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The Civil and Military Dimensions of Dutch Counter-Insurgency on Java, 1947-49

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ABSTRACT

Despite its seemingly overwhelming military superiority, the Netherlands never came close to defeating the increasingly effective nationalist insurgency on Java in the late 1940s. This article argues that the desperate state of the Dutch counter-insurgency campaign—which tends to be overlooked for the crucial years 1947-1948—is best demonstrated by focussing on the failure of the colonial power to integrate the civilian and military efforts and on its inability to govern reoccupied territory during the ‘pacification phase’.

The Netherlands East Indies, the precursor to the state known since 1949 as Indonesia, was created through gradual imperial conquest since the seventeenth century. During this process of colonial expansion, the Dutch colonial army frequently met with irregular resistance. Through a process of trial and error lessons were learned but mostly lost in between campaigns. Soon after the Second World War, as the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies came to an end, the Dutch armed forces again found themselves fighting a guerrilla war. As opposed to the localised pre-war rebellions, they now faced a full-blown nationalist insurgency throughout the vast archipelago of which they controlled little more than the fringes.

This counter-insurgency campaign, which lasted until 1949, was undoubtedly the largest in Dutch colonial history. The Dutch not only had to fight it halfway across the world but also in the wake of five years of Nazi occupation of the motherland and without significant international support. In an attempt to regain its pre-war international stature – which was built largely on its rich colonial possessions – the Netherlands desperately tried to reoccupy the Dutch East Indies. In order to suppress the broad nationalist revolt, the Dutch engaged in a massive build-up of their armed forces. Measured against the size of the Dutch population of just eight million at the time, the military force assembled for this purpose was immense. With 140,000 military personnel at its peak in December 1948, in proportion to its population it outsized that of the Americans in Vietnam in the late 1960s and it was even slightly greater than the French military force in Algeria by the end of the 1950s.

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After more than one and a half years of skirmishes and smaller military actions, the Netherlands launched a major military offensive in July 1947. As part of its so-called 'spearhead strategy', the Netherlands armed forces struck again in December 1948 in an ultimate attempt to decapitate the insurgency.¹ The removal of President Sukarno and his Republican government was expected to result in a quick collapse of its 175,000-strong but ill equipped Indonesian army, the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI) and roughly the same number of autonomous irregulars and armed gangs.² The first Dutch offensive was very successful in military terms. Until July 1947 the Dutch only held a series of primarily coastal urban enclaves that had been previously secured by the British occupying authorities. Now, in just two weeks, the approximately 100,000 strong force under command of General Simon Spoor captured almost two-thirds of Java and an important part of Sumatra, including the richest plantations and oil-production facilities. The operation was euphemistically called a 'Police Action', as the Netherlands government regarded it an internal matter and desperately tried to frame the suppression of the Indonesian nationalist movement as something other than a colonial war. With U.S. diplomatic support – early Cold War priorities caused US to prioritise Western-European economic recovery over nationalist aspirations in Asia – the Netherlands subsequently scored a major diplomatic victory in January 1948 on board the USS *Renville* anchored off the coast of Java. This 'Renville Agreement' ratified the occupation of Republican territory and allowed the creation of a Dutch-dominated union of Indonesia.

In early 1948, the Dutch were therefore in a winning mood. Little seemed to stand in the way of an internationally recognised federal state, in which the Dutch ultimately reigned supreme. However, one and a half a years later the Dutch on Java and Sumatra were on the verge of collapse and were forced to start their imperial retreat.

Historians tend to agree on the causes of this sudden reversal of fortune. Altered Cold War priorities had caused the Americans to drop their support to the Dutch.³

¹ On Dutch military strategy in the Netherlands East Indies see: Petra Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen. Het Nederlands Militair-Strategische Beleid in Indonesia 1945-1949* (The Hague, SDU, 1991). For an English summary see: Groen, "Militant Response: The Dutch Use of Military Force and the Decolonization of the Dutch East Indies", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 1993). For another excellent overview of particularly the military aspects of the conflict see: Jaap de Moor, *Generaal Spoor: Triomf en Tragiek van een Legercommandant* (Amsterdam, Boom, 2010).

² A general survey of the course of the Indonesian revolution and the Republic's conflict with the Netherlands can be found in George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1952) and A. Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution 1945-1950* (Hawthorn Victoria, Longman Australia, 1974).

³ On U.S. policy towards the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies see: Frances Gouda and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies / Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism, 1942-1949*, (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2001); Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism*

Nevertheless, the Netherlands' hard-headed pursuit of a re-occupation policy led to the Second Police Action in December 1948 which – although a short term military success – was a political blunder as it went against U.S. interest. Soon after the conflict turned into a military disaster as the army was overstretched and could not control the immense territory it had seized with such astonishing ease.

This explanation, while not incorrect, reveals the fact that the Dutch colonial government and army stood little chance of winning the counter-insurgency campaign in the eighteen months between the two Police Actions, the period on which this article focuses. The inability of the Dutch to show any serious progress in securing and governing the territories it had occupied had a devastating effect. As Henry Kissinger wrote in 1969 at the height of the war in Vietnam: 'Whereas the guerrilla wins if he does not lose, the conventional army loses if it does not win.'⁴ The desperate state of the Dutch campaign between the Police Actions has often been overlooked because historical research has primarily focused on diplomacy, the two Police Actions themselves, and, to a lesser extent, on the desperate Dutch struggle in the early months of 1949 following the second offensive. Moreover, the war of decolonisation has hardly been studied through the prism of counter-insurgency.⁵

This article addresses the question why the Dutch – despite their overwhelming military superiority and initial diplomatic successes – never came close to defeating the insurgency on Java, the key island in the Archipelago. It does so by focusing on what is often considered a central element of counter-insurgency campaigning but has received little attention in the literature on the war of decolonisation: the institutional challenge of balancing and integrating the military and civilian effort.⁶

and Cold War. The United States and the struggle for Indonesian independence, 1945-1949, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁴ Henry Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations", *Foreign Affairs*, (January 1969), p.214.

⁵ Classic counter-insurgency theory as propagated in for instance: Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1966), David Galula, *Counter-insurgency: Theory and Practice*, (Westport, Praeger, 1964) and Frank Kitson, *Low-Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1971).

⁶ The aspect of civil-military cooperation features in the margins of the above mentioned studies by Petra Groen and Jaap de Moor. Groen's dissertation treats the pacification phase after the Second Police Action in great detail but pays little attention to the preceding counter-insurgency operations as she focuses on military strategy. In his study into the colonial administration on Java between 1945 and 1950, sociologist G.C. Zijlmans addresses civil-military relations rather haphazardly. Zijlmans, *Eindstrijd en Ondergang van de Indische Bestuursdienst: Het Corps Binnenlands Bestuur op Java, 1945-1950* (Amsterdam, De Bataafse Leeuw, 1985). J.A.A. van Doorn en W.J. Hendrix, *Het Nederlands/Indonesisch Conflict: Ontsporing van Geweld* (Amsterdam, De Bataafse Leeuw, 1985) is most elaborate on civil-military cooperation and explicitly addresses the gradual militarisation of the effort to counter the nationalist insurgency. This article attempts to merge preliminary archival research and the available information in the margins of the existing literature.

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Classic counter-insurgency theory takes the government – and not the military – as its centrepiece. Civil-military cooperation and governance will feature as the starting point for this analysis. Addressing the civil-military nexus in both the counter-insurgency campaign and the Indonesian insurgency reveals some of the key weaknesses of the Dutch campaign during the crucial eighteen months between the First and the Second Police Action. At the risk of being accused of benefitting from hindsight, this article will argue that the Netherlands was losing its campaign long before it failed in the international diplomatic arena.

The Gamble: Governing Java in the wake of the First Police Action.

In the field of governance, the Dutch displayed two vital weaknesses. First of all, they lacked a viable political aim. Whereas the British and American governments had started withdrawing from their Asian colonies, the Netherlands government and the Netherlands-East Indies government in Batavia refused to accept the inevitability of a rapid imperial retreat in the wake of the Second World War. Instead they chose to construct a so-called 'modern colonial state'. The cornerstone of this policy was a federal system of supposedly autonomous sub-states that would become part of a Dutch-dominated Union with Indonesia. These federal states were in fact no more than puppet states. The colonial power used rigged elections, installed loyal feudal elites and minority groups – all in order to retain indirect control. Coert DuBois, the U.S. State Department's chief mediator in the Indies in 1948, called the federal state structure an unnatural organisation, which only Dutch arms could maintain. It resembled the French recipe for colonial restoration that had caused the Viet Minh to escalate the war in Indochina.⁷ However, at first the Netherlands gave diplomacy a chance, if only to allow the relatively small European power to fetch a 'big stick' to back it up.

Second, the Netherlands neglected preparations for the administration and control of Java after the Police Action. The highest civil authority, Lieutenant Governor General Hubertus van Mook, admitted privately that he considered the entire military action 'a leap in the dark on marshy soil'. Amidst the quagmire, he hoped to land on a stone that would give him 'solid ground'.⁸ He foresaw serious administrative problems in the to-be-conquered areas and was well aware that he would never find sufficient civil administrative staff and support personnel to govern on Java and Sumatra.⁹ A quarter of his colonial administrators had perished in

⁷ Coert DuBois as Cited in H.W. van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië: De Val van het Nederlandse Imperium in Azië*, (Amsterdam, Prometheus, 2001) p.292; J.J.P. de Jong, *Diplomatie of Strijd: Het Nederlandse Beleid tegenover de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1947*, (Amsterdam, Boom, 1988) p.4.

⁸ Tom van den Berge, *H.J. van Mook. Een Vrij en Gelukkig Indonesië, 1894-1965* (Bussum, Uitgeverij Toth, 2014) p7. This new biography pays hardly any attention to civil-military relations between, for instance, Van Mook and General Spoor.

⁹ Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*, p.244.

Japanese internment camps and many had retired from the service after the Second World War.¹⁰

Also, General Spoor who, despite his immense political influence in The Hague and Batavia would always remain subservient to the highest civilian authority in Batavia, knew that the 'pacification effort' would be hard. But no serious effort was made to erect a civil affairs-type military branch. Instead, six weeks prior to the offensive, General Spoor warned his subordinate commanders that the colonial government would be unable to field sufficient personnel to fill the power-vacuum left in the wake of their advancing columns. He therefore instructed them to select the best qualified officers amongst their cadre to temporally take up this role.¹¹ Lacking the means and time, the civil and military authorities in Batavia resorted to 'hope-based planning'. The Indonesian administration in Republican territory was expected to remain in place and – after a screening process – to continue functioning under Dutch rule.

On 20 July 1947 the Dutch unleashed their military power. Restoring 'law and order' and 'promoting prosperity' had been the key phrases in promoting the Police Action in the Netherlands as well as in the international arena. The territorially limited aims of the offensive were to occupy the key production areas on Java and Sumatra, in order to regenerate the faltering colonial economy. But the Dutch also gambled on the collapse of the Republican leadership after their military victory. Despite the swift and successful penetration of Republican territory by armoured and motorised columns, the early results in terms of 'pacification' were mixed at best. Most Indonesian forces had evaded direct contact with their technologically and organisationally superior opponent. Instead they concentrated on the destruction of bridges and roads, as well as a scorched earth campaign. After having regrouped in the mountainous and jungle terrain favourable to guerrilla-operations the TNI quickly stepped up its irregular campaign.

The Dutch armed forces had not succeeded in encircling enemy troop concentrations. When their dashing, but limited, assault failed to cause the Republican government to collapse and guerrilla activity mounted, General Spoor and Van Mook intended to push forward and continued to plead for a renewed march on the Republican capital of Yogyakarta. But the Netherlands government did not dare to ignore the United Nations Resolution that had forced them to cease hostilities on 5 August. For this purpose Spoor nonetheless kept an important part of his best

¹⁰ C. Otte and G.C. Zijlmans, 'Wederopbouw en Ondergang van de Indische Bestuursdienst', *Z.W.O. Jaarboek* 1980.

¹¹ Spoor aan de Territoriaal – tevens Troepen Commandanten, "Voorzieningen civiel bestuur bij eventuele acties", 11 June 1947, National Archives, The Hague, entry no. 2.13.132 Ministerie van Defensie, Archief Strijdkrachten Nederlands Indië, inv.no. 1395 (Hereafter NA NL, MvD – Archief SNI).

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units in reserve for over a month, which obviously limited the means of countering initial guerrilla activities.¹²

Despite the early setbacks, there were some successes to report in terms of stabilisation and economic recovery. In the wake of the intimidating show of military force, the Dutch civil administrators and their military counterparts initially met with various levels of cooperation from local district and village (*desa*) chiefs. Close to the former frontline surrounding the Dutch-held enclaves, where there had been fighting and pillaging, mostly by armed gangs, stability and relative prosperity returned as a result of investment. Elsewhere however, especially in the areas that had known effective Republican administration, the return of Dutch rule resulted in chaos and fighting. Dutch propaganda tended to blame anarchy and poverty on dysfunctional Indonesian governance but Major General M. R. de Bruyne, the divisional commander in Eastern Java, knew very well that Republican rule was often not responsible for shortages and disorder prior to the Police Action. De Bruyne blamed poverty and hunger on the Dutch naval blockade of the Republic and other war-related measures. He knew that a very competent Indonesian doctor had governed the Eastern tip of Java in an exemplary way.¹³ The subsequent Dutch assault had in fact created a power-vacuum and the General's intelligence section secretly reported that, 'whatever the [Dutch] press is arguing, our occupation has not resulted in law and order, but has caused instability and violence.'¹⁴

The Dutch would soon discover that governing amidst an increasingly effective insurgency was hard. It had come to full effect after the Republican government issued orders to Indonesians not to cooperate with the Dutch, to resist their rule with force and to destroy economic infrastructural targets. Whereas Dutch military power was hardly degraded by direct guerrilla activity, the insurgents gradually succeeded in creating parallel administrative structures that, in close cooperation with the guerrillas, kept the nationalist fighting spirit alive through persuasion and intimidation. Cooperation between the Republican district leaders and the local TNI units was good overall. The effectiveness of this insurgent model is usually dated to 1949. However, it showed great promise long before that. Dutch military intelligence concluded as early as September 1947 that in Eastern-Java, these civil administrators were at the centre of the Republican popular defence apparatus. In what would be called the 'people's defence system', the Dutch analysts concluded, '[c]ivil

¹² De Moor, *Generaal Spoor*, pp.277-288; Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, pp.103-109.

¹³ C.J.O. van Dorren, *Onze Mariniersbrigade, 1945-1950*, (The Hague, s.d.). As Cited in S. Scagliola, *Last van de Oorlog: De Nederlandse Oorlogsmisdaden in Indonesië en hun Verwerking* (Amsterdam, Balans, 2002), p.66.

¹⁴ Dick Schoonoord, *De Mariniersbrigade: 1943-1949: Wording en Inzet in Indonesië*, (The Hague, Afdeling Maritieme Historie van de Marinestaf, 1988), p190; Verslag Commandant van de Expeditionaire Macht Mariniersbrigade aan de Commandant van de A-divisie, 7 september 1947, *Algemene Bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen*, deel XI, 45-48.

administration and army are organisationally merged into a combative apparatus that influences almost every aspect of society.¹⁵ District chiefs played a coordinating role and had a military commander operating next to them with up to a company of guerrilla fighters at his disposal. This allowed the chiefs to restore Republican authority, if necessary by means of force. The population provided food, sanctuary, intelligence and recruits either voluntarily or by coercion. This integrated insurgency model was largely improvised but was developed by Indonesians with 'organisational sagacity', according to the same Dutch intelligence analysis.¹⁶ It would prove essential for the Republic's survival.

The faltering Counter-Insurgency Triangle

In the meantime, the Dutch failed to develop an effective response in the second half of 1947. Of the three key parties involved in the counter-insurgency triangle, the army, the civil administration and the police force, the military component was clearly the strongest. No other service could function without its support. But the army was too widely dispersed in small outposts and had little effective control outside the cities and main roads. Therefore, troops had long reaction times and gained little local intelligence. It made controlling and protecting the population against insurgent influence almost impossible. Even in the recently occupied cities the insurgents – who stood no chance of retaking urban centres with military force – conducted subversive activities.

Overall, a lack of planning and vision hampered operations during the pacification phase. Orders and instructions hardly rose above the level of the twenty year old counter-guerrilla regulations that had been used to fight small autonomous guerrilla bands in the final stages of the colonisation period.¹⁷ Military historian Jaap de Moor called this *Voorschrift voor de Politiek-Politioneele Taak van het Leger (VPTL)* of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army little more than a collection of tips about encircling villages and houses and about patrolling, which merely paid lip service to minimising the use of violence and civil-military cooperation. It was revised after 1945 but was used primarily to warn inexperienced Dutch conscripts of the dangers of warfare in tropical terrain against guerrillas.¹⁸ This would hardly prepare commanders for a full-spectrum, popular insurgency.

¹⁵ Schoonoord, *Mariniersbrigade*, p.203.

¹⁶ For other accounts of the 'peoples defense system' see: A.H. Nasution, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare*, (Jakarta, Seruling Masa, 1970). Groen, *Marsroutes*, p117; B. Bouman, *Van Driekleur tot Rood Wit: De Indonesische Officieren uit het KNIL: 1900-1950*, (The Hague, 1995), p.241; B. Bouman, *Ieder voor zich en de republiek voor ons allen: de logistiek achter de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1950*, (Amsterdam, Boom, 2006).

¹⁷ *Voorschrift voor de uitoefening van de politiek-politioneele taak van het leger* (Weltevreden, 1928, Revised edition The Hague, 1945); Kennis van het V.P.T.L. (Batavia, 1949); Aanwijzingen optreden van Nederlandse Troepen in Nederlands Indië (Semarang, 1948).

¹⁸ J. A. de Moor, 'Colonial warfare: Theory and Practice. The Dutch Experience in Indonesia', *Journal of the Japan-Netherlands Institute*, Vol. 2, (1990), pp.98-114.

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As a result, the Dutch relied on ever larger sweeps and drives that had little lasting effect. Local successes due to troop increases and often brutal special forces actions only pushed guerrilla activity elsewhere – and mostly just temporarily.¹⁹ Military intelligence officers therefore warned against cheerful reports on the results of drives. They argued that arms cache-finds and arrests were of little use while the battle was lost in the field of governance. Republican shadow governors were making parts of East-Java into de facto Republican enclaves.²⁰

It was exactly in this civil administrative sphere that the Dutch remained weakest. In the Dutch-controlled parts of Java, only 90 civil administrators (and their mostly Eurasian and Indonesian support personnel) had to perform the job done by 145 administrators under much more favourable circumstances prior to the Second World War.²¹ The civilian side of the counter-insurgency effort was also inadequate in terms of training and policy planning.²² During the Police Action, the few available civil administrators and police officers had joined the advancing military columns. Expecting a liberator's welcome, they had received little preparation for the difficult occupation duty ahead and money and material for welfare projects and reconstruction was scarce. Due to guerrilla activity civil administrators would hardly be able to penetrate the outer parts of the newly conquered territory formally under their control. Any attempt to do so would require military or police escort. Meanwhile, military-civic action was almost entirely improvised. Even though 'hearts and minds' projects were initiated by Dutch forces with some effect throughout Java and Sumatra, the overall effort was haphazard and mainly benefitted the population in the vicinity of the military posts.²³

In principle, the civil administrators were given supremacy in governing newly occupied territory. However, where guerrilla activity was intense they were given merely an advisory role. Military supremacy at the tactical level was facilitated by the State of Siege that had been declared at the outset of the Second World War seven years earlier and that still applied. This allowed commanders to seize administrative

¹⁹ J. A. de Moor, *Westerlings Oorlog. De geschiedenis van de commando's en parachutisten in Nederlands-Indië, 1945-1950*, (Amsterdam, Balans, 1999) pp.277-278.

²⁰ Schoonoord, *De Mariniersbrigade*, pp.205-206.

²¹ Otte and Zijlmans, 'Wederopbouw en Ondergang', p.182; Zijlmans, *Eindstrijd en Ondergang*, p.57.

²² Spoor aan de Territoriaal – tevens Troepen Commandanten, "Voorzieningen civiel bestuur bij eventuele acties", 11 June 1947, NL NA, MvD – Archief SNI, inv.no. 1395.

²³ There has been no serious research into the military 'hearts and minds' effort in this period, but for a critical account see for instance: Diaries of P. A. van der Poel, police inspector in the Netherlands East Indies, part 18, 3364, (Library of the Netherlands Institute for Military History); Verslag Commandant van de Expeditionaire Macht Mariniersbrigade aan Commandant A-Divisie, 7 September 1947, *Algemene Bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen*, deel XI, pp.45-48; Scagliola, *Last van de Oorlog*, p.67.

control when operations so demanded. As the security situation worsened military commanders increasingly came to dominate over civil administration. They often bluntly fired local Indonesian civil servants suspected of nationalist sympathies and tended to turn a blind eye to summary executions and torture by Dutch troops. Colonial administrators often showed little understanding of the harsh measures taken by tactical commanders in their role as military interim governors. A journalist sympathetic to the Dutch war effort sketched the tension as follows:

The Major travels through his area of operations and gives [the] order. Clean out the ponds and raise new fences around the houses in the kampongs [villages]. The population complains, but when the number of malaria cases drops dramatically after a couple of months they come to thank him. The inventory of the tea factory has been stolen. Everything has to be brought back or the entire kampong will be burned to the ground. [...] The factory is operational again, which means jobs and income for the population. The old civil administrators don't understand it.²⁴

In other cases, military commanders were even more ruthless. After a large operation in Boenboelan in West-Java during late November 1947 – a sweep that resulted in several burned down kampongs – the local indigenous district leader, the *wedana*, offered the Dutch company commander in charge his cooperation. He and the five *loerahs* (village chiefs) that had joined him got more than they could digest when the major made them fully responsible for halting insurgent infiltrations and the introduction of a pass-system. The major made it clear that the *wedana's* failure to do so would result in collective punishment of his community.²⁵ Such repressive measures may have yielded short term success but increasingly drove the potentially neutral section of the population in the nationalist camp. A ruthless enemy-centric approach came to prevail but without the repressive colonial apparatus to back it up.

What seriously undermined the colonial administration was the weakness of its own so-called 'strong arm' – the police forces. Little remained of the pre-war colonial police apparatus. In occupied territory some tactical commanders had created public security services or had started incorporating existing police forces. Where possible, they received the help of colonial police that joined them during the offensive. But only in September 1947 did the military and civilian authorities seriously consider the formation and training of a police organisation. This is somewhat ironic, considering that the war in Indonesia was sold – and has stuck in collective Dutch memory – as 'The Police Actions'. General Spoor considered 'the police question no military

²⁴ Alfred van Spang, *Laatste Acte: Een Cocktail van Soldatenleven en Politiek in Indonesië*, (The Hague, Uitgeverij W. van Hoeve, 1949), p.23.

²⁵ Diary of Major C. J. J. van de Heijden, 30 November 1947, NIMH, Collectie Losse Stukken, p.57, inv. no. 5179.

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matter', but his army would nonetheless play the largest part in organising, training, equipping and sometimes even feeding the public security apparatus as the military leadership sought to free its troops of this responsibility. The rudimentary training of new recruits took only six weeks and it was never entirely clear whether the Army or the civil administration was in charge of the police force.²⁶

Before the police build-up ever took off, Spoor and Van Mook undermined the effort by redirecting the military's energy to the creation of an entirely new security organisation: the so-called Security Battalions. These paramilitary units, manned primarily by newly recruited indigenous troops, were hoped to substitute for the military units the Dutch government sought to withdraw to the Netherlands – but that ultimately had to stay in the Indies for approximately three years. They were also to become the paramilitary muscle of the new federal states that Van Mook was creating. But the Security Battalions would fill only very slowly and largely at the expense of the newly recruited police force.²⁷ In the end, there was only one police officer to every four military personnel in Indonesia by the end of 1948. On Java, an island with almost 50 million inhabitants, there were approximately 35,000 lightly armed policemen. Much of this police force had received minimal training, lacked effective leadership and often proved unreliable amidst mounting guerrilla pressure. In the same period, only 22,500 local home guards were raised primarily for static security duties at the plantations.²⁸

Civil-military cooperation after 'Renville'

In January 1948 the Dutch were saved by the bell when they scored their diplomatic victory with U.S. support. The Renville Agreement resulted in the international recognition of their conquests of the previous summer and the orderly withdrawal of tens of thousands of TNI guerrillas to the Republican territory, which led to a sharp decline in violence in Dutch occupied territories. Diplomacy achieved what the Army had been unable to do.

The Republic used the lull in the fight to reorganise its fighting force and planned to build on its 'people's defence' insurgency model. Meanwhile, the Dutch used the first half of 1948 to expand their system of federal 'puppet states' in hope of further

²⁶ This section on the police force is based primarily on the well-researched and elaborate MA thesis by Roel Frakking, *Het Middel erger dan de Kwaal? De Opkomst en het Failliet van het Instituut der Ondernemingswachten in Nederlands-Indië, 1946-1948*, (MA thesis, Utrecht University, 2011) pp.50-60. See also: Roel Frakking, "Who Wants to Cover Everything Covers Nothing: The Organisation of the Indigenous Security Forces in Indonesia, 1945-1950", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 24, Iss. 3-4 (September-November, 2012) pp.337-358.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.54-59

²⁸ Police strength reached its height of only 35,000 at the time of the Second Police Action. Moreover, the number of home guards never exceeded 22,500. Groen, 'Militant response'; Van Doorn en Hendrix, *Ontsporing van Geweld*, pp.140; G.C. Zijlmans, *Eindstrijd en Ondergang*, p.76, p.88.

marginalising the Republic. They also started to reflect on civil-military cooperation – and with reason. Relations between tactical commanders and civil administrators had become tense during the faltering pacification campaign but the external threat, as well as the massive dependency of the civilian branches on military support and protection, had kept the lid on.²⁹ Now, with enemy pressure off, fights between soldiers and civil servants started to erupt. These clashes often centred on the military commanders' tendency to dominate and to claim direct control of police forces. Formally the police were under civilian control, but commanders often claimed the police forces for light infantry work.³⁰ Neither Van Mook nor Spoor had issued clear instructions. Therefore, civil-military relations became messy on the tactical level. There were large differences between the three divisional sectors West-, Central- and East-Java and the powers of the civil administrators seemed to become trimmed down ever further when moving from west to east.³¹

In the summer of 1948, as the Renville Agreement was falling apart, the TNI dramatically stepped up its infiltrations and guerrilla actions. The reason why the neglect of civil-military cooperation by the Dutch was so harmful was the strength that the insurgents once again showed in exactly this field. But the fact that the Dutch neglected the creation of the coordinated government machinery did not mean that they showed no understanding of the need for a balanced and integrated approach to countering the insurgency. What was remarkable however, was the fact that only the military side came forward with initiatives.³² In the summer of 1948, General Spoor came forward with elaborate instructions that were clearly a product of the debate on civil or military control of the police forces. The general demanded better cooperation between soldiers and civilians. He complained that subordinate military commanders too often saw the pacification effort from a purely military viewpoint. This conflict was however no purely military problem. It was a politico-military problem and therefore called for civil supremacy. Even though General Spoor kept the door open to full military control in insurgent hotbeds, the basic principle he propagated was that military operations were to be made fully

²⁹ Van Doorn and Hendrix, *Het Nederlands/Indonesisch Conflict*, p.137; Spoor aan alle militaire gezaghebbenden, "De verhouding tussen leger, bestuur en politie", 12 July 1948, NL NA, MvD – Archief SNI, inv.no. 1395; "Nota betreffende Samenwerking tussen Leger, Bestuur en Politie", 3 February 1949," appendix to: J.G. Kist aan H.W. Felderhof, "Coördinatielichaam tussen Leger Bestuur en Politie in de Negara Pasundan ter verkrijging van een harmonische samenwerking", 16 mei 1949, NL NA, entry no. 2.10.17, Archief Procureur Generaal bij het Hooggerechthof van Nederlands-Indë, (hereafter: Archief PG), inv.no. 1466.

³⁰ Procureur Generaal mr. Felderhof to Luitenant Gouverneur Generaal Van Mook, "Daerah-politie onder militaire gezaghebbenden", 9 January 1948, NL NA, Archief PG, inv.no. 112.

³¹ Kolonel H.J. de Vries, "Nota (geheim) betreffende de verhouding tussen het Leger den de Daerah-politie op Java en Sumatra", 28 April 1948, NL NA, MvD – Archief SNI, inv.no 1395.

³² "Nota betreffende Samenwerking tussen Leger, Bestuur en Politie", 3 February 1949, NL NA – Archief PG, 1466.

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subordinate to the demands of the civil administration. Operations therefore needed to be directed from joint civil-military headquarters on the tactical level. Civil administrators should be setting priorities, even if this would clash with short-term interests from tactical military perspective. After all, Spoor wrote, patrolling and raids had no use as long as the government did not function.³³

General Spoor had come forward with guidance on civil-military cooperation that showed resemblances to British practice during the Malayan Emergency several years later, a model that would become known as the 'war by committee' system. This is surprising given the fact that Spoor, despite his many qualities, has become the embodiment of a militarised, enemy-centric approach in the Indies. He became to the Dutch colonial war effort what U.S. Army General W. C. Westmoreland has become to the American way of warfare in Vietnam. Spoor's understanding and intentions clearly did not equal his actions. Not only was his guidance diametrically opposed to the situation he had previously allowed to evolve, there are also no indications that the commander's intent was ever put into effect in 1948.³⁴ In the course of that year, 'special military courts' were increasingly put in charge of administrating justice towards anyone, insurgents as well as the population suspected of aiding them. Without any civilian interference or due process, officers appointed as military judges could administer the death penalty and life-long imprisonment.³⁵ On 16 July 1948, the Lieutenant Governor-General once again prolonged the State of Siege for a period of three years 'as a result of the extraordinary circumstances.'³⁶ During the subsequent round of fighting, Spoor and Van Mook allowed the powers of the civil administrators to be trimmed down even further.

Instead of developing more effective ways of controlling territory, Spoor continued to press for the continuation of the 'spearhead strategy'. Mid-1948 this put him at odds with Van Mook. In order to undermine the Republic, the Lieutenant Governor-General proposed a more cautious 'nibble off-strategy', whereby Dutch forces would gradually occupy parts of enemy territory before considering an all-out attack on and occupation of the Republic, which would 'confront us with a policing challenge of formidable size.'³⁷ However, Spoor would write off this option as totally unrealistic. Both military logic and the fear of mounting international indignation and pressure argued against it. Only a swift and all-out decapitation strategy would undermine the nationalist fighting-spirit and allow for the return of order, stability and economic

³³ Spoor aan alle Militair gezaghebbenden, "De verhouding tussen leger, bestuur en politie", 12 July 1948, NA – Archief SNI, 1395.

³⁴ Nota betreffende Samenwerking tussen Leger, Bestuur en Politie, 3 February 1949, NL NA – Archief PG, 1466.

³⁵ Van Doorn en Hendrix, *Het Nederlands/Indonesisch Conflict*, pp.140-141.

³⁶ "Staat van Oorlog en Beleg", *Nieuwsgier*, 17 July 1948.

³⁷ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, p.128.

prosperity. In his estimation, the entire military force would need only two weeks for such an offensive and three months to pacify occupied territory.³⁸ Despite Van Mook's lasting doubts about effective occupation amidst an insurgency, he too would ultimately plead for an all-out offensive before he was replaced by the even more belligerent former Prime Minister Louis Beel in November.

Before the Dutch would again unleash their military power, a fundamental shift had taken place in U.S. policy which the Dutch dramatically underestimated. First of all, the Republican government and the TNI had ruthlessly suppressed a Communist coup-attempt within its territory in September 1948. Thereby they had proved their anti-Communist credentials to the U.S. government, which had already grown weary of the Netherlands' recalcitrance in seeking de facto re-colonisation.³⁹ Second, the resurgence of guerrilla activity in the second half of 1948 convinced American observers that the Dutch were incapable of handling the insurgency that would undoubtedly follow a possible occupation of Yogyakarta. Despite his conviction that pacification would be hard, Spoor wrote off this suggestion as 'nonsense'.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Merle Cochran, the new American negotiator on behalf of the United Nations, predicted that unless the Dutch made some serious concessions to the Republic, they would be confronted with a 'long period [of] guerrilla warfare and scorched earth.' This, he feared, would fundamentally strengthen the Indonesian Communists and undermine the moderate nationalist government in Yogyakarta.⁴¹

On 18 December 1948, just one day prior to the commencement of the Second Police Action, no lesser figure than the prominent 'cold warrior' George F. Kennan advised George C. Marshall that 'curiously enough, the most crucial issue of the moment in our struggle with the Kremlin is probably the problem of Indonesia.' The choice the United States was facing was 'not between Republican and Dutch sovereignty over the islands, but between Republican sovereignty and chaos. We know that chaos is an open door to communism'.⁴² Faced with the communist threat in Asia, the United States would back whoever was winning as long as he was anti-Communist. Militarily, the Netherlands and the Republic had reached a stalemate. But the fact that the Dutch were not winning – and therefore losing – was becoming increasingly clear by late 1948.

Colonial endgame

Despite the many ominous signs, the Dutch government decided to strike again on 19 December 1948 in a desperate attempt to create a *fait accompli*. This time the

³⁸ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, pp.128-130, p.134.

³⁹ Gouda and Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions*, pp.237-265.

⁴⁰ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, p.131.

⁴¹ Government Printing Office, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, VI, p. 466.

⁴² Cited in Gouda and Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions*, p.25.

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primary target was the Republican capital. After a spectacular surprise airborne attack, parachutists of the colonial army seized Maguwo Airport near Yogyakarta. Strengthened by air assault troops that were subsequently flown in, they succeeded in occupying the city within twenty-four hours and captured and imprisoned much of the Republican political leadership, including President Sukarno and Vice-President Hatta. Elsewhere on Java and Sumatra, the offensive did not proceed as smoothly as the First Police Action due to better preparations by the Republican Army. The military leadership managed to escape and would assume a key role in the nationalist revolt – a military interregnum that would have far reaching consequences for future civil-military relations in Indonesia in the decades to come.⁴³ The Dutch attempt to encircle key Republican military units largely failed, but nevertheless most of the Dutch columns reached their geographical objectives and once again at the expense of few casualties. In less than three weeks, before diplomatic pressure by the United Nations and a U.S. threat of withholding Marshall-aid again forced the Netherlands to cease the attack on the Republic, the Netherlands forces occupied the remainder of Java and an important part of Sumatra.

The failure of both tactics and strategy in the previous eighteen months did not drive the Dutch to fundamental innovation during the subsequent counter-insurgency effort in newly conquered territories. Instead, they chose for more of the same as they continued to underestimate both the will and capabilities of the enemy and the broad nationalist support amongst the population. After all – and this argument was repeated over and over again – once the nationalist insurgent movement had been decapitated, the nationalist revolt would crumble. The Second Police Action, while reaching most of its short-term military goals, turned out to be a fiasco on all other accounts. Despite successes in military confrontations with the TNI in the weeks following the seemingly decisive victory on the battlefield, it yielded no political result as the army was completely overstretched in its effort to control the territories it had seized.⁴⁴

Again the military lines of communication and supply seemed the Achilles heel of the Dutch forces. For instance, the hussars of a cavalry squadron that operated around Solo in Central Java had great difficulty keeping the most vital roads open as Indonesian guerrillas laid mines, improvised explosive devices, ambushed convoys and blew up bridges as soon as the Dutch engineers had rebuilt them. But troublesome civil-military relations were at least as important in undermining the counter-insurgency effort. In their area of operations, the hussars' relations with the local *loerachs* had seemed reasonably good directly after the Second Police Action but deteriorated dramatically towards April due to mounting insurgent pressure,

⁴³ T.B. Simatupang, *Report from Banarang: Experiences during the People's War*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1972).

⁴⁴ Groen, *Marsroutes en Dwaalsporen*, pp.196-230.

including widespread assassinations of civil administrators who cooperated with the Dutch. This dramatically hampered the flow of intelligence to the Dutch forces at the expense of casualties amongst the hussars. In one case this led to deadly and random revenge shootings targeting the population.⁴⁵

Whereas General Spoor had earlier paid lip service to the idea of civil supremacy, governing newly occupied territory on Java and Sumatra was made an exclusively military responsibility. The Netherlands East Indies government had managed to increase its civil administrative capacity on Java from 90 to 120 personnel, but this was still only half the staff that had served there prior to 1942. Due to a lack of civil servants as well as military priorities, the civilians' role was formally reduced to advising military commanders – which undoubtedly contributed to the militarisation of solutions. With the replacement of Van Mook and the military now fully in control of governance in occupied territory, 'the political lock on the military was finally removed'.⁴⁶ When in January 1949 several key politicians within the Dutch-created federal state of Pasundan on West-Java showed their Republican sympathies, the divisional commander Major-General E. Engles, bluntly arrested them, thereby demonstrating the bankruptcy of the federal system.⁴⁷ An initiative by the Netherlands-Indies government to create a coordinating body between the army, the police force and the civil administration was finally taken in February 1949 and seemingly agreed upon by May 1949.⁴⁸ By that time, however, it was too little, too late to make a fundamental difference.

As Dutch casualties spiralled in the first half of 1949, more artillery and air-power was used while there was also a sharp rise in examples of summary executions, torture and collective punishment.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the Republican shadow governments, that had been successful in the previous year, came to full effect in that final phase. While continuing to take massive casualties in the military domain, the Republic effectively won the battle for control of the population in the governance sphere. Having undermined Dutch authority and the federal structure for two years, it took

⁴⁵ M. W. C. de Jonge, *Mijn ruiters. Ervaringen als commandant van het 4^e Eskadron Pantserwagens, Huzaren van Boreel, tijdens de Politionele Acties (1947-1949) in toenmalig Nederlands-Indië*, (Rotterdam, Stichting Cultureel Erfgoed De Jonge, 2008), p.259.

⁴⁶ Van Doorn and Hendrix, *Het Nederlands-Indonesische Conflict*, p.141.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.142.

⁴⁸ Nota betreffende Samenwerking tussen Leger, Bestuur en Politie, 3 February 1949, NL NA – Archief PG, 1466, appendix to: J.G. Kist aan H.W. Felderhof, "Coördinatielichaam tussen Leger Bestuur en Politie in de Negara Pasundan ter verkrijging van een harmonische samenwerking", 16 mei 1949, *ibid*; Procureur Generaal bij het Hooggegerechtshof van Nederlands-Indië aan HVK, "Coördinatielichaam tussen Leger Bestuur en Politie in de Negara Pasundan ter verkrijging van een harmonische samenwerking", 23 mei 1949, *ibid*.

⁴⁹ For a general analysis of excessive force and war crimes see: Van Doorn and Hendrix, *Het Nederlands-Indonesische Conflict*.

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little effort to tear it down once the colonial power had overstretched itself dramatically while simultaneously squandering vital international support. In May 1949, the Netherlands signed a treaty that paved the way to a transfer of sovereignty. Even though a cease fire would only be effected in August, the Netherlands' had to withdraw its forces from Yogyakarta and released the Republican leaders. In December, just a year after the spectacular conquest of Yogyakarta, 350 years of Dutch empire in the Indies effectively came to an end.

Conclusion

The Dutch approach in countering the Indonesian revolt can be summarised as follows. The campaign lacked a realistic political aim, too often relied on excessive force, neglected governance in occupied territory and failed to create a balanced and integrated mechanism for civil-military cooperation. 'When we speak about "hearts and minds" [in the colonial context]', Hew Strachan convincingly argued during a counter-insurgency conference in 2007, 'we are not talking about being nice to the natives, but about giving them the firm smack of government.'⁵⁰ The Dutch never came close. Without an adequate system to either control the Indonesians in order to shield them from insurgent influence or to persuade them to join the Dutch camp, the Netherlands failed to separate the insurgents from the population. Intelligence on the enemy was militarised and often failed to distinguish between friend, 'fence sitters' and foe. Secondly, the Dutch lacked patience: hoping for quick results they focused on two speedy offensives at the expense of progressive pacification and long term reform. Finally, Dutch forces failed to sufficiently innovate and adapt to their enemy and environment.

All these overly militarised features were only exacerbated in 1949, after the Second Police Action. But they were clearly present during the previous eighteen months. It was in this crucial period that the Republic gained confidence in its own capacity to launch a full-spectrum insurgency, combining guerrilla warfare, subversion, civil administrative, social measures and – as during almost every insurgency – extreme violence. U.S. pressure was indeed instrumental in speeding up the Dutch retreat, but the Americans only shifted their allegiance after they became convinced during the course of 1948 that the Dutch were not winning and that the Republican government was the best guardian against a Communist threat.

In retrospect, the question is warranted whether an innovative, comprehensive approach to counter-insurgency campaigning by the Dutch would have made a fundamental difference in the late 1940s? This is unlikely when the Dutch case is treated in a comparative perspective. The inadequacy of Dutch ways and means is

⁵⁰ Hew Strachan, 'British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 152, Iss. 6, (2007), pp.8-11.

demonstrated when one takes a quick glance at the vast civilian government apparatus, as well as the relative troop density, that the British required, in support of far more realistic policy aims, when quelling the relatively limited insurgency in Malaya in the years to come. Meanwhile, a quick comparison with the French campaign in Algeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s shows that it took 450,000 innovative French troops with 200,000 local paramilitaries to reach some level of tactical success when stamping out a much smaller rebellion amongst a population less than one sixth of Indonesia's more than 60 million inhabitants. The French were doing so under conditions far more favourable to the counter-insurgent and at the cost of complete moral bankruptcy: and all in support of a similar re-colonisation policy that was no longer viable. In the end, in both Algeria and the Indonesian archipelago military power achieved very little in support of malfunctioning civilian institutions.