

Merdeka: Dutch Military Operations in Indonesia (1945 - 1950)

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Merdeka: Dutch Military Operations in Indonesia (1945 -1950), by Major Barry G.L. Rockx, Royal Netherlands Army, 62 pages.

The Indonesian National Revolution or Indonesian War of Independence was an armed conflict and diplomatic struggle between Indonesia and the Dutch Empire, and simultaneously an internal social revolution. It took place between Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945 and the Netherlands' recognition of Indonesia's independence in 1949. One of the largest revolutions of the twentieth century, the struggle lasted for over four years and involved sporadic but bloody armed conflict, internal Indonesian political and communal upheavals, and two major international diplomatic interventions.

Incorrect Dutch assessment at the political-strategic level led to simplistic and fatally flawed military-strategic decisions. The spearhead-strategy advocated by the army leaders from 1946 to 1949 was determined in part by the Dutch government's political and economic wishes; the view of the enemy held by the Dutch; Dutch military capabilities; and the training and experience of the army leaders both in colonial and regular 'European' warfare. Dutch forces were not able to prevail over the Indonesians, but were strong enough to resist being expelled. Although Dutch forces could control the towns and cities in Republican heartlands on Java and Sumatra, they could not control villages and countryside. Given this stalemate, the Republic of Indonesia ultimately prevailed in the conflict, as much through international diplomacy as through Indonesian determination in the military actions on Java and Sumatra. The revolution destroyed the colonial administration of the Netherlands East Indies, and the Dutch, which had ruled from the other side of the world, found itself with a result that it had not wanted: rapid and total independence for Indonesia in 1949.

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Acknowledgments

This monograph is the result of a life-long interest in the conflict in the Netherland East Indies. Growing up amongst several veterans of this war, especially my grandfather, and doing several case studies during my education in high school and in professional military education courses, increased my fascination of this topic.

The war had an unfavorable outcome for the Dutch, and lost wars are not popular. Many former soldiers feel they are part of a forgotten and maligned Army who never got the recognition they deserved. This monograph expresses honor to those brave soldiers who were sent to the other side of the world to restore Dutch rule and interests.

I would like to thank my monograph director, Ms. Patricia Blocksome, my seminar leader, Colonel Dyrald Cross, and my father-in-law, Dr. Francois Klaaijsen, for giving me the guidance and feedback to finish this monograph. They kept me on the right track and motivated me to research this topic in depth.

I am very grateful to my grandmother. Opening up about this part of our family history by telling me her story as a young woman working at the Dutch headquarters in Bandung. She has given me so much priceless information. Her mental strength and memory are admirable.

Foremost, I owe my wife Rosalie a lot of gratitude. She supported me all the way through this monograph, which consumed a lot of time. Throughout the process, she motivated me to finish my work and accepted all the time I spent in my study room. I could not have finished this monograph without her support.

Acronyms

KNIL	Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (<i>Royal Netherlands Indies Army</i>)
NEI	Netherlands East Indies
NICA	Netherlands Indies Civil Administration
POW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAPWI	Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
RUSI	Republic of the United States of Indonesia
SEAC	South East Asia Command
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (<i>Indonesian National Army</i>)
TRI	Tentara Republic Indonesia
UNCI	United Nations Commission for Indonesia
VOC	Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (<i>United East Indies Company</i>)

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Introduction

We the people of Indonesia hereby declare the independence of Indonesia. Matters, which concern the transfer of power and other things, will be executed by careful means and in the shortest time possible. In the name of the people of Indonesia.¹

— Soekarno and Hatta

General

With these words spoken on August 17, 1945, just two days after the Japanese capitulation to the Netherlands in the territories of the East Indies, Soekarno and Hatta jointly proclaimed the independence of the newly created Republic of Indonesia.² However, the Netherlands did not subscribe to this unilateral termination of the colonial tie. Instead, the general feeling of the Dutch Government was that the restoration of Dutch authority would be good for the economics of both the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI).³ Therefore, barely liberated after World War II, the Netherlands became immediately involved in another war, where Dutch forces would conduct both major combat and counterinsurgency operations. This war in the NEI lasted for over four years and involved sporadic but bloody armed conflict, internal Indonesian political and communal upheavals, and two major international diplomatic

¹ Robert Cripp, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 3.

² Sukarno (Surabaya, 6 June 1901 – Jakarta, 21 June 1970) was the first President of Indonesia, serving in office from 1945 to 1967. Sukarno was the leader of his country's struggle for Independence from the Netherlands. He was a prominent leader of Indonesia's nationalist movement during the Dutch colonial period, and spent over a decade under Dutch detention until released by the invading Japanese forces. Mohammad Hatta (12 August 1902 – 14 March 1980) was Indonesia's first vice president, later also serving as the country's prime minister. Known as "The Proclamator", he fought for the independence of Indonesia from the Dutch. Hatta was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia). He studied in the Netherlands from 1921 until 1932 and after his early education, he studied in Dutch schools in the Netherlands East Indies.

³ Ad van Liempt, *Nederland valt aan: op weg naar oorlog met Indonesie 1947* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2012), 24.

interventions. The Dutch Government sent over one hundred seventy thousand soldiers to the NEI, many of them conscripts. More than five thousand Dutch soldiers lost their lives during this colonial conflict, most not during both short ‘police actions’, but during the guerrilla war. On the Indonesian side, there were an estimated one hundred fifty thousand deaths. The Indonesian people were both victims of Dutch military action and the violence exercised by the Indonesian nationalists against political opponents and alleged pro-Dutch elements among their own people. This war was the largest ever fought by the Netherlands.⁴

Within the historical context of the time, the Netherlands thought that they had both the right to return and the moral duty to restore law and order and to protect the well-disposed Indonesian people from the subversive rebels. In the eyes of the Dutch, this war was therefore not a war of liberation, but an uprising against rule of law.⁵ Although Dutch military forces were able to control the major towns, cities, and industrial assets in the heartland of the Republic on Java and Sumatra, they could not control the countryside. In 1949, international pressure on the Netherlands was such that, combined with the existing partial military stalemate, it became necessary for the Dutch Government to recognize Indonesian independence.⁶

This monograph aims to explore why the Dutch military strategy in the NEI between 1945 and 1950 failed. It will argue that the Dutch military strategy failed because of underestimation of the political and military foundations of the Republic of Indonesia, overestimation of its own superiority in arms and materiel, and because of economic necessity.

⁴ Jaap A. de Moor, *Met Klewang en Karabijn – militaire geschiedenis van Nederlands-indie 1815-1949* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2008), 217.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

Overall, the Dutch based their strategy on two schools of thought.⁷ The first one, promoted by then Governor-General of NEI, Hubertus Van Mook, was aimed at establishing a new relationship between the mother country and the colony based on equality, and quickly recognized the necessity of talking to the Indonesian nationalists.⁸ The second strategy, championed by the Dutch Army commander in the NEI, Lieutenant-General S.H. Spoor, argued that the first and foremost goal had to be to create military order and, only following the creation of this order, could there be talk about the future with the Indonesian nationalist leaders.⁹ Both schools of thought agreed on one basic principle: any form of autonomy for the colony, let alone independence, was out of the question.

Lieutenant-General Spoor was able to develop his strategic concepts for conducting the war against the Republic Indonesia with virtually no opposition from Dutch civil authorities. Throughout the whole period, he persistently adhered to his chosen path, which consisted of a two-phase plan. The first, was a massive overall attack on Republican territory in Java and Sumatra in an attempt to profit from existing Dutch superiority in mobility, technical equipment, firepower, and aircraft. This surprise attack would result in the conquest of a large area, in the demoralization of the enemy, and in the dispersal of the Indonesian Republic's Army, the Tentara

⁷ Joint Publication (JP) 1-02: *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 229. According to US Joint Publication 1-02, strategy is a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.

⁸ Tom van den Berge, *H.J. van Mook (1894–1965) Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesie*. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Thoth, 2014), 321. Hubertus Van Mook was the Dutch Lieutenant Governor-General in the NEI. He was born and raised in the NEI and was educated in the Netherlands. After a career in the colonial authorities, he became the Governor General in 1942. During the Japanese occupation, he stayed in Australia where he tried to keep in contact with both the NEI and the Dutch Government in London. He returned to the NEI on October 31, 1945. Between 1945 and 1949, he was the prime civilian representative of the Dutch government in Indonesia

⁹ De Moor, *Met Klewang en Karabijn*, 217.

National Indonesia (TNI).¹⁰ The second phase was the ‘pacification’ of the occupied areas through constant patrolling by small units in order to locate and eliminate the remaining scattered and continually moving guerrilla groups. Lieutenant-General Spoor’s strategy was called the ‘spearhead-strategy’; it combined the experiences and rules of modern ‘European’ warfare with those of prewar colonial campaigns.¹¹

The first large-scale military action, a police action in July/August 1947, failed to demonstrate the efficacy of this strategy, simply because the campaign had to be stopped mid execution in response to international pressure. It was only during the second police action in December 1948/January 1949, and its aftermath of guerrilla warfare, that the strategy was truly put to the test. It then became clear that it was an utter failure. The policy on which the military leaders (and the Government) had placed all their hopes not only did not result in the total elimination of the TNI, but also did not lead to a quick and successful suppression of the guerrilla groups in the first months of 1949. Instead, counter-guerrilla action proved to be too difficult an undertaking for the Dutch Army.¹²

Why had such a strategy been developed and consistently applied? Did the Dutch Army commanders not see the risks involved in this approach? Some, admittedly rare, critics had pointed out that to occupy first and pacify later would be a very dangerous thing to do; they thought it better, or at least safer, to occupy a limited area and eliminate all resistance there once and for all, before occupying new areas.¹³ Despite these critics, the Dutch Army chose to pursue

¹⁰ Jaap A. de Moor, *Generaal Spoor: Triumph En Tragiek van Een Legercommandant* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 273.

¹¹ Petra Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen. Het Nederlands militair strategisch beleid in Indonesie 1945-1950* (Den Haag: SDU uitgeverij, 1991), 88.

¹² De Moor, *Met Klewang en Karabijn*, 303.

¹³ *Ibid*, 311.

the spearhead strategy. The result was a dramatic and tragic stalemate, from which neither the Dutch nor the Indonesians were able to escape by military means.

By the end of 1949, the Dutch had to compromise with the demands of the Indonesian leaders and to return once more to the negotiating table.¹⁴ In addition, directly after the second police action, the United States threatened that it would stop the flow of Marshall Plan aid to the Netherlands if they would not recognize Indonesian independence.¹⁵ On December 27, 1949, the war ended with the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference, during which the Dutch ceded control of the majority of the former NEI to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RUSI). The member states of the RUSI would transform themselves into the Republic of Indonesia by the end of 1950, forming the Republic of Indonesia as we know it today.¹⁶ War, occupation, war again, and finally the loss of the crown colony, were hugely dramatic events in these ten years of Dutch history.¹⁷

This monograph argues that the significance of the Indonesian rebellion is twofold. First, the Dutch military-strategic policy of massive overall attacks on Republican territory in Java and Sumatra and the pacification of occupied areas are military methods still used today in various

¹⁴ Though an attempt was made, prior to the two police actions, to reach a solution to the question of Indonesian governance during talks in 1946-1947, the Linggadjati Agreement resulting from these talks was unsuccessful at preventing conflict.

¹⁵ Van Dijk, Cornelis W.A.J. "The American Political Intervention in the Conflict in the Dutch East Indies 1945-1949." (Masters Thesis, US Command and General Staff College, 2009), 1.

¹⁶ Jaap P. de Jong, *Diplomatie: Het Nederlands beleid tegenover the Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1947* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1988), 377.

¹⁷ The Netherlands dominated global commerce in the second half of the 17th century during a cultural flowering known as the 'Dutch Golden Age'. However, the Netherlands lost many of its colonial possessions, as well as its global power status, to the British when the metropole fell to French armies during the Revolutionary Wars. The restored portions of the Dutch Empire, notably the Netherlands East Indies and Suriname, remained under Dutch control until the decline of European imperialism following World War II. The Netherlands East Indies was the Crown colony.

conflicts around the globe. Therefore, the lessons learned from this war retain their value for today's world. Second, the Dutch had to cooperate with Great Britain, Australia, the United States, and the United Nations. This monograph explores the complexity of these international relations and the challenges operational artists face when confronted with such a complex environment. In sum, this monograph is not only of historical interest, but is relevant to contemporary political and military concerns.

Methodology

As this monograph aims to explain the failure of the Dutch military strategy in the NEI between 1945 and 1950, research centers on a thorough analysis of related Dutch primary and secondary sources. Where possible, Dutch language sources are supplemented with English language sources. Analysis of historical records from the National Archives of the Netherlands provide the foundation of the historical narrative for this monograph. These records reveal the development and application of Dutch military strategy in the NEI, and the strategic discourse of the Dutch government-in-exile and its highest military and political representative in the NEI, the Governor-General. Additionally, memoirs of general officers that commanded Dutch forces, like Lieutenant-General Spoor, commander NEI Army, and other general officers who had key positions within Dutch military command, contribute to the construction of the historical narrative. Primary sources from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library are also used to provide insight in the official documents of the Linggadjatti conference minutes and agreements.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Linggadjatti Agreement of March 1947 stated that the Republic would have authority over Java, Sumatra and Madoera. Dutch troops would hand over their occupied areas to the Republic. Together with Borneo and the "Big East," the Republic would form a sovereign and democratic federation called the United States of Indonesia. This federation would form the Netherlands-Indonesian Union with the Netherlands and the Queen would be the head of state. Both parties agreed on arranging this before January 1, 1949.

Building on these primary sources, secondary sources provide supplemental historical context for this monograph. These sources contribute to valuable insights on the strategic objectives and decision making in the Dutch Government on the road to war, the strategic objectives of the British and the Americans, and the actual conduct of military operations in the NEI. Finally, memoirs from general officers that occupied key positions within the eastern archipelago, like British Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Christison, Allied commander in the NEI, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian armed forces, General Sudirman, further inform the historical context of this period.

Structure of the Monograph

To substantiate that the Dutch military strategy in the NEI between 1945 and 1950 failed, three key areas will be analyzed consisting of: underestimation of the political and military foundations of the Republic of Indonesia, Dutch overestimation of its own superiority in arms and materiel, and because of economic necessity. This monograph consists of three sections. The first section provides background information on the NEI, necessary to understand the paternalistic Dutch attitude that assumed that the NEI was not yet able to stand on its own feet. It will explain Dutch colonial politics, and the stance and course of action followed by the Dutch Government in response to rising Indonesian nationalism. Additionally, it will describe the situation after the Japanese surrender, when Indonesian revolutionary events had gathered momentum and the Dutch had lost any initiative they might have had. Finally, it will set out how the British initially supported Dutch reoccupation of the NEI.

The second section will describe the road to war. The Republican of Indonesia violations of the 1946 Lingadjatti agreement forced the Dutch to action, leading directly to the first 'police action'. This section reveals the political and military objectives and the course of action using the spearhead-strategy to achieve them. Although this police action had military success, it did not meet all of its objectives.

The third section will describe the military situation on both sides after this first ‘police action’, and, from the Dutch perspective, the necessity for a second ‘police action’. The result was a military stalemate: the Dutch held the major cities and the principal economic regions, while the Republicans controlled most of the outlying areas. This resulted in increased guerrilla warfare; precisely what the Dutch sought to avoid.

Literature Review

There are many sources available on the history of the NEI, however, these sources do not adequately address Dutch thinking at the strategic and operational levels. The Dutch military historical literature describes the military developments on the military tactical level, from brigade to platoon level. The same holds true for scientific interest in the historical study of Dutch decolonization, which focuses on the political and diplomatic developments on the Dutch side and only minimally on the strategic and operational military aspects of the decolonization process. However, by combining documentation from these two research areas, this monograph seeks to highlight and emphasize the role of the strategic and operational aspects.

As wars are not fought in a political vacuum, it is important to look first at the political context. The struggle in the NEI was not, in the eyes of the Dutch, a war of liberation, but an uprising against the rule of law.¹⁹ While the Dutch saw the conflict in Indonesia as an internal matter, the international community was also involved. Military scholar Van Dijk argues that, as the Dutch were not able to end the conflict and the area became more unstable, the US Government, fearing a rise of communism in the archipelago, put political pressure on the Dutch to end the conflict. In addition, van Dijk points out that after the second military offensive and the Dutch dismissal of United Nations Security Council Resolutions, the US Government threatened

¹⁹ De Moor, *Met Klewang en Karabijn*, 217.

the Netherlands with a ceasure in Marshall Aid, since Dutch actions in the Republic of Indonesia were influencing the North Atlantic Treaty.²⁰

In his book, *Afscheid van Indie*, Dutch historian Doel describes the end of the Dutch influence in the NEI. It is a valuable source for Indonesian history and the policy of the Dutch Government.²¹ It emphasizes the differences within Dutch political parties and describes the Dutch reactions to international policy. This book provides a detailed background of the conflict from a Dutch perspective, with a focus on the decision-making process within the Dutch Government. Similarly, in his book *Nederland valt aan – op weg naar oorlog met Indonesie 1947*, Ad van Liempt describes the run-up to the war in the Republic of Indonesia using all possible documents ranging from letters to, diaries, minutes, and secret notes. From his compelling description, it becomes clear that no one was able to stem the disaster.²²

In his book *Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesie*, Tom van den Berge articulates in detail the thinking and actions of Governor-General Van Mook, and his close relationship with the military commander on site, Lieutenant-General Spoor. This contributes to an understanding of the two Dutch schools of thought on strategy in the NEI.²³ The first school, promoted by Van Mook, aimed at establishing a new relationship between the mother country and the colony based on equality and quickly recognized the necessity of talking to Indonesian nationalists. The second school, championed by Lieutenant-General Spoor, argued that the first and foremost goal had to be the creation of military order, which once established would then be followed with a

²⁰ Van Dijk, ii.

²¹ Hubrecht W. Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Prometheus, 2000), 338.

²² Van Liempt, 24.

²³ Tom van den Berge, *H.J. van Mook (1894–1965) Een Vrij en Gelukkig Indonesie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Thoth, 2014), 321.

discussion of the future with Indonesian leaders. Spoor tried to influence the decision-making in the Dutch cabinet to his hand which, as a soldier, he was not entitled to do. In his book, *Generaal Spoor - triomf en tragiek van een legercommandant*, Jaap de Moor articulates how Spoor's thoughts changed almost from day to day because of the evolving political situation in the homeland as well as internationally.²⁴ Despite these different views, there was one thing both schools of thought agreed on: any form of autonomy for the colony, let alone independence, was out of the question. So how was the conduct of military operations based upon these two conceptions? The answer is found in the the book, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen - Nederlands militair strategisch beleid in Indonesie 1945-1950* by Petra Groen. This book provides an excellent background for the military part of the conflict. It focuses on the Dutch military strategic policies and gives detailed information on the police actions in 1947 and 1948. It describes the chaotic situation during the conflict that helps to understand why the international community, led by the United States, intervened politically.²⁵

Jaap de Jong's book, *Diplomatie of Strijd: Het Nederlands beleid tegenover the Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1947*, is probably the most comprehensive book regarding this period and covers the complete episode of the Dutch struggle, looking at all three main actors: Dutch, British and Indonesian.²⁶ The most valuable primary sources are the first six volumes of the *Officiële Bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950* by S.L. van der Wal. Published between 1971 and 1976, these books contain thousands of pages of

²⁴ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 380.

²⁵ Groen, 88.

²⁶ De Jong, 338. While covering British attitudes, this book was written without using British archival sources.

official documents and correspondence in English and Dutch, with annotations providing excerpts of other documents and historical context.²⁷

The book, *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence* by Bart Luttikhuis is the first book in English to specifically study the intense conflict that occurred during the Indonesian revolution and the decolonization struggle of the NEI between 1945 and 1949. This case is particularly significant as the first episode of post-World War II colonial violence, and one with global reverberations. International opinion was ranged against the Dutch, and the nascent United Nations condemned its euphemistically termed ‘police actions’ to reclaim the archipelago from Indonesian nationalists after defeat by the Japanese in 1942. As this book makes clear, however, intra-Indonesian violence was no less prevalent, as groups with rival visions of independence vied for control and villagers were caught between the sides. Taking a multi-perspective approach, eighteen authors examine the origins of the conflict as well as its representation and remembrance in memory.²⁸

According to David Kilcullen, there is no standard set of metrics, benchmarks, or operational techniques that apply to all insurgencies or remain valid for any single insurgency throughout its life cycle. Kilcullen argues in his book, *The Accidental Guerilla*, that these “small wars” differ from previous conflicts as each situation is a unique one and that there are no fixed “laws” of counterinsurgency. However, David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare* provides a template for the defeat of today’s insurgents and terrorists. He states that insurgencies seem likely to be a frequent occurrence in unstable new nations. This book is as relevant today as it was forty

²⁷ S.L. van der Wal, *Officiële Bescheiden Betreffende de Nederlands Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950, vols. 1 to 6, Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën - Kleine Serie* (’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 12.

²⁸ Bart Luttikhuis, Dirk A Moses, *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), ii.

years ago, and contributes to a better understanding of the methods of the various hostile groups active in the NEI. Galula points out the difference between conventional war and insurgency, and describes what a revolutionary war is. His primary interest is to develop principles to guide a regime seeking to combat insurgency.²⁹ Mao Zedong's three-stage theory of insurgency and the books, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* by Roger Trinquier and *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* by John Nagel, also contribute to this monograph's theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of counterinsurgency.³⁰ These books all contribute to the understanding of the actions of both the Dutch Army in the NEI and also the activities of the Indonesian nationalists.

²⁹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 13.

³⁰ Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith III (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006). John Nagel, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Section 1: Strategic Context

Background



Figure 1. Map of the Netherlands East Indies 1942.

Source: Adapted from Dr. Christiaan G.F. de Jong, *Een Voetnoot bij de Koloniale Geschiedenis van Nederlands-Indie* (Groningen: Passage, 2013), 17.

The Dutch influence in Indonesia started in 1596, when the first expedition arrived in the area. Dutch sea power annihilated the Portuguese, who had been present in Indonesia since 1498. When the Dutch established their footprint, other competitors, such as Britain and Spain, got discouraged.³¹ In 1602, the Netherlands' United East India Company (VOC) was formed. In 1619, after a slow and gradual industrialization of the Netherlands, the VOC indirectly colonized the archipelago of Indonesia.³² The VOC's early motives to colonize Indonesia were merely

³¹ Christiaan Penders, *The West New Guinea Debacle: Dutch Decolonisation and Indonesia, 1945-1962* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 24.

³² H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 34.

commercial. They wanted to dominate the trade in Indonesia and form a monopoly in the area in order to compete against other European countries, including Britain. The VOC gradually gained more control of Indonesia as it set up ports in more places. The VOC controlled Indonesia indirectly until the eighteenth century, when the private investment company began to decline due to a decrease in profits from trade and the interruption of Indonesian pirates. The company's charter expired in 1799, after which the Dutch Government took direct control of Indonesia.³³

The Napoleonic Wars (1808-1815) had a large effect on Dutch control of Indonesia, and the control temporarily shifted to the British government in 1811. The Congress of Vienna, in 1815, returned Indonesia to the Dutch and reestablished a Dutch 'sphere of influence' over the archipelago.³⁴ The Dutch exploited the colony, its natural resources, and its labor force. The Dutch were primarily interested in gaining high profits from the labor and resources they extracted from Indonesia. To assure these profits, the Dutch established the *Cultuurstelsel*, or the Cultivation System. This system forced peasants and farmers to grow commercial crops for the Dutch and for the local governments.³⁵ Heavy taxes were levied on the peasants; therefore, they faced impoverished conditions and famine. The Dutch brought commercial agriculture, including coffee cultivation, to the island of Java, which became one of the largest exporters of the product. Sugar, coffee, and other goods accounted for seventy percent of Indonesian exports, and the Dutch took almost all the profits.³⁶ The Dutch used all the fertile land in Indonesia as plantations; peasants did not have enough land for subsistence farming and, as a result, suffered through

³³ Willmott, 34-35.

³⁴ Gordon L. Rottman, *World War II Pacific Island Guide, a Geo-Military Study* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 195-198.

³⁵ Frances Gouda, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies / Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 111.

³⁶ Teitler and Drooglever, *De Val van Nederlands-Indië* (Dieren: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1982), 82.

multiple famines. Due to the poor conditions suffered by indigenous laborers, local resistance to Dutch rule began to grow.

Because of the growing resistance, the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (*KNIL: Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*) was established in 1830 and consisted of Dutch and local soldiers.³⁷ The KNIL was a separate branch of the Royal Netherlands Army, commanded by the Governor-General of Indonesia and funded by the colonial budget. The KNIL was not allowed to recruit from Dutch Army conscripts and had the nature of a 'Foreign Legion,' recruiting not only Dutch volunteers, but also volunteers from many other European nationalities (especially German, Belgian and Swiss mercenaries).³⁸ While most officers were European, the majority of soldiers were indigenous Indonesians, the largest contingent of which were Javanese and Sundanese. This army established Dutch authority in the archipelago and supervised internal order. It also was responsible for defending the colony against foreign attack. After 1900, forty thousand professional soldiers served in the KNIL. In 1918 conscription was introduced in the NEI for military service within the Dutch colony to strengthen the KNIL.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dutch politicians wanted to put more emphasis on the development of the population. There was a new government in the Netherlands and it aimed to bring the population of the NEI to a 'higher level'. This new approach was called 'ethical politics'. Starting in 1901, it aimed for the development of the local population and the indigenous government.³⁹ Despite being well-intentioned, this policy had a negative effect.

³⁷ Dutch and local soldiers worked together in a professional way. During the wars, the local soldiers displayed excellent courage. Most of the Netherlands' highest military medals, the Military Order of William (equivalent of the Medal of Honor), were awarded to Indonesian soldiers.

³⁸ Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), 15.

³⁹ Hubertus Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Prometheus, 2000), 23.

Leaders and royals in the NEI did receive more support, but the local population did not benefit much from the development plans. Western-educated Indonesians grew especially discontent with Dutch domination. Starting in 1908, they established Indonesian political parties, and asked for increasingly more radical demands. In the 1920s, the first Indonesian nationalist parties arose. They sought an independent United State of Indonesia. Some young Indonesians, who had received educational opportunities home and in the Netherlands, formed a new class of intellectuals. They realized that despite the ‘ethical politics’ policy, the Netherlands was exploiting the NEI and that the local population had a subordinate role.⁴⁰ Because of their education, the ‘new elite’ thought that they could rule the country just as well as the Dutch. They wanted the Indonesian people to develop through education and politics. Together with the resentment of Dutch presence all over the East Indies, nationalism grew in the early twentieth century.⁴¹ However, after 1920, the NEI government acted with hard measures against the nationalists. This caused the nationalist movement to remain small in the pre-war NEI.⁴²

During the Second World War, the Netherlands was unable to defend the archipelago against Japanese attack. The KNIL and associated forces were quickly defeated in the NEI campaign of 1941–42.⁴³ All European soldiers, which in practice included all able-bodied Indo-European males, were interned by the Japanese as prisoners of war (POWs).⁴⁴ Twenty-five percent of the POWs did not survive their internment. Japan occupied Indonesia from 1942 to 1945, controlling the trade and government of the archipelago, and removing all aspects of Dutch control. This was in itself disastrous for Dutch prestige. In addition, all Dutch and other European

⁴⁰ Van den Doel, 36.

⁴¹ Petra Groen and D.W. Staat, *Inzet in Nederlands-Indie 1945-1950* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren & Co, 1992), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

nationals were interned in prison camps and every trace of the Dutch presence disappeared entirely from public life. The Japanese, out of sheer necessity, did what the Dutch had never dared to do: they involved the Indonesians in local administration and society. They gave them posts in commerce and government that had previously been out of their reach. The Japanese also militarized hundreds of thousands of mostly young Indonesians, and fired them up with a militant, nationalistic spirit. Finally, the power of the traditional elite, who had been a cornerstone of Dutch colonial rule, was greatly diminished, particularly in Java and Sumatra, where the Japanese murdered many former local rulers.

The Dutch authorities in exile in Australia were completely unaware of these dramatic changes. In 1945, they had little or no information about the actual situation in the occupied archipelago. Consequently, they saw no compelling reasons to relinquish their 'exalted' ideals. By the time they realized that their return to power was by no means a foregone conclusion, it was already too late. Revolutionary events had by then gathered momentum.⁴⁵ By the autumn of 1945, before they realized what was going on, the Dutch had already lost any initiative they might have had.⁴⁶

Peaceful Reoccupation

Although nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta dreamed of Indonesian independence for a long time, they hesitated to act because they wanted to prepare more thoroughly before taking on the Dutch forces.⁴⁷ However, a group of militant youths, *Pemudas*, led by a former protégé of Sukarno, abducted Sukarno and Hatta and told them to declare independence immediately, which

⁴⁵ Willem Gerrit Jan Rimmelink, *The Emergence of The New Situation: The Japanese Army on Java After The Surrender* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 1978), 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Van den Doel, 84.

they did on August 17, 1945, just two days after the Japanese capitulation.⁴⁸ The leadership of the young Republic of Indonesia started by building up a civil administration as well as armed forces. The revolution had started, led by newly educated elites and reformers such as Sukarno and Hatta. For their part however, the Dutch believed the Indonesians did not want independence. Instead, they believed that the Republic of Indonesia was a Japanese idea.⁴⁹

On August 15, 1945, the British-led South East Asia Command (SEAC) became responsible for the handling of the immediate effects of the Japanese capitulation in large parts of South East Asia. The SEAC forces had three tasks to be executed: disarming and repatriating the Japanese POW, Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI), and handover of the administration to the civil authorities.⁵⁰ The way it handled these tasks and dealt with the nationalist movements within its boundaries directly and indirectly influenced the processes of state formation that subsequently took place in these countries. However, it took six weeks following the declaration of Indonesian independence before a few British forces made first contact, on September 15, 1945. This period gave the Republic and the *Pemudas* the initiative. Meanwhile Dutch representatives arrived in the NEI and put their focus on the islands of Java and Sumatra. Unfortunately, the priorities of the Netherlands were at the bottom of the British list of territories where the SEAC tasks were to be executed.⁵¹

The Netherlands wanted to restore their authority as soon as possible, and to stop the violent acts of the *Pemudas*. However, it had barely any troops ready to do this, so the Dutch had to depend on the British, who were not intending to fight the Indonesian independence

⁴⁸ Gouda, 119.

⁴⁹ Gouda, 121.

⁵⁰ Kirby S. Woodburn, *The War against Japan: History of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 228.

⁵¹ De Jong, *Diplomatie*, 58-59; Woodburn Kirby, *The War against Japan*, 228-230.

movement, and only wanted to deal with the Japanese.⁵² The British did not allow Dutch troops on Java and Sumatra during this time because they believed this would provoke the *Pemudas* into further violence. The arrival of British forces in Indonesia caused unrest amongst the Indonesians, especially the *Pemudas*, because they did not want any colonial rule restored. The *Pemudas* demanded unconditional *Merdeka* (freedom), and tried to accelerate their social revolution with violence. The revolutionaries had access to weapons that they captured from the Japanese. In some cases, the Japanese even handed over weapons in large quantities prior to their departure from the islands.⁵³ The *Pemudas* became more aggressive and started to target anyone with any link to the Dutch or the colonial past. They also aggressively approached the British troops, positioned in six key urban areas on Java and Sumatra, and attacked the POW camps.⁵⁴

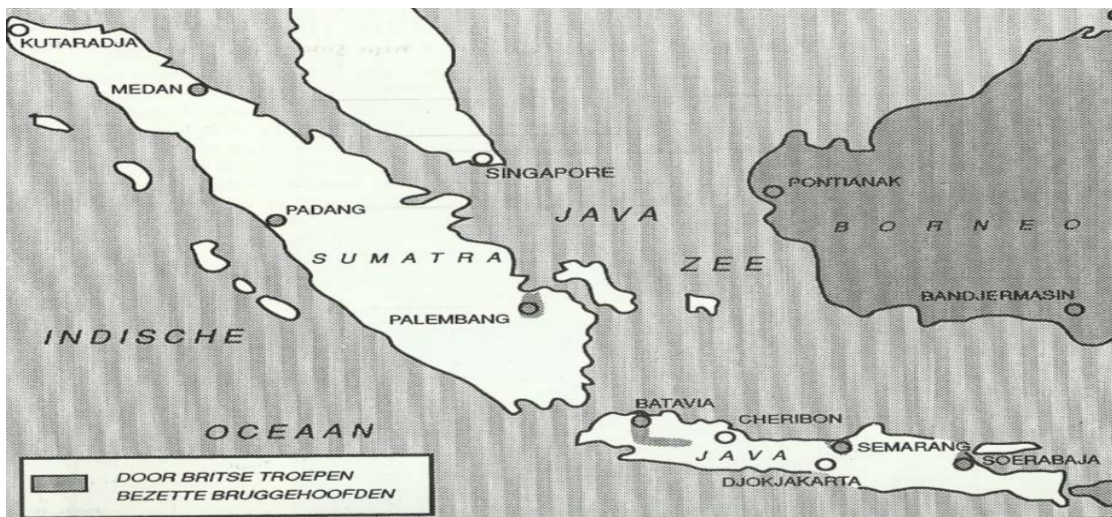


Figure 2. Map of British Key areas on Java and Sumatra.

Source: Adapted from Petra Groen and D.W. Staat, *Inzet in Nederlands-Indie 1945-1950* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren & Co, 1992), 31.

⁵² Penders, 25.

⁵³ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 18.

⁵⁴ The six key areas/cities were on the islands Sumatra (Medan, Padang, and Palembang) and Java (Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya).

This violent revolt, known as the *Bersiap* ('be ready') period, resulted in a death toll that ran into the tens of thousands. The bodies of three thousand six hundred Indo-Europeans were identified as killed; however, more than twenty thousand registered Indo-European civilians were abducted and never returned. The Indonesian revolutionaries lost at least twenty thousand, mostly young fighting men. The Japanese forces lost around one thousand soldiers and the British forces registered sixhunderd sixty soldiers, mostly British Indians, as killed (with a similar number missing in action). The actual Dutch military was hardly involved, as they had only started to return to Indonesia in March and April 1946.⁵⁵ The British forces wanted to avoid any more violence, had limited forces because of other colonial issues, and realized that the Republic was more than just a local revolt sponsored by the Japanese.⁵⁶ Therefore, the British wanted to withdraw as soon as possible, and hand off negotiations to the Dutch. The British emphasized the necessity of negotiating with the nascent Republic of Indonesia, and thus accepting the Republic of Indonesia as a legitimate partner in negotiations.⁵⁷ Although the Dutch did not want to recognize the Republic of Indonesia as a partner in negotiations, their options were limited at the time, so they agreed. The first meeting between Van Mook, Governor-General in the NEI, and the rebel leader Sukarno was set on March 16, 1946. In Indonesia, the British remained involved in military operations to protect civilians and former prisoners and in negotiations until they withdrew their forces between April and November 1946. The Netherlands, who had been building up troop formations in the NEI from March of 1946, re-established Dutch authority in six key urban areas on Java and Sumatra, taking over from the British troops.⁵⁸ Throughout 1946,

⁵⁵ Penders, 30.

⁵⁶ Van den Doel, 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁸ Gouda, 117.

Dutch troops continued to deploy to the NEI and took over the British positions when the latter left the islands. During this time, Dutch military leaders had already started planning for large-scale operations to restore authority over the area.⁵⁹

Section 2: Dutch Military Operations in Indonesia

The strategic purpose of war is to attain a better condition of peace.

—Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*

Decision to Intervene Militarily I

By the end of spring 1947, serious concern existed between the Dutch and the NEI administration over whether the Indonesian Government would fully implement the Linggadjati agreement of March 1947.⁶⁰ This agreement had ceded authority over parts of Indonesia to a Republican government—but with the understanding that Dutch commercial interests would not be harmed, and that the Republic of Indonesia would remain part of a loose federation under Dutch control. The Republican government, however, was facing a number of issues in administering its territory. Black marketeering thrived, particularly the Republican rubber trade with Singapore. Anti-Dutch resistance movements were in charge of commercial crop plantations in Sumatra and Java, the prime foreign currency source. These loosely organized groups, though somewhat affiliated with the Republic of Indonesia, had their own agendas, which often conflicted with policies of the central Republican government.⁶¹

As far as the Dutch were concerned, the Republic had proven itself to be incapable of controlling these resistance movements. The internally disorganized Republic of Indonesia

⁵⁹ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 80.

⁶⁰ Van Liempt, 24.

⁶¹ Teitler and Drooglever, 76.

administration was another concern; party leaders fought with party leaders, governments were overthrown and replaced by others, armed groups acted on their own in local conflicts, and certain parts of the Republic of Indonesia never had contact with the center and went their own way.⁶² The whole situation deteriorated to such an extent that the Dutch Government decided that no progress could be made before law and order were restored sufficiently to make discourse between the different parts of Indonesia possible, and to guarantee the safety of people of different political opinions.⁶³

In addition, the Dutch minister of finance expressed his fears about the deteriorating foreign currency situation of the colony and predicted bankruptcy. For the Dutch, taking quick and firm control over the plantations was imperative for financial and economic survival.⁶⁴ The Dutch planters lobby also suggested military intervention, a plan welcomed by Lieutenant-General Spoor, the NEI Army Commander, who predicted an easy military success.⁶⁵ The Dutch Army Staff estimated they would need two weeks to secure Republican-held cities and six months for the whole of the Republican territory. The planned offensive did not intend to include an attack on Yogyakarta, seat of the Republican government, due to the expected high costs of fighting there.⁶⁶

Other considerations also pointed toward a military option. The Dutch had built up a large number of troops, around one hundred thousand men, in Indonesia since 1946. These

⁶² Teitler and Drooglever, 76.

⁶³ Het Nationaal Archief No.1 F 11279/124/G. BZ, LA: Geheim Archief/DZ-D2. Afschrift, 5 Mei 1947.

⁶⁴ Lieutenant-General Simon Hendrik Spoor (Born January 12, 1902 in Amsterdam – Died May 25, 1949 in Batavia) was the Chief of Staff of the KNIL, and the Royal Dutch Army in the NEI, from 1946 to 1949, during the Indonesian National Revolution.

⁶⁵ Van den Doel, 112.

⁶⁶ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 135.

soldiers were unemployed and remained in their enclaves, but were a target for the Army of the Republic (TRI) and related militias. However, the Dutch Government and Army Staff found it politically difficult to decommission them. The inactive Dutch soldiers, mostly located in Java, were also a significant financial burden on the Netherlands after the ravages of World War II.⁶⁷

Apart from the opposition of the very small Dutch Communist Party, parliamentary consensus existed in the Netherlands about the necessity for military action against the Republic of Indonesia. The conflict reached a point of no return when the Dutch Government decreed an ultimatum to the NEI on June 23, 1947.⁶⁸ The Dutch ultimatum to the Republican Government—which called on it to stop hostilities, to respect foreign property, and to lift a food boycott in Dutch-controlled areas—expired on July 16, 1947. The threat of military action against the Republic of Indonesia thus became very real.

Operation Product

Given the failure of the ultimatum to produce results, on July 21, 1947, the Netherlands launched a military assault under the code name *Operation Product*. This designation indicated the assault's main objective of securing the commercial plantations and stocks (rubber, coffee, tea, etc.) on the two most important islands (Java and Sumatra) in the archipelago in terms of political, military and economic power. The second objective was to press the Republic of Indonesia to accept the Linggadjati Agreement by the occupation of these key areas.⁶⁹

Due to international political considerations, the military assault was labeled a police action, a misleading term suggesting restricted violence and a limited scope of operation. In

⁶⁷ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 137.

⁶⁸ Het Nationaal Archief No.1 F 11279/127/G. BZ, LA: Geheim Archief/DZ-D2. Afschrift, 5 Mei 1947.

⁶⁹ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 77.

reality, the Dutch mobilized over one hundred thousand men, organized into three divisions, several brigades, marine units and a small air force.⁷⁰ Scholar Cees Fasseur argues that the Dutch deliberately stretched out the failed negotiations prior to commencement of this military operation, in order to build up a stronger military force.⁷¹ Before the start of the police action, the Dutch troops consisted of forty-four thousand KNIL soldiers, seventy thousand Dutch Army soldiers, and five thousand Dutch Marines. These forces held several key cities on Java and Sumatra (see figure 2).

Opposing the Dutch Army was a force that appeared strong on paper, but whose strength was doubtful in reality. During their time in power in Indonesia from 1945 to 1946, the British had been unimpressed with the capabilities of the Indonesian revolutionaries, then known as the *Tentara Republic Indonesia* (TRI), the Army of the Republic. In a 1946 report, British Brigadier I.C.A. Lauder described the group, noting that the “lack of arms, ammunition, training and senior commanders make it impossible for this army to be formidable as anything but a force for guerrilla warfare and small scale raids.”⁷² On June 3, 1947, the TRI force changed its name to *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), the Indonesian National Army. The TNI had one hundred ten thousand soldiers on Java and sixty-four thousand on Sumatra.⁷³ Besides these regular forces, there were thousands of loosely organized militants on both islands.

Brigadier Lauder’s poor opinion of the TNI was echoed by Dutch Army Commander

⁷⁰ J.A. Van Doorn en W.J. Hendrix, *Ontsporing van Geweld: Het Nederlands-Indisch Conflict* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers 2012), 140.

⁷¹ Cees Fasseur, *De leeuw en de Cheshire kat: Engeland, Nederland en de dekolonisatie van Indonesië 1945-1949* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999), 10.

⁷² S.L. van de Wal, *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950* (Den Haag: Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatien, 1975), 261.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Lieutenant-General Spoor, who was convinced that they would disintegrate in wartime when confronted by a strong organized foe.⁷⁴ Although the Dutch were outnumbered, they possessed better equipment and training and hoped to profit from their superiority in mobility, technical equipment, firepower, and aircraft. In addition, Spoor believed that the battle value of the TNI in a conventional war was very low due to its lack of armament, internal squabbles, poor training, and dilettante command structure.⁷⁵

The Dutch military developed several military plans but their options were constrained when Van Mook, Governor General in the NEI, insisted on a limited operation because he wanted to be able to negotiate with the Republic after any major operation.⁷⁶ In response to Van Mook's request, Spoor developed and presented his 'spearhead' strategy. Spoor's strategy consisted of two phases. The first phase was a rapid offensive to take control of the principal cities and surrounding areas, and thus 'decapitate' the Republic's leadership. This 'decapitation' was key to the strategy, because the Dutch military leaders realized that there was a significant risk that the TNI would start a guerilla war when the Dutch decided to attack.⁷⁷ The expectation was that the rapid Dutch offensive would result in the control of all major populated areas, the demoralization of the enemy, and the dispersal of the TNI. After taking possession of these key areas, the Dutch expected that revenues would gradually rise, which in turn would support the motherland and the costs of the Army's operations against the NEI.⁷⁸ Indeed, the Dutch Government was economically pressured during this time. The Netherlands had been ravaged during German occupation, so the Dutch government hoped that the revenues of the colony could also support the

⁷⁴ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 82.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Groen, 83.

⁷⁷ Van den Doel, 232.

⁷⁸ Van Doorn & Hendrix, 99.

reconstruction of the Netherlands.⁷⁹ This is partially the reason why the first military operation was named *Operation Product*. Finally, when the key areas were under control, the second phase, pacification, could begin. This meant securing the conquered area by killing or capturing enemy combatants still in the field. The Dutch military would further pacify the outlying areas in a police-style operation by conducting intensive purification operations and patrolling, thereby ending any guerrilla warfare and regaining control of the country.⁸⁰

From July 21 to August 05, 1947, the Dutch conducted operations on land and from the sea, with an emphasis on East Java because of its economic value. The marines were assigned an important role in securing economic objectives, such as plantations, and made responsible for what was generally labeled “cleansing the area of rebel elements.”⁸¹ The irregular resistance movements and the still poorly organized TNI were taken by surprise by *Operation Product*. Armed resistance against Dutch military forces was low, and TNI army units were geographically dispersed or literally decimated. Seventy-six Dutch soldiers died in action, while Indonesian casualties are believed to have been much higher, though figures vary from fifteen hundred to three thousand.⁸² By the end of this first police action, seventy percent of total rubber plantation acreage in Java and around sixty percent in Sumatra were under Dutch military control.⁸³

The military actions of the Dutch Army during the first police action were immediately termed a great success. Abdul Haris Nasution, one of the military strategists of the Indonesian nationalists, who served in the KNIL until 1942 and was a scholar of the military academy in

⁷⁹ Ad Van Liempt, *De Oorlog* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2012), 399.

⁸⁰ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 85.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸² Van Doorn & Hendrix, 152.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Bandung, cynically stated that at this time: “the Dutch staff was touring through Java.”⁸⁴ The spearhead strategy of Spoor seemed to work, as it had led to the capture of many important roads, towns, and bridges. There was little to no resistance, casualties were low, and the rubber plantation acreage came for the most part under Dutch military control. However, problems remained for the Dutch in the NEI.

In order to disrupt the potential of a Dutch conquest, the Indonesian revolutionaries had adopted a scorched earth tactic when the first rumors about a big military operation gained weight, and these tactics, which destroyed a number of plantations, did damage to the economic goals of the war.⁸⁵ Furthermore, and despite the progress of the Dutch Army, the Republic of Indonesia still existed, in contrast to the expectations of Dutch military leaders. When it seemed that *Operation Product* would not pressure key politicians of the Republic Indonesia into abandoning their cause, Spoor insisted on capturing Djokjakarta, where the political leadership of the Republic of Indonesia resided. Alas, this was to no avail.⁸⁶ Several days after the start of *Operation Product*, the military offered the Dutch Government additional military operations that focused on capturing Djokjakarta.⁸⁷ These operations, named *Operation Amsterdam* and *Operation Rotterdam*, had been developed before the start of *Operation Product*, but, after discussion, were eventually rejected by the Dutch government. Most of the Dutch political leaders were convinced that it was unnecessary to actually destroy the Republic of Indonesia. It would suffice to capture the key economic and strategic areas in Java and Sumatra to send a clear message. In addition, the followers of the political parties in the cabinet would not allow such

⁸⁴ Abdul Haris Nasution, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 19.

⁸⁵ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 112.

⁸⁶ Van den Doel, 234-235.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

actions, out of fear that such actions shared too many characteristics with colonial war, which was politically unpopular.⁸⁸

The Dutch Government also did not want to take on further military actions due to international interests; for an aggressive military operation was expected to attract additional attention from neighboring countries and the United Nations. The Dutch government's fears were realized when the central figures in the Republican government, Sukarno and Hatta, proved adept at gaining international support and the war was internationalized. For example, both Australia and India (the latter of which gained its independence in 1947), lodged complaints against the Netherlands at the United Nations within ten days of *Operation Product*. International diplomacy finally brought the advance to a halt. Most damaging of all, however, was intervention from the United States who, through the United Nations, put pressure on the Dutch to stop the offensive. In a response, the United Nations imposed the first ever cease-fire in its short history, thereby ending *Operation Product* on August 5, 1947.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 92-93.

⁸⁹ Alastair M. Taylor, *Indonesian Independence and the United Nations* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1960), 50.

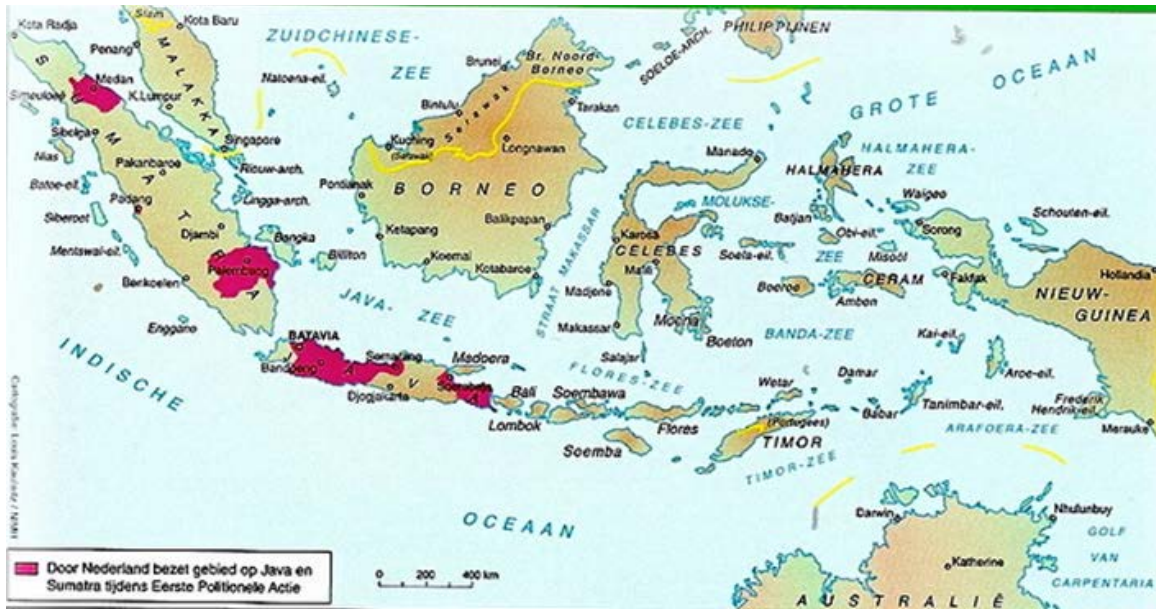


Figure 3. Map of occupied territory by the Dutch during the first police action on Java and Sumatra.

Source: Adapted from Petra Groen and D.W. Staat, *Inzet in Nederlands-Indië 1945-1950* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren & Co, 1992), 46.

Guerrilla Warfare after Operation Product

While Dutch forces overran the Indonesian nationalists during *Operation Product*, this did not imply the Indonesian nationalists were not prepared at all. At first, the commander-in-chief of the TNI, General Sudirman, planned to fight a conventional war. He ordered roadblocks, bunkers, and tank traps to be built at strategic locations.⁹⁰ When *Operation Product* commenced, these obstacles did slightly delay the operations of the Dutch troops, though engineer troops quickly took care of them. The Indonesian Army found itself unable to directly counter the Dutch forces, which were better organized, trained and armed. In contrast, the Indonesian Army consisted mostly of volunteers. Some had received a little military training during the Japanese

⁹⁰ Pierre Heijboer, *De Politieke Acties: De Strijd om Indië, 1945-1949* (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1979), 27.

occupation and had served in the *Peta* or the *Heiho*, but these organizations dissolved when the Japanese surrendered.⁹¹ However, the Indonesian Army did receive some support from a small number of Japanese troops who were still located on islands in the perimeter of Indonesia and were refusing to surrender. These Japanese troops joined the nationalists and offered their weapons, or were overrun by the TNI and then forced to surrender their arms. Moreover, there were recruits from the KNIL who had defected. During the British occupation of Indonesia, soldiers of the British Army that were sympathetic to the Indonesian struggle for independence, such as those of Indian origin, had defected as well. These disparate forces were molded together after the declaration of independence and from then on formed a new Indonesian Army. This Army compensated for its lack of organization and training with its numerical strength, estimated at approximately one hundred seventy-five thousand soldiers.⁹² The strategists of the TNI decided that, considering the failure of the conventional approach, the only viable option following *Operation Product* was guerrilla warfare.⁹³

The TNI's strategy was strongly influenced by the three-stage theory of insurgency that was propagated by Mao Zedong in the 1930s.⁹⁴ The first stage was described as the 'strategic defensive', in which pitched battles with the adversary are avoided. One of the important goals during this phase is forcing the enemy to overstretch, so that it can no longer stabilize its gains.

⁹¹ "Peta is an Indonesian acronym drawn from *Pembela Tanah Air*, which translates as Defenders of the Fatherland. It was the term employed to describe the volunteer force of young Indonesians recruited by the Japanese in Java during the occupation of the NEI in order to supplement Japanese strength. *Heiho* consisted of young recruits from the pre-war police force who were willing to swear loyalty to the Japanese. The *Heiho* were indigenous young Indonesians attached to the Japanese forces to assist in labor service and were not required to carry arms, as they were not considered regulars." Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944-1946* (New York: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 103.

⁹² Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 117.

⁹³ Nasution, 14-16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Meanwhile, guerrilla forces try to win moral support with the local population and train new recruits.⁹⁵ When the second stage is reached, the guerrillas use their strength to solidify the rural areas, meaning that they increase their control over a larger population. Every attempt of the enemy to increase stability and control should be countered, which justifies actions such as the killing of local officials. Finally, when the third stage is reached, the guerrillas attack the most vulnerable positions of the enemy, with great numerical superiority, until the struggle is won.⁹⁶ According to one of the key strategists of the TNI, Abdul Haris Nasution, during the war of Indonesian independence the guerrillas remained in what Mao called the first phase despite their aim of reaching the final phase of mobile warfare. Indeed, survival and the establishment of a good organization were the main priorities of the revolutionaries during the conflict.⁹⁷

Dutch soldiers immediately felt the impacts of TNI's methods of guerrilla warfare when they had to consolidate the territory conquered during *Operation Product*. Starting in August 1947, the TNI initiated attacks and ambushes at weak spots all over Java, reaching from Bantam in the west to Besuki in the east. The TNI created a feeling of insecurity across the island by committing murder and arson. Other islands in the archipelago, such as Sumatra, experienced similar events. Scorched earth tactics were applied as well, destroying many plantations and other economic resources.⁹⁸ United Nations observers to the conflict reported that the TNI sabotaged production equipment using unexploded aircraft ordinance leftover from WWII.⁹⁹ Guerrilla forces also attempted so-called 'Wingate actions,' named after the British commander in Burma

⁹⁵ James D. Kiras, *Terrorism and Irregular Warfare*, and John Baylis, *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005), 214.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Nasution, 76-77.

⁹⁸ Nasution, 182-183.

⁹⁹ Taylor, 124.

who fought against the Japanese.¹⁰⁰ In these actions, Dutch soldiers or positions were attacked from many different sides simultaneously, which proved effective as the number of Dutch casualties rose. In addition, the TNI used the regional-command method of ‘Wehrkreise’ to improve their command and control and thus contribute to operations that were more effective.¹⁰¹ The units of the TNI mostly operated independently and in small groups due to organizational difficulties.¹⁰² Central command was therefore too challenging. Communication beyond the local level was effected through the use of couriers to the regional and national level.¹⁰³ Just as Mao’s theory prescribed, the cities were mostly neglected by the guerrillas, as was engagement in pitched battles.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, the local population either voluntarily cooperated or was forced by the TNI to destroy bridges and block or mine roads, in order to disrupt the Dutch Army operations. Locals also supplied guerrilla forces with food and intelligence and offered refuge.¹⁰⁵ This proved to be effective and frustrating for Dutch soldiers. For example, the Dutch Marine W. van Tilborg served as a truck driver and was thus regularly exposed to mines, buried airplane bombs, and stretched wires that could decapitate a man. Nevertheless, he stated that although he was scared, he did not fail to meet his tasks: ‘The ambushes squeezed him like a thief in the night while driving.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Nasution, 69.

¹⁰¹ *The Wehrkreise* was an organizational system to restore the idea of a single military command in each region. They corresponded generally to the old brigade regions, which had become unworkable with the large-scale movement of units after the Dutch attack.

¹⁰² Nasution, 128.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, Den Haag, Losse Stukken Toegang 57, inventarisnummer 2592, Letter from W. Van Tilborg to his pen pal d.d. 11-02-1948.

Spoor acknowledged the increased difficulties for the Dutch Army because of guerrilla warfare after *Operation Product*. First of all, the overall operations suffered due to the demobilization of many experienced troops. Although this process was delayed at first, in the summer of 1948 many veterans returned home only to be replaced by fresh recruits, mostly conscripts, who were less suited for the difficult job because they lacked the experience of fighting.¹⁰⁷

In hindsight, probably the largest mistake of Spoor's spearhead strategy was that it focused too much on capturing the planned strategic areas and did not focus enough on the pacification of the already conquered ones. While Dutch troops were able to capture many strategic areas, the TNI had managed to avoid battles it could not win, and remained scattered in the perimeter. This gave the TNI the opportunity to reorganize and continue guerrilla warfare. Despite Dutch efforts, the nationalist influence remained strong in many places, either through intimidation or cooperation with the local population.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Spoor appears to have assumed that the TNI was a matter of a few ideological individuals and a group of stunned and blinded followers. The effectiveness of his spearhead strategy was dependent not only on the inability of the TNI to flee and remain in the perimeter, but also stood or fell with the accuracy of his analysis of the character of the Indonesian resistance.¹⁰⁹ The lack of effectiveness of Spoor's strategy ultimately raises the question of why the army commander had such a low opinion of the Republican military resistance.

This monograph argues that the Dutch views on the qualities of the pre-war colonial administration on the one hand, and the impotence of the Indonesian military on the other hand, may have led to underestimation of their opponents in the post-*Operation Product* conflict. It

¹⁰⁷ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

seems by no means inconceivable that Spoor, and with him many others, thought it impossible that an Indonesian military organization, opposed to the restoration of order and prosperity under proven Dutch leadership, enjoyed so much popular support that they could conduct and maintain a guerrilla war. Furthermore, the Dutch forces, although well-equipped and in great number, remained too small a force to effectively consolidate the most important islands of Java and Sumatra.¹¹⁰ In reality, by undertaking *Operation Product*, the Dutch won for themselves a larger area to police, while failing to solve the policing problem that the invasion was meant to deal with.

These considerations led Spoor to insist on the elimination of the political leadership of the Republic of Indonesia. He was convinced that, considering the limited resources he had after the repatriation of many veterans, it was impossible to win the war militarily. However, Spoor thought that the removal of the political leadership of the enemy would surely force them into surrendering.¹¹¹ He thus started a dialogue with the Dutch government to convince them again of the need to remove the Republican political leadership, but did not succeed.¹¹² Instead, *Operation Product* ended with a cease-fire, and Republican leadership continued to build support both internally and externally.

Decision to Intervene Militarily II

We have been attacked.... The Dutch government has betrayed the cease-fire agreement. All the Armed Forces will carry out the plans, which have been decided on to confront the Dutch attack.

— General Soedirman, broadcast from his sickbed.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 120.

¹¹¹ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 331.

¹¹² Heijboer, 127.

¹¹³ Anthony Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution* (Hawthorn, Vic.: Longman, 1974), 152.

Before the second major military operation was launched, however, there was officially still a cease-fire in effect. After the United Nations had imposed this cease-fire, both the Dutch and the Indonesian nationalists agreed on a demarcation line, which would serve as the new status quo. This did not really affect the combat operations of the Indonesian nationalists, however, as many were still behind enemy lines.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, talks between both parties continued on board the *USS Renville*, which harbored a United Nations Commission working to negotiate terms. Eventually, this commission led to the Renville Agreement of January 1948. Key features of this agreement were the transfer of sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia (on the islands of Java and Sumatra) to the Dutch state, which would be transferred yet again to a United States of Indonesia, when established thereafter.¹¹⁵ The United States of Indonesia would become part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands as a sovereign state. Demilitarization was also a topic, but considering the ongoing conflict, which continually breached the ceasefire agreement, this never seriously materialized.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, in the Renville agreement, the self-declared Republic of Indonesia itself was not part of this United States of Indonesia. Eleven independent states were presented in the Dutch plans, but not the Republic of Indonesia. This contradicted earlier Dutch commitments that the Republic of Indonesia would be integrated.¹¹⁷

Another disagreement between the two sides was the disbanding of the TNI due to the soon-to-be-established federal army, of which the KNIL would serve as the backbone.¹¹⁸ Finally,

¹¹⁴ Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, 117.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, 88, 94.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁸ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 127.

a High Representative was to be appointed, who was able to veto the new federal government's decisions, as well as to exercise emergency powers. He alone could decide if it was necessary to use those powers.¹¹⁹ During the peace talks, agreement on these elements unsurprisingly remained inconclusive, which ultimately led to the unilateral abrogation of the Renville agreement by the Dutch Government on December 11, 1948.

Operation Crow

Following the abrogation, the Dutch initiated the second large military operation of the war. In the early morning of December 19, 1948 the chief editor of the Indonesian newspaper *Pedoman*, Rosihan Anwar, was asked to come for a press conference at the Palace with a number of other journalists. The Palace was the official residence of the Governor-General, Dr. L.J.M. Beel and was situated at the Kings Square, now called Merdeka Square. "I saw firsthand recalled Rosihan, many years later, 'the first and last Catholic Governor, Dr. Louis Beel, a stiff rake, who told the journalists: 'The military operations have begun, Operation Crow has started!'" Beel had been Prime Minister of the Netherlands and succeeded Governor-General van Mook in November 1948 as the highest Dutch magistrate in the NEI. Though Beel's announcement may have come as a surprise to the gathered journalists, *Operation Crow*, the second police action, did not suddenly fall from the sky. The growing tension between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia had made many believe that a peaceful resolution of the conflict no longer was in the offing and that military action was inevitable.¹²⁰

This was essentially, however, against the will of Spoor. He had wished for earlier military action, because delaying would only serve the enemy. Starting the operation in early

¹¹⁹ Taylor, 160-161.

¹²⁰ Dr. J.W.M Schulten, *De Tweede Politionele Actie, de Politieke en Militaire Achtergronden* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom Militaire Spectator, 1998), 626.

December 1948 had been his preference, but political reasons, such as the United States' threat of cancelling Marshall Plan aid when negotiations were halted, were the primary cause of the eventual delay.¹²¹ The postponement of the military operation continued several more times, to the point that a final decision had to be made, before the consequences would result in what Spoor called a catastrophe.¹²²

The delay gave the TNI more time to prepare, but the TNI had anticipated an attack anyway, even before large Dutch troop movements indicated that one was forthcoming.¹²³ During the cease-fire, reforms were launched in order to increase the efficiency of the TNI army. The military leaders of the nationalist movement also prepared an alternative headquarters in case their main position was overrun.¹²⁴ The local Indonesian population received instructions not to cooperate with the Dutch, which was seen as a form of treachery.¹²⁵

The Nationalistic army reforms were seriously disturbed, when, just prior to the beginning of *Operation Crow*, a communist revolt erupted on Java in the nationalist-controlled Madiun territory, in September 1948. This event continued for several months and required a seriously aggressive response by the TNI in order to neutralize the threat. However, the political leadership of the nationalist movement benefited from the result, because it proved that, despite

¹²¹ In the immediate post-World War II period, Europe remained ravaged by war and thus susceptible to exploitation by an internal and external Communist threat. In a June 5, 1947, speech to the graduating class at Harvard University, Secretary of State George C. Marshall issued a call for a comprehensive program to rebuild Europe. Fanned by the fear of Communist expansion and the rapid deterioration of European economies in the winter of 1946–1947, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act in March 1948 and approved funding that would eventually rise to over \$12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe. Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 157.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 336. Spoor probably used the word catastrophe to encourage the Dutch government to make a definitive decision.

¹²³ Nasution, 179.

¹²⁴ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 155.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

Dutch allegations of communist activity, the Indonesian nationalists posed no future international threat to the enemies of communism.¹²⁶ Their international prestige therefore rose, and strengthened the bargaining position of the Republic of Indonesia. However, the goals of the Nationalistic army reforms were not reached before *Operation Crow* started. Nasution states that the army commanders of the TNI were too fixated on conventional approaches, which had, and would continue to be, proven ineffective.¹²⁷

Operation Crow aimed at full control of Java and the elimination of the political and military leadership of the Republic of Indonesia. Dutch politicians hoped that after the realization of this, the project of the United States of Indonesia could continue.¹²⁸ Similar to *Operation Product*, Spoor executed a spearhead strategy, focusing on key targets, such as the capital of the Republic of Indonesia, Djokjakarta. He also wished to eliminate several important troop locations of the enemy within six to eight days. If these goals were reached, pacification of the area was planned. Spoor was convinced that victory eventually would be won, although there still was a hard struggle ahead during the pacification of the area.¹²⁹ His opinion about the fighting power of the TNI was not changed; he still had a low opinion of them. For propagandistic reasons, the operation was presented as a police action against terrorists. This was an attempt to make it clear to the outside world that this was an internal affair and had nothing to do with the United Nations.¹³⁰

Also similar to *Operation Product*, this military operation was a combined operation of

¹²⁶ Frans Glissenaar, *Indië Verloren, Rampspoed Geboren* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 66.

¹²⁷ Nasution, 229.

¹²⁸ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 158.

¹²⁹ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 338.

¹³⁰ Schulten, 627.

land, sea, and air forces, and for which the Dutch implemented a large arsenal of military means. On December 19, 1948, *Operation Crow* started on Java with an airstrike on Magoewo airport in Yogyakarta, immediately followed by an airborne insertion. Commando units were dropped from airplanes above Djokjakarta.¹³¹ The Indonesian resistance was low and the Dutch flew in immediate reinforcements and started to march to the center of Djokjakarta. The Republican leaders decided not to leave the city, but to have themselves arrested, as they expected that the political gain would be bigger if they were arrested instead of a fleeing.¹³² General Soedirman, the TNI commander, did not follow this example and was able to leave the city. In the afternoon, Sukarno, Hatta, and other government members were arrested and subsequently interned. In the unoccupied fort, Fort de Kock on central Sumatra, the government members who were not captured formed an Indonesian Republican emergency government.

Meanwhile, Dutch military columns penetrated the Republic of Indonesia from Central and East Java. With some minor exceptions, the TNI avoided battle. Two amphibious Dutch landings supported the ground operations. Attacking from East Java, the Marines had many problems. Weather conditions were poor and the available resources of the Marines were insufficient for their assignment. In addition to that, the road network in their area of operations was very bad.¹³³ Because of these problems, the Marines were not able to carry out their plans on time. Spoor had little sympathy for these problems, for in his view, the Marines had failed.¹³⁴ Although the Dutch troops, sometimes delayed, reached their attack targets in the cities of Solo, Magelang and Madioen, they failed to inflict heavy losses on the TNI.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Schulten, 627.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 628.

¹³⁴ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 355.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Once the heart of the Republic of Indonesia was for the most part occupied, Spoor gave orders to bring West Java under Dutch control. On December 23, 1948, military units crossed the demarcation line at four locations. The occupation of West Java was without major problems and completed within a few days. On December 31, 1948, the conflict ended in Java. According to Spoor and his subordinate commanders, the Republic of Indonesia had ceased to exist.¹³⁶ The question now was the pacification of the 'liberated areas' from malicious elements. This had to be done completely in the tradition of the KNIL by conducting daily patrols and performing purges.

The course of events at Sumatra did not differ much from those on Java. The focus of the attack was the occupation of the Republican political and military headquarters, which was located at Fort de Kock. Unlike at Java, only a portion of Sumatra was under Dutch control. The cause of this was a lack of sufficient troops. On South Sumatra, operations started according to plan on December 29, 1948, with an airborne operation in order to capture the oil fields in Jambi. However, prior to the Dutch gaining control, the TNI managed to set the oil installations on fire. Further Dutch operations in South Sumatra were not entirely successful.¹³⁷ The TNI slowed the Dutch advance with all sorts of roadblocks and resistance.

¹³⁶ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 358.

¹³⁷ Schulten, 629.



Figure 4. Map of occupied territory by the Dutch during the second police action on Java and Sumatra.

Source: Adapted from Petra Groen and D.W. Staat, *Inzet in Nederlands-Indie 1945-1950* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren & Co, 1992), 107.

On January 5, 1949, *Operation Crow* ended at Sumatra. Airplanes dropped leaflets announcing, “The Republic of Indonesia does not exist anymore.”¹³⁸ Again, the prevailing view of the Dutch Government was that the military goals had been met and the greatest challenge would be the pacification of the area, which was even larger than before. Indeed, it would be more problematic to control as well.

Pacification

Resistance to the Dutch appeared low during, and shortly after, *Operation Crow* but would reappear stronger in a later stage when TNI units were reorganized behind enemy lines. The growing effectiveness of the TNI’s guerrilla activity was not only visible in the body count,

¹³⁸ Glissenaar, 68.

which was the highest by far in 1949, but also in the experience of Dutch soldiers.¹³⁹ Eventually, the enemy ambush tactics severely frustrated them. A Marine wrote that this was no longer a “fair war.”¹⁴⁰ He complained that the Marines were using artillery and mortars to “smoke things out” when there is the least suspicion that the TNI was present.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, he and his fellow Marines could not distinguish innocents from foe anymore, which meant not only the success of the guerrilla campaign of their enemy, but also the increasing chance of killing actual innocent people.¹⁴²

Although the guerrillas grew in effectiveness, their activities did not lead to great victories or strategic captures by the TNI. The Dutch held the major cities and the principal economic regions, while the Republicans controlled most of the outlying areas. This resulted in a military stalemate. Probably the greatest success of the TNI was the mobilization of the local population, who denied intelligence to the Dutch while providing food and other forms of support for the TNI. The lack of clear political goals and the growing international pressure on the Netherlands, fueled this stalemate as well.¹⁴³

It is interesting that the aspect of national and international support played such a key role in the transformation of the war. In most conflicts, there exist at least two parties that attempt to convince the local population that it is in their best interest to join their party’s side.¹⁴⁴ James D. Kiras, an expert in the field on terrorism and insurgency, substantiated the notion that “a

¹³⁹ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 158. Around 160 casualties per month.

¹⁴⁰ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, Den Haag, Losse Stukken Toegang 57, inventarisnummer 2592, Letter from W. Van Tilborg to his pen pal d.d. 28-01-1949.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 200.

¹⁴⁴ Martijn Kitzen, *Westerse Militaire Cultuur en Counter-Insurgency* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom Militaire Spectator, 2008), 128-129.

terrorist or insurgent campaign will almost always fail if it cannot attract internal or international support.”¹⁴⁵ During the War of Indonesian Independence, the Indonesian nationalists were successful in effectively gathering local support and mobilizing it, albeit sometimes through dubious methods. The Dutch presence was not strong enough to convince the Indonesian population that they would benefit by joining the Dutch cause. As one Dutch scholar stated, “The greatest defeat of the Dutch resulted from the fact that they could not win the Indonesian people as their allies.”¹⁴⁶ While key targets were either captured or preserved from destruction, effective control of the area in Java and Sumatra remained troublesome. Moreover, Dutch forces failed to prevent the organization of a shadow state, which served as an alternative to the captured political leaders of the Republic of Indonesia.¹⁴⁷ As a result, guerrilla warfare became more intense.

On the international level, support for the Dutch cause was crippled by *Operation Crow*. The Republic of Indonesia was not considered a sovereign state and therefore did not benefit from international rights that normally follow recognition by other states. Their de facto status during the war was, from a legal point of view, weak and not acknowledged by many nations. However, the weak legal status of the Republic of Indonesia did not mean they did not enjoy any international support. The British, for example, were quite reluctant to support the Dutch cause and tolerate the military interventions, because they wanted to avoid any further involvement with colonialism in Indonesia and instead concentrate on British India.¹⁴⁸

During the conflict, the United States and Great Britain, hoping to steer the conflict back to the negotiation table, initiated weapon embargoes. The Dutch were in a better position to

¹⁴⁵ James D. Kiras, *Terrorism and Irregular Warfare*, John Baylis (red.) et al., *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 209-212.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, 213.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 214.

¹⁴⁸ Glissenaar, 178.

gather international support. They received financial (Marshall Aid) and moral support from the United States. However, the United States had served as the main source for weapons during World War II in the defense of the NEI. This proved to be rather controversial when war material used by the Dutch was still recognizable as American, as with the exemplary stars on the tails of fighter and bomber planes. According to some, this was done on purpose to intimidate the nationalists by implying that the Americans had chosen the Dutch side in the conflict.¹⁴⁹

Actually, the Americans were divided over the issue. There were those who supported Wilsonian ideals of self-determination, while others tolerated colonial empires of important allies. However, when the Indonesian nationalists thwarted a communist uprising—thereby proving that they would not become a future enemy of the United States—and the Dutch initiated *Operation Crow*, the choice became easier.¹⁵⁰ Financial support was withdrawn, and the Dutch were forced to accept international steering of the conflict, something that the Netherlands had been trying to avoid since the start of the war.

Operation Crow Aftermath

The aftermath of *Operation Crow* was quite devastating in terms of prestige loss for the Netherlands in the international community and Dutch policy for the future of Indonesia. In that regard, framing the Dutch military operations as pyrrhic victories seems quite appropriate.¹⁵¹ The Security Council of the United Nations presented a resolution on January 28, 1949 that would transfer the leadership of the upcoming independence to the United Nations Commission for Indonesia (UNCI). It also called for a ceasefire, the release of the political prisoners and a

¹⁴⁹ Frances Gouda en T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2002), 191.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, 194.

retreat of Dutch forces from Djokjakarta. Some soldiers hoped against better judgment that the Dutch Government would ignore the demands of the international community: “Let them swim in the Security Council of the United Nations as long as they want, we just go on.”¹⁵² Finally, the resolution presented a deadline for the transfer of sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia not later than January 1, 1950.¹⁵³

In the months leading up to the institutionalization of the Indonesian federation, several serious issues remained. The cease-fire appeared ineffective, leading to many more casualties on both sides. Another great struggle was the creation of the federal army and its composition. Dutch officials were convinced that any federal army primarily composed of TNI soldiers would lead to problems in the near future, whereas the Republic of Indonesia declined a primary role for KNIL soldiers in this army. Despite the differences between both parties, the UNCI steered the conflict into their preferred direction. In August 1949, a Round Table Conference was organized in The Hague where the final adjustments were approved. After a final meeting in December, the Second and First Chamber of the Dutch Government also accepted the specifics of the transfer of sovereignty. On December 27, 1949, just prior to the deadline of the UNCI, this transfer was officially completed, meaning that the conflict was over.¹⁵⁴

Section 3: Analysis

This section analyses the Dutch military strategy in the conflict with the Republic of Indonesia between 1945 and 1950, and argues that, in October 1945, the Netherlands was confronted with an improvised Republic of Indonesia and a loosely organized Republican military force equipped with Japanese weaponry. Yet the Netherlands’ pursuit of a return to

¹⁵² Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, Den Haag, Losse Stukken Toegang 57, inventarisnummer 2592, Letter from W. Van Tilborg to his pen pal d.d. 12-02-1949.

¹⁵³ Taylor, 187-188.

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, 262-264.

power in the Indonesian archipelago, which was the Dutch political and military strategic objective at the time of the Japanese surrender. The Dutch return to power was influenced by the ensuing military dependence on Great Britain, by the attitudes of the Japanese occupying force and the Indonesian population, especially the unforeseen revolutionary-nationalistic fervor of the Indonesians on the islands of Java and Sumatra, and finally by its own military inadequacy.

Military Dependence on Great Britain

During the period of military dependence on Great Britain, the unexpected developments resulted in conflicting opinions between Britain and the Netherlands. Fearing a colonial war, the British thought better of the 'reoccupation' of Java and Sumatra, opting for a 'key-area strategy' as an alternative, and insisted on political discussions with the Republic of Indonesia. The Dutch rejected the proposals for discussion and continued to press for 'reoccupation' of Java and Sumatra. They did not believe that this would pose any problems for the two-division strong British force and that this British slowness in the planned 'reoccupation' of Java and Sumatra was brought about by Dutch powerlessness and British self-interest. According to the Dutch, the Republic of Indonesia did not stem from nationalistic reawakening among the population. It was, rather, the product of Japanese conspirators and Indonesian collaborators. The Dutch believed that this Republic of Indonesia would collapse once these leaders had been captured.¹⁵⁵

Despite the conciliatory British policy, the militant Republicans attacked the British in their key areas in October and November 1945. This Indonesian military display of power, coupled with pressure from the British, led to a division in the Dutch camp in November of that year. While Dutch military authorities stuck to the above-described position, Governor-General Van Mook's aim changed in favor of decolonization and a partial reoccupation campaign in order

¹⁵⁵ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 314.

to support negotiations on decolonization. In his opinion, total reoccupation would be beyond the strength of the Dutch.¹⁵⁶ In the midst of this controversy, the Dutch cabinet, by necessity, reluctantly sided with Van Mook at the turn of the year. However, the Dutch government wanted to go no further than gradual, limited decolonization, and was unwilling to rule out prematurely the possibility of a total reoccupation campaign at some stage.¹⁵⁷

Military Planning

In the first months of 1946, Spoor formulated plans with his staff for both a territorially limited campaign as well as a total reoccupation campaign. With respect to the latter, their main assumption was that the resistance movement was fueled by a group of leaders responsible for manipulating the masses, and that, as a result, the resistance would quickly die down were these leaders to be eliminated. Spoor and his staff regarded a military force of five divisions to be necessary in order to realize total reoccupation. The Dutch Government was willing to dispatch those troops, but a complete reoccupation campaign was first dismissed by the British and then subsequently postponed in the light of ongoing negotiations. At the end of 1946, these negotiations resulted in the Draft Treaty of Linggadjati, in which the Netherlands and the Republic Indonesia agreed on the gradual, limited decolonization of the NEI. However, the debate about the military alternative reared its head once again in April 1947, when the discussions about the implementation of this treaty deadlocked and the Netherlands faced financial bankruptcy.

From April 1947 onwards, the army leaders took the position that military action was required. In their opinion, not only was a partial reoccupation campaign one of the military possibilities, but by this time, because of military reinforcements, total reoccupation also was

¹⁵⁶ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 261.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 316.

within the capabilities of the Dutch Army. The Army leaders wanted to achieve both partial and total reoccupation by means of a spearhead strategy. This was due in part to the capacities of Dutch troops and the assumed weaknesses of their opponent, but chiefly to the Army leaders' conviction that the Republican leaders were exerting a decisive influence on their supporters. In the operational phase, mobile columns would have to take over the enemy headquarters, and take up key positions rapidly. The occupied territory would then have to be cleared in a pacification phase. The Dutch military assumed that the Republicans would be so disorganized and demoralized by the loss of their leaders and key positions that they would be forced to give up the guerrilla war they had been ordered to fight within a matter of months. Since, according to Army leaders, the spearhead strategy would yield the best results if the senior Republican leaders were eliminated, they gave preference to a total reoccupation campaign. However, they did not warn that a partial reoccupation campaign, in which the enemy leaders would remain unharmed, would pose any insurmountable military problems.¹⁵⁸

For national and international political reasons, the political leaders adhered to the Army leaders' military-strategic advice only partially. The Dutch cabinet's right wing was in favor of military action, and Van Mook had gradually concluded that there was no longer any other solution. However, for domestic party and international political reasons, the left wing of the cabinet was opposed to a military offensive and would certainly not hear of a total reoccupation campaign. A compromise was reached, and a decision in favor of a territorially limited campaign was finally made in mid-July 1947. This campaign was intended to force the Republic of Indonesia into a politically cooperative attitude and to help the Netherlands out of its financial quagmire. In the course of this debate, the political leadership barely mentioned the spearhead strategy which was to attain this goal. Once the first police action had been initiated, it appeared

¹⁵⁸ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 317.

that the offensive was a military success, albeit an incomplete one. From a political point of view, however, it did not live up to expectations.¹⁵⁹

Spearhead Strategy

This first offensive in July 1947, *Operation Product*, exposed a number of problems. The spearhead strategy was able to occupy military positions in key areas, however, it turned out to be virtually impossible to simultaneously encircle the adversary and partially eliminate them, as called for in a number of sub-areas. During military operations, Dutch troops were bound to the main roads and could not prevent the adversary, who resorted to guerrilla warfare, from withdrawing and avoiding direct combat. Spoor realized that the ongoing guerrilla warfare prevented him from reaching a permanent political, economic, and military success. However, he was still convinced that this danger could be averted by eliminating top Republican military leaders. He never thought that new Republican military leaders could rise to take over, as he held the TNI in low esteem. He must have thought that the Republican military organization was a matter of a few leaders, with a group of blind followers. The effectiveness Spoor's spearhead strategy was not only dependent on the prevention of Republican leaders from escaping, but stood or fell with the accuracy of his analysis of the nature of the resistance.¹⁶⁰

Consequently, the Dutch Army leaders, despite their earlier prognosis, regarded successful counterinsurgency measures in the occupied territory to be impossible, and a follow-up campaign to occupy the remainder of the Republic to be imperative. Van Mook sided with the military leaders on the necessity of military action, though he proposed a slightly different strategy. Spoor and Van Mook exerted pressure on the cabinet, going so far as to threaten action

¹⁵⁹ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 267.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 271.

on their own authority.¹⁶¹ However, the government was also being subjected to pressure by the international community, which condemned the campaign. International economic threats finally tilted the scales and instead of a follow-up campaign, a new attempt at negotiation followed.

Between the first offensive in July 1947 and the second in December 1948, the Dutch military leadership modified its military-strategic proposals on three counts in comparison with the policy in the preceding period. In October 1948, the military leaders stated that, judging by military and political experiences, the ultimate military-strategic objective should no longer be the reoccupation of the remaining Republican territory, but the elimination of the Republican armed forces and government. In order to attain this goal, more troops were considered necessary than in 1947. Moreover, they wanted to aim their ‘spearheads’ at several concentrations of enemy troops in the operational phase.¹⁶²

The spearhead strategy and the underlying motives remained essentially unchanged, in spite of the rather discouraging counterinsurgency experiences gained in the staging of the first action, and the leadership’s information on the Republican guerrilla plans in the event of a Dutch offensive. The Army leaders were still convinced that a surprise, regular offensive, with the chief aim of eliminating the enemy leadership, would deliver such a disorganizing and demoralizing blow to the adversary that the Dutch troops would be able to largely settle the guerrilla war within six months of the action. Van Mook offered the only military-strategic opposition to the spearhead strategy, and instead from May to October 1948 advocated a ‘nibbling-off strategy’. For both economic and military reasons, Van Mook expressed the preference in this period to first stage a partial campaign in the periphery, followed by a further reoccupation campaign. However, Van Mook’s successor, Governor-General Dr. L.J.M. Beel, who took up office as High

¹⁶¹ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 307.

¹⁶² Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 312.

Representative of the Crown in October 1948, was entirely at one with Spoor's strategic judgement.

Influencing Politics

The Dutch government paid little attention to military-strategic matters because the question as to whether a new offensive should be launched was an extremely polarizing issue. This stirred up too many feelings in the Dutch government and was neglected.¹⁶³ Discussions to this end came to a head when negotiations reached a standstill again in June 1948. The army leaders again joined in the debate, and once more sided with the 'hawks' in the Dutch Cabinet. The influence of the army leaders on the political decision-making process was greater in autumn of 1948 than it had been previously. Both Van Mook's successor, Beel, and the right wing of the cabinet, which had gained in strength since the Dutch 1948 elections, welcomed arguments from Spoor. These arguments served to strengthen their conviction that a new offensive was requisite and enabled them to exert pressure on the cabinet's left wing. For party domestic political considerations, but mainly for international political reasons, the left wing was again averse to renewed military action. In mid-December 1948, however, they succumbed to pressure from the right wing, and Beel and Spoor, who were threatening to take action on their own authority. The cabinet decided in the context of this debate that the campaign should have the military-strategic objective of eliminating the Republican government and their armed forces. The political objective, which the cabinet did not formulate until immediately after the offensive, was the political elimination of the Republic of Indonesia.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, 287.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Military Outcome

The military outcome of the second police action, *Operation Crow*, was that the Dutch troops only achieved partial success in attaining their objectives. They were able to capture the Republican political leaders and secure key positions, but they failed in their attempt to eliminate the Republican military leaders and defeat a number of Republican troop concentrations. Although the Republican military was temporarily disorganized because of the Dutch offensive, their morale and fighting spirit were not severely shocked.

For both police actions, the Dutch forces in the NEI relied heavily on their superior technology, especially on their mobility and firepower, which was usually best realized on or in the vicinity of roads. The TNI therefore focused on key points of the road network via simple means, such as improvised explosive devices called ‘pull bombs’, to inflict losses upon the Dutch in order to undermine support for the mission in the motherland. Therefore, the Dutch had to add additional riflemen, mortars and ‘storm pioneers’ in their reconnaissance units next to light and heavier reconnaissance vehicles. They also had their own logistical units, including medical care, capable of evacuation of casualties. This reorganization went smoothly because they had practiced and operated for a long time with each other prior to deployment, developing trust between units that promoted easy coordination of action.¹⁶⁵

Analysis of the pacification phases from January to May 1949 and from May to August 1949, shows that a military impasse arose after four months. Dutch troops were only able to neutralize the TNI in few parts of Java and Sumatra.¹⁶⁶ In the greater part of both islands, the TNI was able to hold out as a guerrilla army. From a military-strategic point of view, they even forced

¹⁶⁵ This contrasts with the current deployments of the Dutch army, where ad hoc units (Combined Arms Teams) do not work with each other prior to deployment and need time to get used to each other.

¹⁶⁶ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, 192.

the Dutch troops on to the defensive in certain mountainous areas. However, they did not succeed in forcing them to retreat, because the TNI remained inferior on a military-tactical level. These military-tactical shortcomings caused the TNI to suffer great losses in terms of both personnel and equipment, but despite these losses and disagreements amongst themselves, there was still no demoralization across the board. Although the TNI's fighting spirit was also stimulated by political developments, the support given by the local population was of overriding importance to morale.¹⁶⁷

The TNI, by then a full-fledged guerrilla force, was heavily dependent on the support of the Indonesian people, and, if not voluntarily given support, the guerrillas forced support via terror. The local Dutch authorities and the military were inadequate to protect the population against this terror and therefore the population supported the guerrillas which undermined their well-intentioned hearts and minds campaigns.¹⁶⁸ Protection of the population, however, is labor intensive and therefore requires the employment of significant forces for an extended period. This requirement can only partly be compensated for by superior mobility and firepower on the ground and in the air and even then, a numerical preponderance of land forces and police continues to be essential. On the island of Java, four Dutch divisions with a total of about seventy thousand men were not sufficient to protect the local population from the terror imposed by the TNI. The TNI was able to hold out as a guerrilla army chiefly thanks to the 'people's defense' system that provided personnel, food, and information.¹⁶⁹

The inability of the Dutch to win the population's support in the ongoing guerrilla war, an unforeseen military development, was one of the factors that led the Dutch Government to resume negotiations with the Republicans in March 1949. It also led to the approval of the Van

¹⁶⁷ Glissenaar, 178.

¹⁶⁸ Groen, 235.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Roijen-Roem agreement – one of the provisions of which was a rapid transfer of sovereignty – in May of that year. For the sake of the Dutch negotiating position, the pacification continued until August 1949 when an armistice was declared, although this did nothing to alter the military stalemate.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The political and military leaders of the Republic of Indonesia had no need of the writings of the Chinese thinker and author of the *Art of War*, Sun Tzu in order to wrong-foot the Dutch because the Dutch themselves made all the wrong moves. From the beginning, they had a false picture of the enormous social and political changes taking place in Indonesia.

The Netherlands had been present in the Indonesian Archipelago for over three centuries and its scholars had studied the various Indonesian peoples and cultures in detail. Still, the Dutch made poor assumptions and the general feeling was that the restoration of Dutch authority would be good for the economics of both the Netherlands and the NEI. Dutch military leaders were convinced that the Republic of Indonesia was a Japanese invention, had little support from the general population, and consequently would collapse like a house of cards once the Dutch had eliminated its political and military leadership. This unsubstantiated way of thinking also dominated politics and news reporting in the Netherlands.¹⁷¹ There were those who were more pessimistic about the situation or who adopted a more balanced view, but they were a small minority. The Dutch attitude is perhaps best explained as arising from a mixture of

¹⁷⁰ The Roem–van Roijen Agreement was an agreement made between the Republic of Indonesia and the Netherlands on May 7, 1949. The name was derived from the two principal negotiators at the meeting; Mohammad Roem and Jan Herman van Roijen. The purpose of the meeting was to iron out outstanding issues prior to Indonesian independence, which was to be granted at the Round Table Conference at The Hague later that same year.

¹⁷¹ Van Liempt, 18.

incomprehension, bitterness and offended missionary zeal.

In August 1945, the British-led SEAC became responsible for the handling of the immediate effects of the Japanese capitulation in large parts of South East Asia. The British adopted a cautious approach, and in order not to add fuel to the fire, they did not allow any Dutch reinforcements into Java or Sumatra. This caused a power vacuum, which the Indonesian nationalist were quick to fill. Militant groups, *Pemudas*, demanded unconditional *Merdeka*, freedom, and tried to use violence to accelerate the social revolution. They had access to weapons that the Japanese had handed over to them in large quantities. The Netherlands was almost powerless to resist, even after the British had allowed Dutch armed forces back to the principal islands of Java and Sumatra in 1946. The Dutch occupied just a few key cities, but had insufficient military and civilian personnel and equipment to control the situation.

The Netherlands was totally unprepared for the post-war problems in Indonesia. The Dutch Government had outdated ideas on its future role in the colony and misunderstood the nature of the nationalistic revolution. The Netherlands did not realize that it had begun what would later enter the history books as a war of decolonization. It considered the struggle to be an uprising against the rule of law and not as a war of liberation. This uprising had to be put down, and only then could new forms of future cooperation be discussed in constructive consultation. The Dutch authorities were oblivious to the fact that during the war years they had forfeited any remaining credit with the Indonesian population, and that the majority of the Indonesian population supported the Republican nationalistic alternative.

This incorrect assessment at the political-strategic level led to simplistic and fatally flawed military-strategic decisions. Initially, Spoor thought that it would be sufficient to eliminate the individual pockets of resistance so that the Netherlands could regain control of the situation as he believed the population would then voluntarily submit to Dutch authority. This was entirely in line with the colonial army's pre-war police actions, geared to maintaining internal law and order.

When it became apparent that it would not be that simple, Spoor adopted a more militarized version of this approach. According to the spearhead strategy, Dutch armed forces would take possession of the principal cities in a rapid offensive and thus ‘decapitate’ the Republic’s leadership. The uprising would then grind to a halt and Dutch armed forces could, in a second phase, pacify the outlying areas in a police-style operation designed to regain control of the country.

In July 1947, and again in December 1948, the Netherlands implement this strategy carrying out two major military operations; but to no avail. The Republic of Indonesia had, in the meantime, steadily gained more international support and started a form of bottom-up guerrilla warfare. The TNI prepared ambushes, applied hit-and-run tactics, created a feeling of insecurity by committing murder and arson, and even employed scorched-earth tactics. This was not gang warfare, as the Dutch military persisted in believing far too long, but a full-scale ‘people’s war’. The Dutch Army had no solution for this, especially since it had based its decisions on incorrect assumptions.

The Netherlands tended towards the military solution which was an ‘enemy-centric approach’. The Army leadership maintained its faith in the ‘decapitation’ theory. However, it did too little in the way of pursuing a broader counterinsurgency approach, for which it was probably insufficiently equipped. The heaviest burdens fell on the soldiers in the field who concentrated on patrolling and clearing areas, where too few soldiers were assigned to areas that were too large to police. Later, the Army was forced to adopt tougher anti-guerrilla tactics, which turned the local population against them even more. As a result, their actions were often counterproductive, on both the political and military strategic levels, as well as on the military operational and tactical levels.

This resulted in a military stalemate. The Dutch held the major cities and the principal economic regions, while the Republicans controlled most of the outlying areas. This military

impasse was not due to the Dutch Government's policy alone, as argued by Spoor, military-strategic miscalculations were also to blame. These miscalculations stemmed from the overestimation of the Dutch troops' offensive capabilities, and the underestimation of the Republican military force's possibilities and readiness to implement its guerrilla plans. This underestimation was in turn due to an error of judgement as to the extent of the nationalistic disposition of the Republican military force's and some of the population, as well as the power of the Republican armed force to obtain popular support vital to its guerilla war. From a Dutch point of view, the struggle between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia can be characterized as a revolutionary war, with the Netherlands' objective being to secure its interest in a semi-autonomous Indonesia. From an Indonesian point of view however, this was an 'inter-national' war.

The Army leaders, and especially Spoor, played an increasingly important part in the political decision-making process on the issue of whether the Netherlands should use military force against the Republic of Indonesia, because by degrees it was able to offer actual military alternatives. Other contributory factors were the changing swings in the balance of power in the Cabinet and the appointment of Beel as Governor-General at the end of 1948.

For the same reasons, and because of their position and the Cabinet's preoccupations, the Army leaders became increasingly influential in the decision-making as regards the military-strategic objective. Moreover, Spoor and his subordinate commanders played a primary role in the military-strategic decision-making process with a view to realizing this objective. This stemmed on the one hand from their position and the faith placed in their judgement by the political leadership, and on the other hand from a certain lack of interest in this subject on the part of Dutch political leaders.

The spearhead strategy advocated by Army leaders from 1946 to 1949 was determined by the political leadership's political and economic wishes; the view of the enemy held by the Dutch;

Dutch military capabilities; and the training and experience of Army leaders both in colonial and regular 'European' warfare. However, the ineffectiveness of the Dutch military strategy in Indonesia suggests that the pursuit of a different military strategy in this conflict, geared more towards the adversary, would likely only have achieved better results in combination with a different political policy, serving to undermine the local population's support for the revolutionary party.

The incorrect assessment of the situation and the consequent ineffective military strategy naturally had an impact on the actions of Dutch units and expectations and experiences of the troops. The three categories of military personnel: soldiers of the colonial arm (KNIL) who had been POWs, the 'war volunteers', who were the first to arrive from the Netherlands in 1945 and 1946, and the conscripts, who were sent to NEI from the second half of 1946 onwards, became cynical and demoralized. The ninety-thousand-plus conscripts, who, often against their will, had deployed in the expectation that they would be restoring justice and security, had a rude awakening. Like the war volunteers, they were not prepared for the difficult and ultimately impossible task that awaited them. The course of events gave them a feeling of uselessness. Survival was their main goal. This was in contrast to their opponents, who were fighting for their nation's independence with absolute conviction. Their willingness to lay down their lives was far greater than that of their Dutch counterparts, who just wanted to go home as soon as possible. They had been robbed of their illusions, just like most of the other Dutch nationals involved.

The Dutch military-strategic spearhead policy of massive overall attacks on Republican territory in Java and Sumatra and the pacification of occupied areas are military methods still used today in various conflicts around the globe. The lessons learned from the Indonesian independence war retain their value for today. In addition, the Dutch had to cooperate with Great Britain, Australia, the United States, and the United Nations. The complexity of these international relations and the challenges operational artists face when confronted with such a

complex environment still hold true today. Furthermore, the Dutch military and political leadership made an incorrect diagnosis in Indonesia, even though it was historically explicable. This led to counterproductive actions resulting in a catastrophe completely beyond the control of the Netherlands. Four years of guerrilla warfare, at a cost over one hundred thousand lives, left the Dutch with a result that it had sought to avoid: rapid and total independence for Indonesia.

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