This did not always work, however, and in a conversation with Sukarno, a State Department official noted that he was displeased to see the Dutch military patrolling Indonesian islands in vehicles bearing the American flag or wearing leftover American uniforms.³² In this way, American efforts to maintain goodwill with the Dutch while simultaneously working to maintain the favor of Indonesian nationalists were complicated and stilted. Pursuing their objectives with Indonesian nationalists would prove equally as difficult for the administration.

While Indonesians pleaded for American support on the basis of anti-colonialism and political freedom, the United States, worried about the potential of an anti-Western or communist uprising, sought to avoid direct responsibility for colonialist-allied policy in Indonesia for deterrent reasons rather than ideological ones. As the communist threat grew greater in the minds of policy makers, the United States undertook a delicate maneuver: they sought to firmly align the Indonesian nationalist party with the “West” while also maintaining the goodwill of the Dutch colonialists. Cochran and Asian experts within the State Department believed that if the U.S. did not keep up with anti-colonialist rhetoric and show some measure of good will towards the cause of Indonesian independence, Washington would be unable to “escape blame in the eyes of native nationalists if colonial systems were restored intact.” So-called “Asianists” in the administration argued that the Asian continent was the “wave of the future,” and if the United States were too outward in its support for the Netherlands, “Third World” countries would lose

³¹ Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 1999), 81.

³² McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*, 68.

respect for the U.S. and deviate towards communism.³³ While Cochran argued that Asians were particularly “susceptible to successful demonstrations of power,” the State Department eventually took a less radical approach, combining “studied noninvolvement” and conversations with individuals such as Hatta and Sukarno to assure the nationalists of their belief in the eventual liberation of European colonies, with the hope that such assurances of American rhetoric would prompt the nationalists to firmly align themselves with the democratic West should they gain their independence. In this vague, benevolent, and paternalistic way, the U.S. sought to avoid direct responsibility while ensuring stability and hoping for alignment. As Roadnight states, nationalists were not as receptive to this strategy as the administration might have hoped:

“The sense that American policy towards Indonesia was not driven by a ‘love’ of country but by a belief that a strong and nationalistic Indonesia was better than a communist one only confirmed in people’s minds the feeling that America’s policy was determined more by its own interests than Indonesia’s.”³⁴

Fearing the imposition of the USSR on the conflict in Indonesia, the Truman administration sought to exert as much influence as possible to promote stability with the Dutch and align the nationalists against communism. However, with American public opinion in mind, officials sought to remain blameless while still managing to exert a large amount of influence in the conflict. This seemingly contradictory strategy forms the basis of the administration’s third strategic objective: to retain deniability and satisfy American public opinion while simultaneously maintaining a large degree of influence in the conflict over Indonesia’s independence. In the end, this objective led to several distinctly Cold War policy initiatives

³³ Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia*, 102.

³⁴ Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia*, 102.

during the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, including the definition of a “Defensive Perimeter” and the establishment of the United Nations Good Offices Committee.

Avoiding Blame

Although the postwar United States was primarily engaged with Japan in a military and infrastructural sense, the lack of willingness to explicitly engage in Indonesia was reinforced by “political considerations”—namely, a complicated swelling of public opinion against the Dutch colonizers but also against direct American involvement in the conflict. Contemporary newspaper and magazine editorials provide a look at how this public opinion operated and appeared to policy makers. For example, a 1945 editorial in *New Republic* wondered what “moral obligation” the United States had to “maintain the Dutch empire by force.”³⁵ Keeping the political considerations of the American populace in mind, the Truman administration’s solution was to create and lobby for policy that would create meaningful progress in the conflict without taking substantial public action.

Acheson’s introduction of a “Defensive Perimeter”, later translated into feasible policy in 1950 through NSC 68, allowed the administration to profoundly change the U.S. policy approach towards Indonesia while avoiding blame by tucking their Indonesian initiatives discretely into a larger geographic bulwark against the Soviet Union. The authors of NSC 68 argued that the only way to defeat the Soviet Union was to “practically demonstrate the integrity and vitality of our system” and the “moral and material strength of the free world.” Reluctant to use force, the document posits that the only way to succeed in the Cold War was to effectively demonstrate

³⁵ “Revolution in Indonesia,” *New Republic*, 29 October 1945, 558-59. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“the superiority of the idea of freedom by its constructive application” and to “develop a healthy international community” that was resistant to communism and friendly towards U.S. interests. The document notes that threats to a “healthy international community” are most present in Southeast Asia as the “politico-economic situation” and recent communist revolution in China made the region especially vulnerable to the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the brief suggests “a rapid build-up of political, economic and military strength in the free world” as the only viable course of action in the Cold War.³⁶ One of the most essential aspects of NSC 68 as it applied to Indonesia and the threat of communism in the region was the development of a “Defensive Perimeter” that would run from the Aleutians through Japan and the Ryukyus to the Philippines, enveloping Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia in its course. The “perimeter” ran from military bases to military base, effectively designating Indonesia as a quasi-protectorate without anyone noticing.³⁷ The rhetoric of NSC 68 and the development of the Defensive Perimeter covertly placed Indonesia at the near-center of American Cold War foreign policy, effectively declaring that the Cold War would be fought on the periphery.

Using the United Nations

Even though the United States originally opposed the introduction of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict as an issue to the United Nations for reasons of blame, direct action, and Soviet involvement, the administration decided to use the United Nations as a platform to have a considerable amount of influence while maintaining the image of a neutral arbiter. Thus, the

³⁶ “A Report to the National Security Council – NSC 68,” April 12, 1950. President’s Secretary’s File, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, 10-11, 21, 30, 54.

³⁷ Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia*, 92.

United States agreed to the formation of the Good Offices Committee (GOC), a special committee of the UN Security Council on which it would hold a primary, supposedly impartial role in solving the issue of Indonesian colonization or independence. The committee's work would be unbinding and would essentially offer recommendations for the parties in conflict on how to proceed. While the majority of non-permanent members of the Security Council wanted debate and action on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, the United States sought "in all things" to avoid international embarrassment. If a U.S.-led United Nations initiative failed, the implications for both the legitimacy of the newly arranged United Nations could be incredibly damaging—not to mention the implications for the United States in their moral fight against communism. In order to avoid direct responsibility while still having a strong voice in the conflict, the United States proposed the creation of the GOC as a special committee of the Security Council. Although functioning as supposedly neutral arbiter between representatives of the Netherlands and Indonesia, the formation of the committee gave the United States an "equi-vocal" platform regarding direct action in the conflict.³⁸ The U.S. representative to the GOC would set agendas for conversation and articulate the official opinions of the committee, essentially controlling the narrative under the guise of neutrality. In this way, the formation of the GOC serves as a prime example of the administration's third policy objective. As committee records reveal, the GOC gave the United States and its representative—University of North Carolina president Frank Porter Graham—a powerful platform to covertly direct Truman administration policy objectives while avoiding express blame or public involvement.

Frank Porter Graham and the Good Offices Committee

³⁸ Roadnight, *United States Policy Towards Indonesia*, 35-36.

The GOC's structure and activities allowed the United States to "direct developments" in the Indonesian conflict without appearing as a major player. While the United States technically functioned as an arbitrator, the role allowed the U.S. to define much of the activities of the committee. This meant that the person appointed to represent the U.S. had the power to direct conversations and agenda items that would further the United States' policy objectives, namely those relating to Cold War alignment, political, and economic aims. As documents from the Frank Porter Graham Papers show, this is precisely what happened throughout the course of the committee's existence.

In October 1947, President Truman appointed Frank Porter Graham—then president of the University of North Carolina—to serve as the United States representative on the GOC. In addition to congratulating the university president on his appointment and speaking to his character as a statesman, letters to Graham illustrate the perceived importance of his post on the GOC, and by extension, the significance of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict to the general public. In one letter, a friend of Graham stated, "It makes me very humble to feel that the affairs of such a troubled world have been cast upon the shoulders of such a gentle person as yourself."³⁹ Robert W. Barnett, an Asia expert in the Far Eastern Division of the State Department, wrote to Graham that he got "great personal satisfaction from knowing that our government is sending a 'liberal statesmen' to a part of the world, which wants to be reminded of the great American tradition of humanitarianism and progressive democracy."⁴⁰ After his appointment, Graham received

³⁹ Francis Winslow to Frank Porter Graham, October 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1980, Scan 81, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Barnett to Frank Porter Graham, October 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1980, Scan 91, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

numerous pleadings from those on both sides of the conflict in Indonesia, including various pro-Dutch accounts of violence in Sumatra and Sulawesi as well as letters from socialist groups in the United States who referred to Graham as “comrade” and wished him luck in forwarding the cause of Indonesian independence.⁴¹ As a relatively unknown but well-loved and dedicated figure, Graham was, in the eyes of the Truman himself, the perfect choice for the mediator position on the GOC. A talented writer and passionate supporter of the administration, Graham began his appointment with the intention to not only arbitrate between the representatives of the Dutch and Indonesian governments, but also to promulgate American policy.

The work of the GOC would last from fall 1947 into 1948, with the committee traveling together to New York City, Sydney, and finally Jakarta to familiarize themselves with the conflict and offer proposals for solutions.⁴² As mandated by the Security Council, the committee was comprised of a representative named by the Netherlands, a representative named by the Indonesian republican government, and a neutral arbiter from the United States. The Indonesians and Dutch were required to name their representatives from other UN nations. The Netherlands chose Belgium as their representative while the Indonesian republican government chose Australia to negotiate on their behalf. In traveling to three different locations, the committee took time to educate themselves on the issue before entering into official talks and negotiations in Jakarta, which were directed by Graham. Once the committee arrived in Jakarta in November, the representatives decided to hold their negotiations in what they perceived to be the most neutral territory available: a United States naval ship. As the arbiter of the committee, Graham

⁴¹ Interestingly, Graham was accused of being a socialist or a communist on several occasions. For more information, see Sitterson, J. Carlyle. “Graham, Frank Porter.” *NCpedia / Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁴² Sources from the Frank Porter Graham Collection refer to Jakarta as its antiquated name “Batavia.” For the purposes of consistency, it is referred to here as its modern name.

articulated the findings and opinions of the group, producing several lengthy policy memos and documents. Aboard the *USS Renville*, Graham set the agenda for and negotiated talks between the representatives. While Graham was careful to note that the GOC's assistance in the conflict was "not binding," the work and ultimate recommendations of the committee would guide UN policy and influence the ultimate agreement between the Indonesian Republic and the Netherlands. Thus, in his capacity as the arbiter and reporter for the committee, Graham—and thereby the United States—articulated the opinions that would shape the beginnings of the Indonesian Republic and the international community's relationship to the nation for decades to come.

Ultimately, Graham's GOC findings directly reflect the two-fold, contradictory, furtive, and ambiguous nature of the Truman administration's foreign policy towards Indonesia. As a supposedly neutral arbiter, Graham's official statements for the committee fall directly in line with the administration's distinctly cold war objectives: to maintain economic access and the cultivation of a free market in Indonesia, to maintain stability and seeking alignment, and to keep the United States out of a direct role while still preserving their ability to influence the conflict substantially.

In the final report of the committee, Graham emphasized the importance of Indonesia's raw material production and the world's access to their export market. In the beginning of the report, Graham stated, "events on these islands have repercussions... with economic reverberations around the world." Graham, as the arbiter and reporter for the other members of the GOC, acknowledged the importance of raw material production in Indonesia, stating that some of the world's "most important foods, medicines, raw materials, and motive power for industrial production" can be found in Indonesia. To Graham and the Good Offices Committee, economic

access to raw materials was directly connected the armed conflict between the Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch colonizers, and the prolonged conflict was actively hurting the American and world economies. The report argued that one should not “hear the sounds of bitter distrust, killings, and destruction, but of all-out production of rice... rubber, tin, petroleum.” What Indonesia needs, according the GOC’s official report, is “economic reconstruction” in order to achieve a “world of international cooperation for lasting peace and *maximum production* [emphasis added].” In equating “lasting peace” with “maximum production,” Graham illustrates the significance a free and stable Indonesian economy as a policy objective.⁴³ In order to achieve economic stability and “maximum production” for all parties, Graham argued for a loosening of Dutch trade restrictions toward a free market while seeking to not “uproot the economic interests of the metropolitan power,” as, according to Graham, such a circumstance would be “to the latter’s disadvantage no less than to the former’s.”⁴⁴ The report urges Indonesia not to rapidly industrialize and to maintain its production of raw materials, referencing the human rights abuses of countries that have nationalized their economies and calling for an “evolution, not revolution.”⁴⁵ While this statement is undoubtedly bound up in Cold War biases against the USSR, it nonetheless tracks with American policy objectives for maintaining access to the islands’ raw materials. The context-setting and incremental recommendations Graham gave on

⁴³ Graham, “Security Council: Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question,” Batavia, 29 November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 51-52, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

⁴⁴ Graham, “The United States and Dependent Territories,” November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 3, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

⁴⁵ Graham, “Security Council: Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question,” Batavia, 29 November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 51-52, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

behalf of the committee reveal an agenda to open and stabilize the Indonesian economy—an objective that neatly matches another clearly defined strategy of the Truman administration.

Furthermore, the weight that Graham assigns to “political and social advance” and “world peace” throughout his authorship of GOC documents highlights the strategic importance of alignment and stability in the Indonesian conflict, an exact mirror of Truman administration policy. Graham made several mentions to the rights of nations to “liberty,” “freedom,” and “self determination,” and stated that these issues should determine which side United States should take in disputes between other nations. With these markedly Western, democratic principles in mind, the GOC document suggested an apprenticeship agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands, in which the Indonesian government would learn how to create a stable, democratic nation. Mentioning that the American public felt “strong bonds of sympathy and understanding with both sides of colonial conflicts,” Graham wrote that it was “incumbent upon the metropolitan power to prepare the dependent people for the attainment of self-government at the earliest possible time.” On the other hand, Graham wrote that an unstable nationalistic government could not offer the “personal freedoms” characteristic of a Western, democratic nation.⁴⁶ As evidenced in his writing, Graham, and by extension the GOC, clearly imply that the natural aspiration of the Indonesian nationalists should be a democratic, U.S. aligned government. In fact, this is the only option presented through the committee’s apprenticeship recommendation. Graham and the GOC believed that if Indonesia and the Netherlands were able to shape the former colony into a democratic and Western-aligned nation, they would be fulfilling “the faith

⁴⁶ Graham, “The United States and Dependent Territories,” November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 1-3, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

and hopes of mankind.”⁴⁷ By pursuing a discussion and recommendation that would set Indonesia on a path for democratic, Western-aligned nation building, the Graham and the Good Offices Committee satisfied another of the Truman organizations major policy initiatives.

Finally, Graham makes a point throughout his writings on the Indonesian conflict to stress the importance of gradual, incremental steps that the Indonesian nationalist and Dutch government should take, markedly without the official political, economic, or military intervention of international actors—namely, the United States. The GOC’s proposed apprenticeship status would keep the nationalist Indonesian government under the influence of the West without directly implicating the United States in its nation building. The program as proposed by the GOC would allow the United States to maintain economic access to Indonesia’s raw materials, guide Indonesia on a path of democratic Western alignment, and limit the scope of blame should the venture fail. In this way, Graham’s work on a UN council epitomizes the developing form of idealized Cold War intervention.

Conclusion

Addressing the UN general body in the committee’s final report, Graham pleaded with the Indonesian Republic and the Netherlands to “not separately, in distrust, betray those hopes of peace, but rather let us all together in this strategic place and in this strategic time fulfill the faith and hopes of mankind.”⁴⁸ To Graham and the GOC, the conflict in Indonesia spoke to not only

⁴⁷ Graham, “Security Council: Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question,” Batavia, 29 November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 52, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

⁴⁸ Graham, “Security Council: Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question,” Batavia, 29 November 1947, Indonesia: 1947, Folder 1981, Scan 52, Frank Porter Graham Papers.

the core of foreign policy, but also to humanity's faith in the future of democracy. In giving voice to the perceived high stakes of a seemingly peripheral conflict, Graham, the GOC, and the Truman administration argued their policy from a distinctly Cold War perspective. Informed by U.S. rhetoric, policies, and economic dependencies in the prewar and wartime years, the Truman administration pursued three characteristically Cold War policy objectives in the immediate postwar period: to maintain economic access to the Indonesian economy, to maintain political stability and seek democratic alignment, and finally, to maintain deniability and satisfy American public opinion while seeking to have a substantial impact on the fledgling Indonesian nation.

This high-stakes approach to matters in Indonesia would continue well into the next decade and presidency, in which decision makers followed the Truman administration's precedent in crafting foreign policy towards a newly independent Indonesia. As the Cold War escalated in the subsequent years, the Eisenhower administration would use many of the Truman administration's policy objectives on Indonesia to form the reasoning for an extensive yet poorly justified covert intervention in the country.

CHAPTER TWO

*“Why the f*ck did we come?”*

- *Tony Poe, CIA Paramilitary Advisor to Indonesian P.R.R.I rebel forces, commenting on the reasoning behind his assigned operation. March 1958.*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 1999), 81.

Intelligence historians generally characterize the 1950s as the “heyday” of covert action in the United States. The preferred weapon in the earliest years of the Cold War, the CIA often used covert action to combat what U.S. leaders deemed to be communist threats in an increasingly polarized world. Operation HAIK, which lasted in an official capacity from September 1957 to May 1958, is regarded as a classic example of anti-communist-motivated covert action from this exemplary period in U.S. intelligence history. Alarmed by leftward political trends and communist electoral victories in Indonesia’s democratically elected central government, the United States carried out what is widely regarded as one of the most extensive covert actions in U.S. history to date, employing paramilitary advising, arms deliveries, and air support to aid rebel groups that had formed in opposition to the central Indonesian government. According to many scholars, all of these actions were carried out by the United States in the name of anti-communism.

Even if the original justification behind Operation HAIK was the containment of communism in Southeast Asia—a notion that secondary sources largely affirm—early in the operation it was clear that Indonesia would not follow the prescribed Cold War script; the country, by the judgment of State Department officials and others, was not on the brink of a holistic communist takeover politically, ideologically, or practically. Despite this knowledge, CIA support for covert arms deliveries, paramilitary advising, and air support to anti-Jakarta Indonesian rebel groups continued, muddying the traditional anti-communist justification of the covert operation. Thus, even though many scholars largely maintain that Cold War-era fears were the definitive and final reasoning behind Operation HAIK, alternate justifications to this conventional wisdom are needed to paint a more complete picture of the reasoning behind CIA covert operations in Indonesia. Ultimately, the Eisenhower Administration followed a practical

precedent set earlier by the Truman administration—alternatively justifying Operation HAIK through the consideration of sunk costs and other economic concerns, a foreign policy that was at least partly informed by racism, and perhaps most importantly, Indonesia’s policy of nonalignment.

Operation HAIK—Culmination of Disparity

At its most basic level, CIA intervention in Indonesia from 1957 to 1958 was borne of conflicts between certain groups, namely the conflict between the central Indonesian government on the island of Java, made up almost exclusively of individuals belonging to the Javanese ethnic group, and the non-Javanese ethnic groups over which the central government presided, most notably the Minahasans, Acehnese, Batak, and Minangkabau. These diverse ethnic groups, comprised of Muslims, Christians, nationalistic Sumatrans and others, felt that they had little to no voice in the post-colonial Indonesian government. Conflict between these groups on the issue of governance began even before Indonesia gained its independence from the Dutch in 1949. Sumatra petitioned for independence before a centralized and independent Indonesia was even created, and conflict continued soon after the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia with the Acehnese and Batak revolting against the authority of the central government in 1953.⁵⁰ Ultimately, while tensions with Javanese elitists had existed for decades, by 1956 the most recent—and most internationally inflammatory—point of contention between the central government and the rebel groups revolved around one word: communism.

In the years immediately following independence from the Dutch, Indonesia held “relatively fair and free” elections, and it was via the legitimate, democratic 1955 election that

⁵⁰ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 2-22.

the Sukarno government came to power.⁵¹ Although not a member of the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, or “P.K.I.” for short), Sukarno’s implementation of proportional democracy mandated that the P.K.I., which received around twenty-five percent of the popular vote in 1955, be given approximately twenty-five percent of the administration’s cabinet positions.⁵² While groups such as the Acehnese and Minahasans had never been fans of Java’s authority, the aforementioned ethnic groups and their most prominent leaders viewed communism, first and foremost, as an enabler of further government centralization and encroachment. Even though, as Conboy and Morrison note in their comprehensive overview *Feet to the Fire: C.I.A Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958*, “capitalism and free trade had been good to [the marginalized ethnic groups],” their qualm with communism was not exclusively or even majorly ideological. For groups such as the Batak, Acehnese, Minahasans, and Minangkabau, “communism—in the form of the P.K.I—had become synonymous with Java,” and Java, with its ever-growing authority, was the enemy.⁵³ Thus, communism became the rallying cry against the centralized Indonesian government—a call to action that would prove, not by accident, to be valuable in attracting international support to their cause.

In rebellion against the central government, and communism by default, and seeking an increased degree of governmental and economic autonomy in a system in which they felt that they had no voice, these groups entered into open rebellion against the central government on Java in late 1957, and declared two different, yet allied, rebel nations and armies in February

⁵¹ Individuals in Indonesia are generally referred to by surname only; thus, the President of Indonesia is referred to simply as “Sukarno.”

⁵² David P. Forsythe, “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” *Journal of Peace Research* 29: 4 (November 1992), 385-395.

⁵³ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 22.

1958.⁵⁴ The first group, the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (*Permerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia*, or “P.R.R.I.” for short), was located exclusively in southern Sumatra and maintained objectives centered in that region. Conversely, the second rebel group, officially labeled the “Universal Struggle Charter” (*Piagam Perjuangan Semesta*) but known mostly as “Permesta,” was made up of individuals from diverse locations and ethnicities that were each united against what they viewed as Javanese encroachment. For the most part, both rebel groups were led by former high-ranking officers of the Indonesian National Army (*Tentara National Indonesia*, otherwise known as the “T.N.I.”), and these core leaders often represented a certain ethnic group that had a stake in the rebellion. It was one of these core leaders from the PRRI, Colonel Maludin Simbolon of the Batak ethnic group, which first broached the idea of seeking U.S. support for the rebellion.⁵⁵

The U.S. Considers Involvement

The Eisenhower Administration had been secretly monitoring Sukarno’s leniency towards communism for some time, and had already decided to covertly intervene in the Indonesian civil war before either of the rebel groups ever thought to seek U.S. support. According to documents found in the Indonesia collection of the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS-Indonesia)*, the nonalignment of the Indonesian post-colonial government in the context of the Cold War became a primary concern of U.S. relations with the island nation soon after their independence. In response to these concerns, covert action in Indonesia became a topic of interest as early as 1953, when Eisenhower suggested that varying geographic and ethnic

⁵⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 22-23.

groups could potentially be used as “fulcrum” to drive away communist ideologies should they arise prominently.⁵⁶ Despite this early strategizing, actual covert action by the United States in opposition to rising communist ideologies in Indonesia did not come to fruition until 1955, when the CIA attempted to throw the election away from communists by discretely supplying one million dollars to the Masjumi Party, a Muslim-oriented, anti-communist group that ran in opposition to Sukarno.⁵⁷ Further covert operations would not be officially planned until 1 August 1957, when the National Security Council formed the Ad Hoc Inter-Departmental Committee on Indonesia to address what the U.S. government perceived as the growing threat of communism in Indonesia. The National Security Council placed the committee in the charge of former ambassador to Indonesia and current State Department Intelligence Director Hugh S. Cumming.

Drawing heavily on recent P.K.I. victories and the planned appointment of P.K.I. members to the presidential cabinet, the special committee decided to pursue a two-tiered approach to confronting communism in Indonesia. First, the United States should overtly continue to provide economic aid to Jakarta and “support non-communists within the military forces on Java.” Second, and most importantly, the committee recommended that the U.S. “employ all feasible covert means” to “exploit the political resources and economic leverage available on the outer islands.” Overall, the committee hoped that this second strategy would “strengthen anti-communist forces outside of Java.”⁵⁸ These policies set forth by the Cumming committee, which became official presidential policy on 23 September 1957, were the original

⁵⁶ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 16.

⁵⁷ Joseph Burkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (New York: Putnam, 1976), 213.

⁵⁸ Charles Triebel, “Memorandum from the Special Assistant: Washington,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: February 10, 1958), 36.

guiding principles behind the extensive paramilitary covert action that would eventually be termed “Operation HAIK” and carried out by the CIA⁵⁹ Ultimately, however, the operation—which consisted of mainly arms and supplies deliveries, military advising, and air support—would go well beyond the initial conceptions of those on the Cumming committee.

Decision Makers

Practical orders and justification for Operation HAIK flowed from several different individual sources. At the top of the chain were those who shaped the large-scale justification, strategy, and policy for covert action in Indonesia—intuitively, these individuals, including President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and CIA Director Allen Dulles, also had ultimate authority over whether to proceed with the operation or whether to, as Allen Dulles would later say, “pull the plug.” Next, orders flowed to the CIA operatives in Indonesia from Frank Wisner, the CIA’s chief of Operations, to Al Ulmer, the chief of the CIA’s Far East Division.⁶⁰ Mostly uninvolved in this decision-making chain of command were State Department officials on the ground in Indonesia, most notably John Allison, who had replaced Cumming as the Ambassador to Indonesia in early 1957.⁶¹ This forced detachment would serve as a source of contention throughout the entire Indonesian ordeal—especially as the practical threat of communism lessened. Ultimately, because Operation HAIK was streamlined by President

⁵⁹ “Operation HAIK” derives its name from the two-letter prefix, “HA” used by the CIA for Indonesia

⁶⁰ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 52.

⁶¹ Audrey R. and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia, 1957-1958*. (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 1999), 37.

Eisenhower and not born of the larger foreign policy apparatus of the United States government, the aforementioned involved individuals were responsible for defining the justification behind and practical activities of the covert operation. Thus, their individual justification for arms and supplies deliveries, military advising, and air support—as evidenced from primary documents—constitutes the overarching and collective reasoning behind Operation HAIK.

Threat of Communism Lessens

Although the fear of an imminent communist takeover served as the basis for the decision reached by the National Security Council committee and subsequently the Eisenhower administration as a whole, the Department of State, and specifically those working in the American embassy in Jakarta, began to express the view that communism was no longer a major threat to Indonesia as early as December 1957. In a long-winded plea to Secretary Dulles, Ambassador Allison asked to make “one final appeal for a new, less negative look at the problems here in Indonesia.” Ambassador Allison stated that there was “complete unity of thought” among State Department officials in Indonesia that following the 1957 elections, in which the Indonesian secular party emerged victorious once again, the threat of communism had not grown, and was, in fact, lessening. Allison stated, “we are convinced that the Indonesians want and need American friendship, and importantly, we feel that such a desire is not based alone on material values accruing therefrom.” In this way, Allison implies that Sukarno is genuinely interested in American democracy and civil rights. He furthermore goes on to state that Sukarno and his administration, despite visits from Chinese leaders, were not impressed by the communist ideology touted by the Chinese. Instead, Allison argues that they were impressed by China’s fierce anti-colonialism, stating that the United States was “failing to present America

in a way understandable to the aspiring millions of the ex-colonial areas.”⁶² Later, in March 1958, once the operation had already started, Allison passionately argued for a change in U.S. actions in Indonesia, stating that, in relation to Sukarno, “I might assure President Eisenhower that he is not a communist, that no policy of his would be hostile to the U.S.”⁶³

Primary documents from the Eisenhower administration illustrate that the president and other top HAIK decision makers knew also about the changing situation in Indonesia, similar to diplomatic colleagues, but they nevertheless chose to continue the planning and implementation of the covert operation. A transcribed conversation between the Dulles brothers that occurred on 10 February 1958 states that “A [Allen Dulles] said you can tie the communists in to a good deal but it is not an actual takeover... the Sec [Secretary of State] is in favor of doing something but it is difficult to figure out what or why.”⁶⁴ The same consensus on the state of communism in Indonesia was reached in a document entitled “Memorandum to the President’s Special Assistant” and dated 24 February 1958. In this memo, a member of the president’s staff describes the consensus among President Eisenhower, the Secretary of State, and the CIA Director that Indonesia was not “a nation teetering on the edge of communist takeover,” and that “imminent communist domination” was not “in the cards.”⁶⁵ Thus, only two months into Operation HAIK,

⁶² John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1954-1957* (Djakarta: December 30, 1957), 576-577.

⁶³ John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Djakarta: March 2, 1958). 53.

⁶⁴ “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of State Dulles and Director of Central Intelligence Dulles,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: February 21, 1958), 45.

⁶⁵ “Memorandum to the President’s Special Assistant,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: February 24, 1958), 47.

which officially started in early January with the first transfer of arms to rebel groups, it had become clear to individuals throughout the Eisenhower administration that support for the P.R.R.I. and Permesta groups could not be holistically and rightfully justified in simple Cold War terms. Ultimately, despite the lack of conventional Cold War justification in the eyes of the Department of State and the Eisenhower administration, Operation HAIK continued as planned, incorporating arms and supplies deliveries, the deployment of military advisors, and air support to the anti-Jakarta forces—leaving some CIA operatives such as paramilitary advisor Tony Poe wondering “why the f*ck did we come?”⁶⁶

Operation HAIK: Three Components

The first key component of the CIA’s involvement in the Indonesian civil war involved the transfer of arms and supplies to both P.R.R.I. and Permesta rebel groups. While still a paramilitary activity, deliveries of this nature were seen as an effective and low-risk way of aiding the rebel groups in their conflict with the central government on Java. The first CIA-led arms delivery to the Indonesian rebels left from America’s naval base at Subic Bay on 8 January 1958, arriving in Sumatra a few days later. The transfer, which was delivered via U.S. naval barge, consisted of enough small arms and equipment for over eight thousand troops, and caused such a spectacle that “a crowd gathered to gawk, dashing any hope of this being a clandestine undertaking.”⁶⁷ Although delivery of arms and supplies by naval barge to the Permesta and

⁶⁶ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 81.

⁶⁷ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 32.

P.R.R.I. rebels would continue through at least May 1958, the scene caused by the first transfer prompted the CIA to employ arms deliveries by air with greater frequency, using specialized “kickers” to make certain that the supplies reached their designated destinations.⁶⁸ Although Allen Dulles would argue in February 1958 that the CIA should be willing to “take some very substantial risks” in relation to providing arms to the Indonesian rebels, a high level of discretion was clearly important to those responsible for ordering and carrying out the deliveries.⁶⁹

The second major component of Operation HAIK was the deployment of paramilitary advisors to Indonesia. As described by the National Security Council committee, these advisors were meant to aid, train, and direct both the P.R.R.I. and Permesta rebel forces. The individuals chosen for this job included American CIA operatives and, interestingly, Filipino military officers hired by the CIA to direct rebel forces in conventional and guerrilla military tactics. By the end of February 1958, four CIA officers had been deployed to Sumatra alone, with at least two more American operatives and an undisclosed amount of what Conboy and Morrison refer to as “Filipino experts” heading to Permesta camps soon after.⁷⁰ While at least one author has equated the presence of these military advisors among P.R.R.I. and Permesta forces to the rebels “augmenting their ranks with mercenaries,” the CIA advisors and Filipino “experts,” by all accounts, did not themselves engage in direct military action on behalf of either the P.R.R.I. or

⁶⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁶⁹ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 58.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 73-76.

Permesta.⁷¹ Even though the advisors did follow the rebel forces and observe their activities from battle to battle—as Allen Dulles reported to the National Security Council in May 1958 when each of the CIA advisors were “on the run behind Indonesian-T.N.I. lines”—neither the American CIA advisors nor the Filipino military officers ever fired a gun or dropped a bomb.⁷² Cumulative and ethical implications aside, the CIA paramilitary advisors and CIA-hired “Filipino experts” formed the core of what was technically a non-combatant pillar of Operation HAIK.

The final component of the CIA’s involvement in the Indonesian civil war was the most directly combative and bureaucratically controversial. In what would eventually come to constitute “most of the agency’s covert effort,” the final pillar of Operation HAIK involved the CIA organizing rebel military bases, purchasing and locating planes for P.R.R.I. and Permesta use, and—most notably—hiring American civilian pilots as combatant “soldiers of fortune” on behalf of the rebel forces.⁷³ From the outset, airstrikes were an important part of the rebel strategy against Javanese forces. Both Permesta and PRRI leaders thought that coordinated bombings would boost the “international image” of the rebel groups, giving them the appearance of a large military apparatus supported by sound infrastructure.⁷⁴ The CIA agreed, and furthermore gauged airstrikes using B-26 bombers, in comparison to traditional warfare methods,

⁷¹ James Callanan, “A Tale of Three Campaigns: Landmarks in the Heyday of Covert Action,” *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Policy, Intelligence, and CIA Operations*. (London: IB. Taurus, 2010), 30.

⁷² Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 124.

⁷³ Ibid, 99.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 105.

to be the most effective tactic against TNI forces. However, while the CIA was more than willing to provide planes and airstrips, the lack of qualified pilots on behalf of the rebel forces posed a challenge to Washington decision makers. Steeped in concerns over ethics, image, and risk, the decision makers in the Eisenhower administration considered using Filipino pilots, American Air Force personnel, and even probed the idea of hiring pilots that had defected from communist-controlled Poland. Finally, in mid-April 1958, Eisenhower personally approved the use of the Polish pilots for the operation as well as the use of American civilians. That the pilots should be civilians was important to Eisenhower, as he strongly stipulated that any American involved in airstrikes on behalf of the Indonesian rebels could not be employed by the military, and could only be used on a “soldier of fortune basis.”⁷⁵

What was originally viewed as one of the most important and successful components of Operation HAIK would eventually bring about the end of the entire operation. Throughout the month of April 1958, American civilian pilots and hired Polish airmen carried out numerous attacks on T.N.I. forces, bombing barracks, medical facilities, fuel deposits, warehouses, bridges, and battleships. P.R.R.I. and Permesta leadership wished to keep up the pace of airstrikes in order to adequately confront the central government’s military force; believing their strategy to be legitimate, the CIA agreed on several occasions to increase funding, weapons, and personnel for the airstrikes.⁷⁶ Two of the most prized pilots among those hired by the CIA were Americans Alan Pope and William Beale—together, they completed more airstrikes on T.N.I. property and personnel than all of the other CIA pilots combined. However, their combined effectiveness did

⁷⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation with President Eisenhower,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: April 15, 1958), 109-110.

⁷⁶ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 99, 117, 120.

not come without controversy, as an airstrike carried out by Pope and Beale on 15 May 1958 at an Ambon marketplace brought about a large number of civilian deaths and was highly publicized in Indonesian state media. Although not directly involved in the decision-making process for HAIK, Department of State officials in Indonesia panicked and appealed to the CIA strongly, and the pilots were subsequently limited to striking airfields and boats, and never buildings.⁷⁷ Already on edge after the marketplace bombing, the final straw for Operation HAIK came when American pilot Alan Pope was shot down by Indonesian forces and caught with “a virtual catalogue of incriminating evidence” that tied him to the CIA and by default the United States’ government. Fearing an international scandal, President Eisenhower, the Secretary of State, and the Director of the CIA decided collectively to “pull the plug” on the Operation, leaving Pope in the hands of the Indonesian government and ordering the immediate evacuation of all CIA operatives present in Indonesia.⁷⁸

Conventional Wisdom

The academic literature on Operation HAIK holds that the specific fear of a communist uprising in Indonesia was the ultimate and definitive justification behind the extensive paramilitary covert operation. While certain scholars have worked to illustrate the nuance behind this generally accepted reasoning, most authors default to containing communism in Indonesia as the preeminent and enduring aim of the operation, even after State Department officials and others decided that an Indonesian communist uprising was *not* likely by late 1957 and early 1958. This conventional wisdom is present in major monographs that focus on the operation such as

⁷⁷ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 132.

⁷⁸ Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 182-184.

Feet to the Fire (Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison) and *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (Audrey R. and George McT. Kahin) as well as shorter analytical pieces that mention HAIK such as “A Tale of Three Campaigns” in *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Policy, Intelligence and CIA Operations* (James Callanan). While these authors do explore nuance related to CIA operations in Indonesia, as will be discussed and expanded upon in the next section, they generally affirm the notion that the prevention of communism in Indonesia was the persistent and ultimate reasoning behind the operation.

In the comprehensive monograph *Feet to the Fire*, authors Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison largely imply that the main, enduring, and ultimate reasoning behind Operation HAIK was the fear of an imminent communist uprising in Indonesia. When referencing the origins and justification of the covert operation, the authors name covert successes in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954) as the predecessors to Operation HAIK—emphasizing Allen Dulles’ particular enthusiasm for using covert operations to “fight communism.”⁷⁹ The authors thus place Operation HAIK within the scope of the Cold War, aligning the goals of the operation in Indonesia with the broader U.S. ideological fight against communism and Soviet influence. While Conboy and Morrison briefly consider issues with this traditional justification including sunk cost and nonalignment, the piece mostly highlights the pre-1957 Indonesian political climate as justification for the operation. This evidence includes, but is not limited to, the 1955 P.K.I. electoral wins and subsequent cabinet considerations, Sukarno’s 1956 speech regarding “guided democracy,” and a May 1957 visit to Indonesia by the Soviet president.⁸⁰ Ultimately, in

⁷⁹ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 13-16.

generally failing to consider the changing political conditions of the country from mid-1957 to early 1958, Conboy and Morrison suggest that the pervasive justification throughout CIA operations in Indonesia was the possibility of an imminent communist takeover.

In Kahin and Kahin's broad historical study *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, the belief that Indonesia was "on the brink of falling into the Communist camp" is held up as the preeminent justification for Operation HAIK.⁸¹ While the authors give considerable attention to issues of nonalignment, they are not directly stated as preeminent justifications after the perceived threat of communism lessened in late 1957 and early 1958. Instead, familiar facts such as Sukarno's friendliness with Chinese communist leaders, 1955 P.K.I. electoral victories, and the risk of losing American oil and rubber investments in Sumatra should Indonesia go communist are relied upon as the most pressing and enduring justifications for the wide-ranging covert action.⁸² Thus, although more nuanced justifications are presented in *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, the suggestions are ultimately the same—in the view of Kahin and Kahin, the potential for a communist takeover of Indonesia was the persistent and foremost justification behind HAIK. Similar to monographs, authors of articles or chapters in which HAIK is analyzed largely maintain this conventional justification.

While James Callanan's chapter "A Tale of Three Campaigns" maintains the notion that the foremost and lasting justification of Operation HAIK was the prevention of a communist uprising in Indonesia, Callanan more precisely argues that this anti-communism justification was motivated by large-scale U.S. economic policy that was not practically compatible with communism—namely, the Dodge Plan (Dodge Line). According to Callanan, the threat that a

⁸¹ Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 28.

⁸² Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 28-35.

communist Indonesia would pose to the United States' economic plan for post-World War II

Asia was even greater than the threats posed by other conventional Cold War actors. He states:

“In many ways Washington had more justification for acting against Sukarno than it did against Arbenz or Musaddiq, not least because the Indonesian premier's political aspirations ran contrary to United States' plans for Southeast Asia and the Far East as a whole. Outlined in the Dodge Plan, American objectives for the promotion of economic growth and political stability in the Far East centered on the revival of Japan as the workshop of Asia.”⁸³

Callanan's emphasis on the economic threats of a communist Indonesia differs slightly from the more general justifications of other authors, but the implications of his argument about the motivations behind Operation HAIK are essentially the same. By principally focusing on the threat of communism and its detriments to U.S. economic policy, Callanan, too, maintains that the threat of a communist uprising was the primary and enduring justification behind CIA involvement in the Indonesian civil war.

Ultimately, Operation HAIK continued in full force until May 1958, despite the consensus among State Department officials and decision makers in the Eisenhower administration by early March that Indonesia was not teetering on the edge of a communist revolution. This consensus muddies the conventional justification provided by scholars such as Conboy and Morrison, Kahin and Kahin, and Callanan. While these scholars imply that the real and present threat of communism was the most fundamental and persistent justification behind CIA intervention in the Indonesian civil war, alternative justifications are clearly warranted. An examination of primary documents and relevant secondary sources illustrate three compelling alternatives to the conventional narrative of justification. In the case of Operation HAIK, evidence suggests that the covert operation was alternatively justified through Indonesia's

⁸³ James Callanan, “A Tale of Three Campaigns: Landmarks in the Heyday of Covert Action,” 131.

nonalignment, the consideration of sunk costs by decision makers, and foreign policy measures that were influenced by racism.

Alternative Justifications

While conventional wisdom suggests that an ideological opposition to communism formed the primary reasoning for Operation HAIK, decades-old policy objectives and values such as sunk costs and economic concerns, racism and colonialism, and nonalignment more significantly informed American covert action in Indonesia.

Sunk Costs and Economic Concerns

Although decision makers were aware of the lack of conventional justification for continuing on with Operation HAIK, a sunk-cost fallacy provides an alternative justification for the protraction of the covert operation. In a document from February 1958, President Eisenhower wondered to the Secretary of State and the Director of the CIA about how to proceed without conventional justification, stating that “cutting ties to the rebels in midstream” would likely be more “problematic” than withdrawing from the operation.⁸⁴ In subscribing to this line of thinking, Eisenhower and other top decision makers were considering the already “sunk cost” of Operation HAIK—the planning, money, personnel, and aid already given and carried out—instead of the political reality that would have logically compelled them to end the covert operation and cease their support of the P.R.R.I. and Permesta rebel groups. Ultimately, instead of terminating the operation, decision makers decided to funnel more money, arms, and air equipment to the rebel groups to ensure their success and thereby secure their economic and political objectives in the region. In mid-March, the White House even approved the sending of more paramilitary advisors

⁸⁴ “Memorandum to the President’s Special Assistant,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: February 24, 1958), 47.

to Indonesia—all of these, specifically, from the CIA Despite protest from the Department of State officials in Indonesia to increasing CIA personnel allowed on the ground, decision makers hoped that this operational expansion would help to “salvage the situation”—a situation that the United States had already sunk millions of dollars in arms, supplies, equipment, and salaries into.⁸⁵ Hence, justified by their consideration of sunk costs, decision makers continued to expand an operation that they could not justify in clear Cold War terms. In doing so, President Eisenhower, the Secretary of State, and the Director of the CIA not only made what would turn out to be an objectively bad investment decision, but also created an alternative justification for continuing on with the covert operation.

Racism and Colonialism

A foreign policy influenced by racism and colonialism may serve as another potential alternate justification for the endurance of Operation HAIK. In situating CIA covert involvement in the Indonesian civil war among other U.S.-led covert operations that took place during the 1950s, scholars such as Michael Hunt, David Myers, and David Forsythe have argued that an “informal U.S. ideology of greatness, racism and anti-revolution” shaped U.S. foreign policy as it related to covert action in the developing world. In Operation HAIK specifically, Forsythe argues that “a combination of disdain for non-European politicians, fear of social revolution, and resentment that the U.S. leadership was rejected” were all “at work” in the planning and implementation of Operation HAIK.⁸⁶ While scholars such as Kahin and Kahin argue that U.S. commitments in Europe, particularly commitments to build up badly damaged post-World War

⁸⁵ Conboy and Morrison, *Feet to the Fire*, 79.

⁸⁶ David P. Forsythe, “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” 393.

If economies, were the main factors that kept the United States government opposed to anticolonial struggles in Asia, some primary documents suggest that this preference for European nations over developing, non-white nations may have been at least partially motivated by racist attitudes—providing additional justification when the real, tangible threat of communism in Indonesia lessened.⁸⁷

Interestingly, State Department documents containing the communications of Ambassador Allison and President Sukarno are the most illuminative in regard to the influence of racism and colonialism in foreign policy and the eventual protraction of Operation HAIK. In his year-end letter to Secretary Dulles in December of 1957, Ambassador Allison wrote passionately about why he felt Indonesians should be drawn to aligning with the United States. He stated that Indonesians should desire “friendship” from the United States, as a country that had “abolished slavery of a colored people.”⁸⁸ In this quote, Allison analogizes the slavery of African Americans to the apparent plight of individuals in Indonesia—making the United States the heroic, freedom-giving character in a narrative of oppression and captivity. In Allison’s narrative, the United States assumes a paternalistic role over non-white persons with the assumption that their governments and leaders, even if fairly elected as in Indonesia, are corrupt, tyrannical, and repressive. This ideology of paternalism and superiority that justifies action against nonaligned, developing countries is, as exemplified by this statement, rooted in racist attitudes.

⁸⁷ Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 29.

⁸⁸ John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1954-1957* (Jakarta: December 30, 1957), 577.

In addition, in a conversation documented by Allison in March 1958, Sukarno himself pointed out what he saw as an example of U.S. foreign policy that has been influenced by racist attitudes. He wondered to Allison why the United States was “so worried about Indonesia’s percentage of communist votes” but “not worried about France and Italy yet theirs is higher.”⁸⁹ While it is certainly true that the United States was concerned about communism in Europe and acted both covertly and overtly to combat communist uprisings and Soviet influence in places such as France and Italy, the differences in strategy, scale, and tactics are striking between U.S. covert action in Europe and the extensive paramilitary covert operation that took place in Indonesia. The United States essentially trained, funded, and equipped two full military forces in Indonesia, putting advisors and pilots on the ground, and spending millions of dollars on behalf of a violent rebellion against a government that had a smaller percentage of communist politicians than some Western European nations. In lacking clear, Cold War justification, scholars and primary sources suggest that the United States relied on a foreign policy that was, at least in part, informed by racist attitudes to justify the perpetuation of Operation HAIK in Indonesia.

Nonalignment

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Indonesia’s nonalignment served as an important alternative justification for covert action in Indonesia in spite of the lessened communist threat. In the new political climate of the Cold War, the United States began to see nations around the world through a lens of alignment—either they were aligned with democracy and freedom (and by default, the United States) or they were aligned with Leninism and communism (and therefore

⁸⁹ John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Jakarta: March 19, 1958), 78.

aligned with the Soviet Union). Indonesia was no exception to this rule in the eyes of Washington decision makers, with efforts to clearly align Indonesia with the United States occurring as early as the Truman administration. In 1949, President Truman attempted “trick” Indonesia into alignment by suggesting that they must declare explicit allegiance to the United States in order to receive an aid package that, for other countries, did not carry the same allegiance requirements. According to Kahin and Kahin, this attempt at deceit pushed Indonesia further into a policy of nonalignment, stating that, “this incident would serve as a forceful reminder to future Indonesian cabinets of the risks inherent in identifying themselves too closely with Washington.”⁹⁰ While nonalignment was “not unusual among ex-colonial countries,” nonalignment was a major point of contention in the mutually exclusive view of decision makers such as President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and Allen Dulles.⁹¹ In an article entitled “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” David P. Forsythe argues, “under Eisenhower and Dulles, Washington developed a foreign policy that equated third world nonalignment with evil” stating that Washington decision makers chose to see the world “in terms of two hostile camps, communist and non-communist.”⁹² With this viewpoint in mind, it is no surprise that the United States was upset at Indonesia’s rejection of their offered leadership. Ultimately, when lacking actual proof that Indonesia was at the cusp of a communist takeover, primary sources show that nonalignment was used as justification for continuing on with Operation HAIK.

⁹⁰ Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 34-35.

⁹¹ Ibid, 33.

⁹² David Forsythe, “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” 388.

Despite the general consensus that a communist takeover was not an imminent threat, communications between the White House, Department of State, and CIA show that decision makers chose to continue Operation HAIK for fear that Indonesia would be subject to excessive influence from the Sino-Soviet bloc should they remain explicitly nonaligned. This line of thinking began early in the planning process for the operation, with Secretary Dulles arguing in February 1957 that “if left alone Soviet, Red Chinese, and local Reds will fill vacuum and I believe... everything we can do to keep alive his [Sukarno’s] interest in the other side [the United States] worthwhile.”⁹³ Per Secretary Dulles’ argument, and those of several other individuals in the Department of State, CIA, and Eisenhower administration, Indonesia could not exist as an independent entity. Because they were no longer subject to colonial authority, a “power vacuum” had emerged in the eyes of decision makers, and had to be filled by either the United States or a communist adversary. Although slightly less extreme and reactionary, those on the ground in the American embassy in Jakarta shared similar views to the Secretary. However, in place of explicit mentions of alignment, euphemistic and ironic words such as “free” and “independent” are used in reference to Indonesia’s nonalignment. For example, Ambassador Allen stated in December 1957 that Indonesia was in a “struggle for national identity and international acceptance,” later telling President Sukarno in March 1958 that “it is in the interest of Indonesian people, the US, and the free world—indeed all mankind—for your important country to remain free and independent. I believe that this creates a strong identity of interest and alliance between our two countries.”⁹⁴ Additional communication between the President’s

⁹³ John Foster Dulles, “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia,” *FRUS Indonesia 1954-1957* (Washington: February 26, 1957), 355.

⁹⁴ John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1954-1957* (Djakarta: December 30, 1957), 62 and 577.

Assistant for National Security Affairs and the Special Assistant from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in relation to Operation HAIK paints Indonesia as a “strategic area that if lost to the communist bloc would cause the position of the U.S. and its allies in the Far East to suffer irreparable and catastrophic damage.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, in a report from March 1958, the Intelligence Advisory Committee argued in relation to Operation HAIK that a “compromise solution” in which Indonesia would maintain independence and nonalignment “is not likely to satisfy for long the pressures for a greater degree of alignment,” thereby justifying the covert operation through Indonesia’s nonalignment.⁹⁶

Ultimately, nonalignment served as a major justification for continuing Operation HAIK after a communist takeover became unlikely in Indonesia. In their never-ending practical and ideological fight against communism and the Soviet Union, decision makers such as Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers failed to see the nuanced interplay present in Indonesia between alignment, post colonialism, nationalism, ideology, and practicality. In speaking to Ambassador Allison about his visits with Chinese leaders and his admiration for the Chinese economy, Sukarno stated,

“Indonesia is endeavoring to stride across centuries in a few years... the US is so far advanced economically and industrially that Indonesia has no hope of catching up, Soviet Russia too is in an advanced state of development industrially, but China, which had been a miserable country only 8 years ago, has made tremendous advance and I’m greatly impressed. When I say that methods adopted by Commie China in achieving this

⁹⁵ “Memorandum to the Special Assistant from the Joint Chiefs of Staff for National Security Council Affairs (Tribel) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Cutler), *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: February 10, 1958), 33.

⁹⁶ “Report of the Intelligence Advisory Committee,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Washington: March 5, 1957), 62.

development may hold lessons for Indo [sic], I do not include their political doctrine... this I reject. But rejecting their political philosophy does not mean I cannot gain ideas on the economic front. Americans do not seem to understand this... I am not a communist... I tried to point out that Nationalism was the fire sweeping across Indonesia and this is true. I am a Nationalist but no communist.”⁹⁷

In assuming that Indonesia, a developing country, was more ideologically than practically motivated in maintaining nonalignment, the United States saw justification for an extensive covert operation in what was essentially a policy of pragmatism and nationalism. As evidenced through primary documents, the United States used this alternative reasoning to justify continuing Operation HAIK despite the eventual unlikelihood of an Indonesian communist uprising.

Conclusion

While conventional wisdom suggests that preventing a communist takeover was the foremost and ultimate reasoning behind CIA involvement in the Indonesian civil war, primary sources suggest that top decision makers agreed within two months of the start date of the operation that Indonesia was not on the brink of a communist uprising politically, practically, or ideologically. In place of concrete, anti-communist justification, decision makers found justification to continue the extensive paramilitary operation in their consideration of sunk costs, a foreign policy influenced by racism and colonialism, and Indonesia’s policy of nonalignment. Nearly sixty years later, issues of justification in Operation HAIK still yield important implications for decision makers in the reasoning behind the implementation of national security and intelligence initiatives.

⁹⁷ John Allison, “Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State,” *FRUS Indonesia 1958-1960* (Djakarta: March 19, 1958), 76.

CONCLUSION:

The Tragedy of Opaque Intentions

In Williams' account of American foreign policy history, he argued that the U.S. approach towards diplomacy was characterized by a distinct and significant disparity between official narrative and actuality of action. As we have seen in both the Truman and Eisenhower administration and their policies towards Indonesia, the grouping of elites into decision making silos often led small groups of men to make world-altering choices on the basis of these disparities in rhetoric and reality, all without general dialogue or debate. Ultimately, following Williams' analysis, these conditions led to what he refers to as "terror"—secrecy, covert operations, and crisis.⁹⁸ Per this model of American diplomacy, there is no poetic justice. There are no heroes or villains. Only tragedy.

From 1945-1953, American diplomacy towards the aspiring, fledgling nation of Indonesia was comprised of contradictory and conflicting objectives that ultimately formed a chasm between the stated intentions of U.S. involvement in world politics and the reality of American action. The Truman administration's attitudes and actions toward Indonesia as it sought to build an independent nation constitute the basis of this drama. In the following administration, practical concerns continued to outrank ideological ones in justifying American action in Indonesia, although the narrative of democracy and anti-communism continued to be heard in the contemporary era and later affirmed by historians. The crisis that resulted from this gulch in mythology and action now reveals the true nature of American policy toward Indonesia in the period—a mixture of economic, political, and public image objectives cloaked in a message of good will and democracy.

In both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, policy and action was largely informed by the U.S. desire to maintain economic and nationalist interests and investments in the

⁹⁸ Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 6-8.

region. Following a significant reliance on Indonesian oil, rubber, tin, and other raw materials in the pre-war period, the United States in many ways wished Indonesia follow whichever political path would best suit American access to the Indonesian economy. This was, of course, an economy rooted in colonialism, oppression, and exploitation. While wishing to maintain these objectives, decision makers nonetheless felt obliged by the American mythology of anti-colonialism and revolution to give lip service to nationalism. Meanwhile, they were putting all of their tangible resources into maintaining the status quo of the colonial system. This paradox is evident in both the statements of White House decision makers as well as those sent to negotiate America's position in person—such as Frank Porter Graham. In the Eisenhower administration, the economic importance of Indonesia remained a key factor in determining American action, and the administration viewed their expenditure on Operation HAIK as an investment into achieving those objectives. Lacking conventional, ideological justification, decision makers used their heavy monetary, materials, and personnel investments in the operation to justify its continuation. Thus, a decision to wage covert war found its basis in a sunk-cost fallacy, in which economic investment continued to be a prime motivator of American diplomacy despite the official narrative.

Using the guise of liberty as their narrative, the United States also fought to firmly align Indonesia with the West while maintaining political and economic stability in the Cold War world. The United States in many ways treated the aspiring Dutch colony and then new nation of Indonesia as a monopoly block in the Cold War game, offering flowery platitudes about democracy in initiatives such as the Good Offices Committee, but quickly abandoning those supposed principles when actual democracy threatened Western alignment. When the United States feared that Indonesia would *democratically* position communists in their government,

decision makers decided to intervene through intelligence initiatives that undermined the democratic ideals they publically professed—funneling money to certain political parties, training an armed rebellion, instigating the involvement of foreign countries in another nation's domestic affairs, and essentially attempting to stage a civil war. Thus, when it came to promoting democracy and the political ideal of free trade in Indonesia, policy was never truly about the American ideal of liberty, which, by nature, came with an ideological opposition to communism. It was all about alignment.

Maintaining a disparity between rhetoric and reality thus had dramatic implications on policy planning and action, leading to instances such as Operation HAIK. The expression of this disparity in rhetoric and actuality and its effects on foreign policy and defense decision-making still has implications in modern intelligence operations.

Holistically, the use of alternative justifications such as sunk costs, a foreign policy informed by racism, and nonalignment for the continuance of Operation HAIK calls into question the need and appropriateness of national security measures and how such necessity and pertinence is evaluated—a question in which issues of oversight, collaboration, and evaluation are inherent components. While this question applies to the need for covert action in the case of HAIK, a similar line of questioning can be applied to a multitude of contemporary intelligence and national security operations. These implications give issues of justification in Operation HAIK a high degree of importance even today.

Although Operation HAIK occurred almost sixty years ago, a consideration of the justifications behind the extensive paramilitary covert action offers significant insight into contemporary intelligence and national security initiatives. HAIK's alternative justifications of economics and sunk cost, a foreign policy at least partly influenced by racist attitudes and

colonialism, and nonalignment illustrate conceptual issues with justification as they apply to state action in foreign countries. Furthermore, an analysis of these alternative justifications raises important questions about the reasoning behind present-day intelligence and national security operations as they relate to sunk costs, racism and colonialism, and issues of nonalignment—or, as would be more common today, a commitment to “Western” values.

First, the consideration of sunk costs in decision-making has detriments that are as relevant now as they were in 1958. As Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers justified the perpetuation of Operation HAIK through the sunk cost of resources already poured into the operation, so did American decision makers in the Vietnam War and Soviet leaders during their occupation of Afghanistan. Similar considerations may be relevant in the United States’ current prolongation of the “War on Terror,” in which sizable resources have been invested and numerous expansions have been pursued despite significant criticism and setbacks. Ultimately, operations such as HAIK suggest that the use of sunk costs as justification for state action usually yields miserly returns in the long run—a rule that very well may be applied to modern day intelligence and national security operations in the Middle East.

Second, while almost sixty years have passed since a foreign policy influenced by racism and colonialism worked to justify the continuance of Operation HAIK, racism may still play a role in national security operations today. Current narratives of “freedom” in America’s War on Terror are reminiscent of racist and paternalistic philosophies of “freedom” for non-white persons that help to justify U.S. covert action against the central Indonesian government 1950s. When reasoned through a foreign policy influenced by racism, the CIA’s involvement in the Indonesian civil war suggests that measures taken against non-white nations and peoples require

less legitimate and pressing justifications—a notion that is certainly applicable to more contemporary U.S. actions in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Third, even though one rarely hears the term “alignment” in today’s post-Cold War world, a similar principle applies in the emphasis on “Western” values in U.S. national security decision-making. In general, the use of nonalignment as justification for Operation HAIK is illuminative of the false assumption that less developed nations are more ideological in motivation than pragmatic in motivation. As evidenced through primary documents, American decision makers viewed Sukarno’s policy of nonalignment as a rejection of Western democracy and, consequently, an adherence to Soviet-style communism. The notion that a lack of commitment to “Western” values implies a commitment to adversarial values is inherently false; however, this notion is nevertheless present in modern day attitudes concerning contemporary U.S. national security operations in areas that are deemed to not share America’s values (e.g. nations with large Muslim populations).

Finally, covert operations have recently and prominently reemerged in mainstream American media and political thought since the accusations of Russian meddling in the U.S. 2016 presidential election. The Russian government and their intelligence establishment are accused of everything from providing disinformation and divisive political content to vulnerable citizens, creating false social media accounts and other accounts known as “bots,” and even providing some forms of funding—all in hopes of creating chaos and swaying the election to a certain candidate of their choosing. Given the history of U.S. intelligence operations such as HAIK, several questions arise about the nature of Russia’s attack and what the U.S.’s response should be. Ethically, is it ever okay to attempt to influence another country’s democratic process? If so, when? If not, why? Given the perpetual disparity between the U.S.’s rhetoric on

freedom for all peoples and their historical and current actions in world affairs, the answer is likely not as simple as media, law enforcement, and political officials make it out to be.

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