P-ISSN: 2986-3686
E-ISSN: 2798-4427

JGSS
Journal of Global Strategic Studies

Vol. 3 No. 2 December 2023

Decolonization and the Cold War: The Superpowers and the Anti-Colonial Insurgencies in Indonesia and Vietnam
Robert J. McMahon

Navigating Indonesia-United States Relations, 1967-1969: President Soeharto's Australian Whisperer
Shannon Smith

The Coming Hypersonic Era: Modern Weapons and Counterforce in the 21st Century
Peter J. McLaughlin

Saving the Mighty Mekong: The Case for Additional US Engagement with the Mekong Sub-Region
Alexis Turex

Approaches in the Indonesian Maritime Identity Construction: From Independence era to the Introduction the Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision
Briliantina Putri

Master's Programs in International Relations
Faculty of Social and Political Science
Jenderal Achmad Yani University

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

Journal of Global Strategic Studies
Vol. 03 No. 02
December 2023

Decolonization and the Cold War: The Superpowers and the Anti-Colonial Insurgencies in Indonesia and Vietnam

Robert J. McMahon

Emeritus Professor, Ohio State University

Throughout the Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently faced the dilemma of whether to recognize or to confer legitimacy upon armed insurgencies vying to overturn established civil authority. The superpower conflict, at once ideological and geopolitical, came to encompass the entire globe by the 1950s, with the Third World emerging as the chief zone of competition between the two superpowers--as well as the main source and site of non-state armed groups. The potential transformations of these armed groups into governments threatened to alter the prevailing balance of regional and global power. Policymakers in Washington and Moscow, consequently, needed to calculate carefully how the granting of de jure or de facto recognition to a particular armed insurgency, or the accordance of some form of legitimacy to it, might affect broader Cold War goals. Why did the United States and the Soviet Union, this essay asks, choose to recognize some insurgencies, deny recognition to others, and actively oppose still others? How, for their part, did these various armed, non-state actors seek to gain support, recognition, and legitimacy from one, or both, of the superpowers? What factors best explain their relative successes or failures in those endeavors? the present article explores those larger questions by focusing specifically on armed decolonization movements, arguably the most common and most consequential of the non-state, armed groups that emerged throughout the post-1945 period. In each of the cases examined here, the superpowers sought to shape the outcome of the decolonization struggle, offering, or withholding military support and diplomatic recognition as a weapon of influence. In each case, the aspiring national liberation movement deployed a combination of armed strength and diplomatic advocacy in a bid for legitimacy and recognition, seeing the support of one or both superpowers as instrumental to the overarching goal of full-fledged sovereignty and acceptance within the prevailing international state-based system.

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

During their four-and-a-half-decade-long contest "for the soul of mankind," as President George H. W. Bush so aptly described it, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently faced the dilemma of whether to recognize or to confer legitimacy upon armed insurgencies vying to overturn established civil authority (Bush, 2004, p. 1). That titanic struggle, at once ideological and geopolitical, came to encompass the entire globe by the 1950s, with the Third World emerging as the chief zone of competition between the two superpowers--as well as the main source and site of non-state armed groups. The potential transformations of these armed groups into governments threatened to alter the prevailing balance of regional and global power. Policymakers in Washington and Moscow, consequently, needed to calculate carefully how the granting of de jure or de facto recognition to a particular armed insurgency, or the accordance of some form of legitimacy to it, might affect broader Cold War goals.

Cold War era armed insurgencies took different forms. Many were anti-colonial rebellions that sought independence from long-time colonial powers. Others, as in Greece, Cuba, Nicaragua, Somalia, and Ethiopia, are best labeled as civil wars or insurrections against unpopular ruling governments. Still others, as in Hungary and Afghanistan, were revolts against externally imposed regimes. All raised the twinned issues of recognition and legitimacy.

Why did the United States and the Soviet Union, this essay asks, choose to recognize some insurgencies, deny recognition to others, and actively oppose still others? How, for their part, did these various armed, non-state actors seek to gain support, recognition, and legitimacy from one, or both, of the superpowers? What factors best explain their relative successes or failures in those endeavors?

The present essay explores those larger questions by focusing specifically on armed decolonization movements, arguably the most common and most consequential of the non-state, armed groups that emerged throughout the post-1945 period. The dismantling of the colonial empires transpired over three decades, principally between 1945 and 1975, ranging from the Asian and African continents to the Middle East and the Caribbean. Many of those independence struggles played out peacefully, to be sure, as imperial powers and indigenous nationalists bargained over the precise terms and timing of self-rule. Such was the case in the Philippines, India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Jamaica, and many former British and French dependencies in Africa. Other struggles devolved into open warfare between colonial military forces and indigenous armed groups. Those will be the focus here.

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

Although wholly distinct from the Cold War in its origins and consequences, decolonization coincided temporally with the superpower rivalry and was profoundly shaped by it. I will explore the intersection between decolonization and the Cold War by focusing on two of the most significant anti-colonial rebellions, those in Indonesia and Vietnam. In each of those long-colonized territories, Washington and Moscow sought to shape the ultimate outcome of the independence struggle, wielding as diplomatic weapons the prospect of diplomatic recognition or economic-military support—or the withholding of the same. In each case, the aspiring national liberation movement deployed a combination of armed strength and diplomatic advocacy in a bid for legitimacy and recognition, seeing the support of one, or both, of the superpowers as instrumental to the overarching goal of full-fledged sovereignty and acceptance within the prevailing international state-based system. Indeed, the central argument of this essay holds that it was that shrewd admixture of effective fighting strength and adroit diplomatic outreach that eventually led to the success of the independence movements in both Indonesia and Vietnam.

Anti-Colonial Rebellions Erupt in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia emerged as the first front in the anti-colonial wars of insurgency. In the days and weeks that followed World War II's fiery denouement, anti-colonial nationalists in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina boldly acted to shake off the shackles of colonialism by unilaterally declaring independence. On August 17, 1945, Sukarno and Mohammed Hatta, nationalist leaders who had long opposed Dutch colonial rule, proclaimed an independent Republic of Indonesia. Just over two weeks later, legendary Vietnamese patriot Ho Chi Minh announced the birth of an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In each country, longstanding and well-organized independence movements acted swiftly to capitalize on the power vacuums opened by the sudden surrender of Japan's occupying forces. Prominent, charismatic leaders and their ardent followers in both colonies sought to turn brash proclamations of independence into reality, utilizing a mix of diplomatic outreach and military pressure (McMahon, 1999, pp. 19-25).

Sukarno almost immediately appealed to U.S. President Harry S. Truman for support, requesting American mediation in the anticipated fight with a Dutch Government eager to restore imperial rule. He hoped that the persistent American anti-colonial pronouncements of the wartime years might translate into sympathy for Indonesia's aspirations. Ho, for his part, sent a series of personal letters to the new U.S.

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

chief executive in which he pled for U.S. support and recognition. Neither man received the response he craved. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes informed Sukarno that a request for mediation could only come from the "territorial sovereign"; and no member of the U.S. Government even responded to Ho's plaintive missives. Instead, the United States adopted a policy of formal neutrality toward the brewing colonial disputes in Indonesia and Indochina and called for negotiations between the contending parties. On December 19, 1945, the U.S. State Department issued a formal statement that acknowledged the territorial sovereignty of the Netherlands over the East Indies islands while denying the Indonesian Republic's quest for status as an equal party to the dispute (Byrnes, 1945, pp. 1021-1022).

Throughout the next year-and-a-half, as armed clashes between colonizer and colonized intensified, death tolls mounted, and negotiations stalled, the Truman administration urged the respective contending parties to pursue peaceful resolutions of these colonial disputes. At the same time, the United States declared its strict neutrality toward each of them. By so doing, Washington was conferring a degree of legitimacy on the two independence movements. One does not call for negotiations with terrorists or bandits, after all. Clearly, Washington never placed Indonesian and Vietnamese fighters and diplomats in those categories, nor did it ever explicitly consider them to be *illegitimate* aspirants to power. Indeed, U.S. officials themselves, including former President Franklin D. Roosevelt, had long called for an end to colonialism and the eventual evolution toward indigenous self-rule across the colonial world. Acutely conscious of the burgeoning support for the fledgling Indonesian and Vietnamese republics among the peoples and governments of the emerging Afro-Asian states, the Truman administration instead sought to find a middle ground: maintaining solidarity with key Western allies while straining to avoid alienating Third World anti-colonialist sensitivities or blatantly contradicting its own professed principles. State Department Asian expert and ambassador to the Netherlands Stanley K. Hornbeck reflected that, in attempting to address the decolonization conundrum: "We in effect attempted to support neither side, and yet favored one and hoped not unduly to offend the other" (Hornbeck, 1948, pp. 132-133).

Indonesia's Struggle for Independence

Indonesia's leaders actively, and shrewdly, courted support from the United States and from the wider international community—their principal audiences. Diplomatic outreach thus formed a core part of their strategy for achieving recognition and

legitimacy—and, ultimately, full independence. From the outset of the independence struggle, republican leaders vacillated between two alternative policies: diplomasi or perdjuangan (struggle). Such spokesmen as Sukarno, Hatta, and Sutan Sjahrir believed that the military, organizational, and ideological weaknesses of the infant republic necessitated a predominantly diplomatic approach. Broadly conceived, their view was that the republic must seek to conclude a negotiated settlement with the Dutch which would be guaranteed by the great powers; everything else would have to be subordinated to that central goal. Once a settlement had been attained, they could then turn to the critical task of transforming and democratizing Indonesian society. The logic of diplomacy thus demanded that any radical or revolutionary tendencies within the nationalist movement be suspended or suppressed to appease international opinion. The republic, according to this calculation, had to demonstrate that it was a responsible, capable, and stable government. By promising to protect foreign properties and displaying a willingness to welcome foreign investments—as it did in its widely circulated political manifesto of November 1, 1945--the Republic of Indonesia vied to project an image of moderation and responsibility to the world. It was, in effect, staking a claim to international legitimacy as a respectable and trustworthy state-in-waiting (The Political Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia, 1948, pp. 172-175).

The risk inherent in a policy of diplomasi was that the attainment of international recognition, if the policy succeeded, might occur at the expense of internal social reform. Perdjuangan, the alternative strategy, based its hopes instead on the vigor and revolutionary potential of the national freedom movement. Its chief advocate, popular communist leader Tan Malaka, a decades-long veteran of the anti-colonial struggle, believed that true independence could never be bestowed as a gift from the Western powers. Only through armed struggle could independence be won, a fundamental transformation of Indonesian society effected, and a cohesive, organized sense of purpose created out of the formless national movement (McMahon, Colonialism and Cold War, 1981, pp. 104-106).

At key junctures, those competing tendencies within the nationalist movement complemented each other. Yet the preference of senior republican representatives for diplomatic outreach to the West as the most efficacious strategy became clear before the end of 1945 and permeated all aspects of governmental policy over the next four years. On December 19, 1945, the State Department released its first official statement on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, expressing disappointment with the breakdown of negotiations between the two parties and calling for "a peaceful settlement recognizing

alike the natural aspirations of the Indonesian peoples and the legitimate rights and interests of the Netherlands" (Byrnes, 1945, pp. 1021-1022). Although falling well short of the Indonesian leadership's hope that the United States would acknowledge the republic's status as an equal party to the dispute, Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir heaped praise on President Truman in a personal Christmas telegram. "The last message of good will and encouragement issued by your State Department," Sjahrir wrote, "has given us great comfort in the struggle we are waging to establish freedom, justice and democracy in Indonesia". He added: "We look to you, as the head of a country that has always been in the forefront of the fight for liberty, justice, and self-determination, to use the benefit of your influence to stop the present bloodshed in Indonesia" (Sjahrir, 1945, p. 1186).

Over time, Cold War priorities compelled the United States to accord ever more legitimacy to the Indonesian Republic. A Dutch "police action" of July 1947, aimed at eliminating the republic as a viable entity, failed to suppress Indonesian guerrilla resistance while bringing forth widespread international condemnation of Dutch aggression. Days after the commencement of the offensive, Prime Minister Amir Sjarifuddin broadcast a statement from the republican capital of Jogjakarta, calling for a halt to the bloodshed and appealing to the republic's friends in India, China, Europe, and the United States to intervene "quickly and effectively". The aim of the Dutch military action, he stated flatly, was the complete liquidation of the republic and the restoration of the old colonial rule "under the cover of nice words and phrases" (New York Times, 1947).

Washington carefully monitored the international and domestic response to the renewed fighting. A State Department memorandum for Secretary of State George Marshall reported that the Dutch attack "started a wave of sympathy for the Indonesians which has swept around the world" (Secretary of State's Weekly Summary, 1948). Popular correspondent Theodore H. White thundered in the New Republic: "Men were once more being killed for the sin of seeking freedom" (White, 1947). Added the New York Times, in its first anti-Dutch editorial: "This action cannot be interpreted otherwise, therefore, then as an effort by the Dutch Government to impose by arms what it believed it was not going to gain by negotiation and which it did not choose to submit to arbitration" (New York Times, 1947).

President Sukarno appointed ex-prime minister Sjahrir as an ambassador-at-large to plead the Indonesian case before the UN Security Council. His first stop enroute to New York was New Delhi, where Jawaharlal Nehru, India's interim prime minister, expressed his outrage at the Dutch assault and promised unqualified Indian support for

the republic. After meeting with Sjahrir on July 24, Nehru gave a forceful indication of the growing self-consciousness and solidarity among the former colonial territories of Asia. “What has become of the U.N. Charter,” he asked? “The spirit of the new Asia will not tolerate such things. No European country, whatever it may be, has any business to set its army in Asia against the people of Asia. When it does so, Asia will not tolerate it”. The leader of about-to-be-independent India vowed to call formally for Security Council consideration of the Dutch-Indonesian dispute (Grady, 1947, pp. 990-991). U.S. officials, who clung to the hope that they would not be forced to choose between their need to maintain warm relations with their European allies and their determination to forge close ties with the newly emerging nations of the Third World, grew alarmed.

In line with their broader diplomatic strategy, Indonesians kept up the pressure on what they saw as their most important audience in the West. On July 25, Sukarno broadcast an urgent appeal to the United States, beseeching its help to bring about a peaceful settlement. “Just as your American ancestors fought 170 years ago for your liberty and independence,” he declared, “so are we Indonesians fighting for ours. Just as you then rebelled against domination by a country far across the seas, so are we”. He implored Americans “to stand by the principles of justice and right for which you fought so valiantly only two years ago” (New York Times, 1947, p. 3).

The urbane Sjahrir presented Indonesia’s case for independence to the Security Council with an effective blend of eloquence and passion. During subsequent council debates, the Soviet Union championed the Indonesian cause while berating the Netherlands. So, too did Australia and many non-Western states, thereby imposing a nettlesome dilemma on U.S. decision makers. The debates showcased the breadth of Indonesia’s support in its bid for international legitimacy and recognition. U.S. diplomats could not afford to ignore that reality without running the risk of alienating the growing number of countries backing Indonesia’s aspirations. To head off formal UN intervention, the United States offered to serve as a mediator. When Indonesian officials made known their preference for UN over U.S. mediation, however, Washington shifted course. It acquiesced to a Security Council resolution that called for a cease-fire and the creation of a three-member UN Good Offices Committee (GOC), which came to include the United States, to help implement the cease-fire and foster renewed negotiations (McMahon, Colonialism and Cold War, 1981, pp. 173-191).

Citizen-diplomat Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina and Truman’s appointee as U.S. representative to the GOC, played a pivotal role in negotiating the Renville Agreement of January 1948, signed on board a U.S. naval

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

vessel docked in the Java Sea. Shortly after arriving in the Dutch East Indies, Graham informed Secretary of State Marshall that he believed the Indonesian Republic to be the "rallying center of the largest, ablest and most dedicated single group of Indonesians in this struggle for independence". The present leadership, he emphasized, "seems as moderate, reasonable and responsive to Western ideas of any likely to arise in the future" (Graham, 1947).

When Dutch-Indonesian negotiations faltered again in December 1947, and another military action appeared imminent, the State Department drafted a compromise agreement that, while unfavorable in many respects to the republic, averted a military clash and facilitated a tentative negotiated settlement. In a crucial meeting with Indonesian leaders, Graham urged them to sign what became the Renville Agreement because he said it would at least ensure the continued existence of the republican government. "You are what you are," he famously stated, "and that is what you will remain." In other words, he was assuring them that signing the agreement would not adversely affect their current status as the de facto government in much of Java and Sumatra—the two islands that contained approximately ninety per cent of the total population of the archipelago. That pledge won them over, despite substantial domestic resistance that soon led Prime Minister Sjarifuddin to fall from power (UN Library, 1948; Salim, Hadji A., 1948).

Officially, the U.S. position toward the Dutch-Indonesian struggle remained one of nominal neutrality, and American participation on the GOC helped to bolster Washington's image as an impartial and even-handed mediator. In reality, though, American actions consistently tilted toward the Dutch. U.S. policies and statements at the UN and mediation efforts on the GOC invariably worked to the advantage of The Hague, as most informed observers quickly realized. When Marshall Plan aid began to flow to the Netherlands in 1948, moreover, the United States was placed in the anomalous position of serving on a UN commission as a nominally impartial arbitrator at a time when its financial assistance was at least indirectly financing the Netherlands's aggressive policy.

Its pro-Dutch orientation remained dominant until the early months of 1949, in the immediate aftermath of a second Dutch military offensive. The rehabilitation and reintegration of Western Europe and the corresponding desire to present a solid front against the Soviet Union led the United States to support the Dutch position in virtually all negotiations between them and the Indonesians. American support was not uncritical, of course; Washington strongly advised the Dutch against resorting to military force

before both military offensives and continually urged the Netherlands to reach an equitable settlement with the Indonesian nationalists. It was pressure from Washington, in fact, that led the Netherlands reluctantly to accept the Renville settlement.

But the United States never pushed the Dutch too hard. The success of the containment strategy, the European Recovery Program, and the incipient North Atlantic Treaty Organization necessitated the steadfast support of Western European nations, including, of course, the Netherlands. The intensification of the Cold War during those years underscored this need. American officials, moreover, tended to view Indonesia as an essential cog in the economic vitality of the metropole. It would contribute to the economic health of the Netherlands, which in turn would contribute to the economic health of Western Europe. Indeed, the Marshall Plan operated on the assumption that the European imperial powers would continue to draw strength from their colonies in Southeast Asia (McMahon, Colonialism and Cold War, 1981, p. 7).

In the wake of the second Dutch "police action," launched in December 1948, American policy changed drastically. The nearly universal denunciation of The Hague's aggression by the international community and widespread support for Indonesian independence merged with similar sentiment in the American public and Congress to bring the issue to a head. Events within Indonesia, moreover, exposed Dutch policy as hopelessly flawed. Indonesian guerrilla forces fought the Dutch army to a standstill, while the Dutch-sponsored non-republican states on the outer islands, which they were grooming to be pliable puppets in a thinly disguised divide-and-rule tactic, summarily abandoned the Netherlands and moved to join forces with the republic. With that political shift by the outer islanders, the Republic of Indonesia demonstrated beyond any doubt that it had achieved strong domestic legitimacy across the entire archipelago. In the eyes of the overwhelming majority of Indonesians—on Sulawesi, Borneo, and Bali as well as on the far more populous islands of Java and Sumatra-- it was now accepted as the sole, legitimate representative of Indonesian nationalism and the emerging Indonesian state.

Ironically, it was primarily European rather than Asian considerations that led the Truman administration to apply mounting pressure on the still-recalcitrant Dutch Government to accept Indonesian independence. As a result of Dutch intransigence, Congress placed substantial pressure on the administration to move in that direction by threatening to cut off all funds to the Marshall Plan and to hold up passage of the then-pending Atlantic Pact. Those programs, which lay at the heart of the administration's Cold War strategy, were far too vital to be jeopardized by a colonial war in Indonesia—

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

a conflict that to most senior American policy experts was an annoying sideshow (McMahon, Colonialism and Cold War, 1981, pp. 251-294).

In the end, the Indonesians' strategy of combining military action with diplomatic overtures in their independence struggle proved highly effective. Worried that their Dutch ally now represented a greater threat to peace and order than decidedly moderate nationalists did, and that the Soviet Union and local communists would gain influence if the fighting continued, the United States pressured the Netherlands to take immediate steps that would lead to genuine independence. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, in a climactic meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Dirk U. Stikker, on March 31, 1949, made it clear that anything less might force the United States to withhold economic assistance that the Netherlands desperately needed (FRUS, 1949, pp. 258-261). That policy shift led, just days before the decade's end, to the formal transfer of authority from the Netherlands to a sovereign Indonesian state. The United States became one of the first nations to confer formal recognition on the new Indonesian government, its abrupt shift to a pro- Indonesian policy having profoundly affected the timing and scope of that outcome.

Vietnam's Jagged Path to Independence

Ultimately, U.S. policy toward the Vietnamese national liberation movement charted a strikingly different path. A crucial difference derived from the divergent ideological character of the respective insurgencies. From the first, the Indonesian independence movement was led by moderate, non-communist nationalists. The non-communist bona fides of the Sukarno-led government were proven, in the eyes of U.S. analysts, by its bloody suppression of an internal communist revolt at Madiun, East Java, in September 1948. In Vietnam, on the other hand, the outstanding nationalist figure—Ho Chi Minh—was a decades-long communist, former resident of Moscow, and veteran Comintern agent. Worried that if Ho prevailed over the French it would lead to "an independent Vietnam State which would be run by orders from Moscow," the State Department acknowledged, in September 1948, that "we are all too well aware of the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution that excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome" (FRUS, 1948, p. 48).

Ho and the Viet Minh insurgency he helmed faced the same basic challenge as their counterparts in Indonesia: How best to achieve legitimacy and recognition? What blend of armed resistance and diplomatic outreach would prove most salutary to the goal of full sovereignty and independence? After fruitless negotiations with France broke

down in the summer of 1946, the Viet Minh had little choice but to pursue the path of armed resistance to an obstinate colonial overlord. In November, a brutal French naval bombardment of Haiphong claimed more than 6,000 Vietnamese lives. Ho Chi Minh and his supporters fled Hanoi, the French moved quickly to establish administrative control in the north, and the Viet Minh mobilized for guerrilla warfare. Conflict soon engulfed much of Vietnam. It would rage unabated for the next six-and-a-half years (Hess, 1987, pp. 197-204).

Yet the Vietnamese did not forsake diplomacy. Diplomatic outreach continued to serve as an indispensable adjunct to the ongoing contest of arms. Rather than immediately turning to the Soviet Union, as ideological affinity might have seemed to dictate, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) initially hedged between the West and the East, still hoping that it might draw some degree of sympathy and support from a United States proud and protective of its anti-colonial heritage. Indeed, in 1948, the ruling Indochina Communist Party instructed cadres to refrain from criticizing the United States in public statements and to adopt a posture of neutrality toward the Cold War struggle between the superpowers. "The foreign policy of our government," it stipulated, should not turn against the Americans "or to act in any way so as to incur their animosity. When it comes to public matters, it is formally prohibited to write, in any document, newspaper or book, one single word or one single line capable of incurring harmful repercussions on the foreign policy of our government in terms of its relations with the United States of America" (Logevall, 2014, p. 225). Until 1950, Ho always took care to strike a neutral pose, a balancing strategy that deepened Soviet leader Josef Stalin's suspicion that the Vietnamese leader was more of a nationalist than a communist—not unlike Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito. Yet Ho, for his part, reasoned that reaching out to international audiences and potential constituencies in both the West and the communist world best served the nationalist cause (Logevall, 2014, pp. 224-226; Gaiduk, 1996).

The Truman administration's gravitation toward open support for the French, by1949, helped push Ho into the arms of the communist powers. With consummate cynicism, France propped up the weak and pliable ex-Emperor Bao Dai as an indigenous alternative to Viet Minh rule. Despite deep misgivings, American policy makers accepted the ruse as the only available alternative to a communist-dominated Vietnam. That would have constituted an intolerable outcome for an administration that increasingly saw communism as a monolithic movement and greatly feared the geostrategic and ideological repercussions of Mao Zedong's recent triumph in the Chinese civil war (Hess,

The First American Commitment in Indochina: The Acceptance of the "Bao Dai Solution", 1978).

America's shift from formal neutrality to open embrace of the French colonialists drew the DRV ever closer to Stalin's Soviet Union and (after October 1949) Mao's China. In January 1950, the Vietnamese leader made a secret trip to Beijing in search of Chinese diplomatic backing and material aid. He then traveled to Moscow the next month, at the very moment that the landmark Sino-Soviet Treaty was being finalized, and personally beseeched Mao and Stalin for military assistance. Weeks earlier, first Beijing and then Moscow had extended formal recognition to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During the three-way meetings in Moscow between Stalin, Mao, and Ho, the former made clear his preoccupation with European issues and his lingering distrust of the Vietnamese and Chinese suitors who he privately considered to be closet Titos. Stalin reaffirmed Moscow's diplomatic recognition of the DRV, but he ruled out any direct U.S.S.R. aid. Instead, the Soviet dictator urged Mao to provide the Vietnamese insurgents with military equipment and training, a directive that Mao readily accepted (Zhai, 2000, pp. 16-18).

Beijing's support, which commenced soon thereafter, proved indispensable to the Vietnamese anti-colonial fighters. It helped secure military victories against superior French forces, culminating in the climactic triumph at Dien Bien Phu, in March 1954. For its part, the United States abandoned any pretense to neutrality in the wake of the communist powers' recognition of Ho's government. It formally recognized the Bao Dai regime in February 1950 and a few months later began providing massive amounts of military materiel to the French. In American eyes, however skewed their vision might have been, the Viet Minh formed part of a monolithic communist threat headquartered in the Kremlin. Despite the largely ineffectual character of French military and political policies, U.S. officials were agreed that the French counter-insurgency campaign served U.S. Cold War interests.

The Geneva Accords of 1954 brought an end to the First Indochina War. The settlement divided the country, temporarily, at the 17th parallel. The negotiators established two regroupment zones, one in the north for the Viet Minh and one in the south for the French and those Vietnamese who had fought with the colonialists. Nationwide elections, slated to take place within two years, were to create a unified Vietnam. But they never took place. Rather, rival North and South Vietnamese states developed. The former, which kept as its official name the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), was formally recognized by the Soviet Union, China, and all the Eastern

bloc countries; the latter, which called itself the Republic of Vietnam, received strong backing from the United States and formal recognition by Washington and its allies. A new guerrilla insurgency then erupted in the south, in 1957, aimed at overthrowing the U.S.-supported Saigon regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Three years later, the so-called Viet Cong guerrillas, supported and controlled by the DRV, established a politico-diplomatic arm: the National Liberation Front (NLF) (Duiker, 1994, pp. 107-137).

Vietnam's National Liberation Front

The NLF followed the script pioneered by the Republic of Indonesia and being pursued simultaneously by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), in Algeria, seeking international legitimacy and recognition as a government-in-waiting through a flurry of worldwide diplomatic activism to complement the ongoing military campaign. Military and diplomatic successes proved mutually reinforcing, as the Indonesians had earlier discovered. By 1961-1962, the Viet Cong/NLF insurgents controlled approximately half of the territory and half of the population of South Vietnam, helping to validate their claim that the Saigon regime lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the populace--the basic constituency that each were appealing to—and that only the NLF possessed that legitimacy (Prados, 2009, pp. 62-72).

The NLF's Foreign Relations Committee launched a diplomatic offensive, in mid-1962, aimed at winning support and recognition from both communist and non-communist states. Deliberately downplaying its intimate ties with and subservience to Hanoi, the NLF presented itself as a genuinely autonomous South Vietnamese actor, intent upon forming a "neutralist" government independent of both Hanoi and Washington. "We believe in a neutral solution to the Viet Nam crisis," declared NLF Secretary General Nguyen Van Hieu. "Vietnam is capable of determining its own future without outside interference and the National Liberation Front is willing to engage in negotiations right now to produce a peace-loving and democratic government" (Brigham, 1999, p. 17). The campaign met with considerable success; the neutralist message and image appealed to many non-aligned states and to certain liberal and pacifist groups in the West as well. Hieu traveled to Jakarta to meet with Sukarno, for example, and the Indonesian president praised the NLF while predicting that "it will surely win." In a subsequent press conference, on September 20, 1962, Sukarno called for immediate negotiations between the United States and the NLF to end hostilities (Brigham, 1999, p. 24). Following talks with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian ruler likewise praised the NLF while proposing that South Vietnam "should become a neutral zone" (Brigham, 1999, p. 25).

Throughout the mid- and late-1960s, the NLF strove to maintain the pretense of independence and continued following the path of diplomatic activism, even as the conflict in South Vietnam morphed into a major land war with more than half a million U.S. troops deployed there along with tens of thousands of North Vietnamese regulars. To break the military stalemate on the ground—plainly evident by 1967--Hanoi, Moscow, and Beijing insisted that the NLF had to be accepted as a legitimate entity and negotiating partner in any peace talks between the United States and its South Vietnamese ally. Albeit with great reluctance, the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, increasingly desperate to bring an end to the divisive Vietnam War, accepted that bitter pill as a condition for opening the Paris peace talks in May 1968. Winning a coveted seat at those formal negotiations constituted a supreme diplomatic triumph for the NLF; it offered undeniable political legitimacy to the southern insurgency that U.S. military forces had for years labored fruitlessly to liquidate.

Johnson's successor, Richard M. Nixon, shifted the real negotiating action from the formal bargaining among the Americans, North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, and NLF to secret, behind-the-scenes talks between his representative, National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger, and senior North Vietnamese Politburo Member Le Duc Tho. Those negotiations deadlocked over Washington's refusal to allow a role for the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the NLF's new name) in South Vietnam's postwar governance. Hanoi remained adamant on that essential point. Only the Nixon administration's belated and pained reversal of course on the PRG's political legitimacy, allowing it to participate in a postwar coalition government, led to the compromises embedded in the deeply flawed Paris Peace Agreement of January 1973 (Asselin, 2003).

Conclusion

In each of these decolonization upheavals, national liberation movements vied for legitimacy and recognition by combining armed resistance with diplomatic overtures. Indonesian nationalists, with their adroit comingling of diplomasi and perdjuangan set the template. They calculated, from the outset, that support from the United States could be crucial to their bid for independence; and that highlighting the moderate, non-communist character of the fledgling republic they had formed in the days that followed Japan's surrender could help sway American opinion. At the same time, Sukarno and his inner circle realized that, absent a strong military arm, Dutch forces could capsize the republican experiment, snuffing out organized nationalist resistance to the return of imperial rule. They could then present the international community with a fait accompli.

For the United States, Indonesia's diplomatic and military achievements together proved instrumental to its belated support for the freedom struggle. Not only had the republic effectively demonstrated its moderation, openness to Western trade and investment, and broad-based support from constituencies in the Afro-Asian world and among progressive groups within American society, but its fierce guerrilla campaign against attacking Dutch units stymied all Dutch efforts to "pacify" the archipelago. In the end, Washington's decision to pressure the Netherlands to grant Indonesia full sovereignty proved to be surprisingly easy. Competing policy priorities shifted decisively toward the Indonesian cause in early 1949 for two essential reasons: first, the republic had plainly attained legitimacy internally and in much of the wider world; second, Indonesian armed resistance to the Dutch counter-insurgency campaign had proved remarkably effective, rendering a Dutch military victory unobtainable and continued fighting both fruitless and dangerously unstable.

The Soviet and Chinese decisions to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam proved just as easy. As the Cold War heated up in the late-1940s, the search for allies in the rapidly decolonizing Third World grew in importance on both sides of the Cold War divide. The American denial of support to the DRV—before and after the Geneva Convention of 1954—seemed as natural as Moscow and Beijing's denial of the same to, first, the French-supported Bao Dai regime and, after Geneva, the Republic of (South) Vietnam. Recognizing a communist-dominated liberation movement was anathema to the United States, recognizing communist North Vietnam, after 1954, equally so.

Unquestionably, the force of arms proved much more decisive to the outcome of the First and Second Indochina Wars than the art of diplomacy. Yet diplomatic outreach also contributed significantly to that outcome. The ability of the NLF, and later PRG, to take on the trappings of at least a semi-legitimate government-in-waiting enabled state and non-state actors outside the communist bloc to champion its cause. Its mere existence as a nominally autonomous agent, moreover, allowed North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China to insist that the NLF must be represented in any peace talks with the United States and South Vietnam. That battering ram of a diplomatic strategy, alongside constant military pressure, forced the Nixon administration to accord it legitimacy as a political stakeholder in post-peace settlement South Vietnam.

Two other decolonization cases, those of Algeria and Angola, sketched briefly here for comparative purposes, underscore this broader pattern. Nationalist claims-makers in each territory invariably adopted a strategy that blended armed resistance to

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

the imperial power with urgent appeals to the international community. In each instance, those appeals were based on the righteousness of the pro-independence cause and the demonstrable fact that the claims-maker enjoyed widespread domestic support—and hence possessed legitimacy. Freedom fighters in Algeria, in the 1950s and early 1960s, and Angola, in the 1960s and 1970s, adroitly leveraged a mix of armed opposition and diplomatic advocacy in their common quests for total independence, much as had their counterparts in Indonesia and Vietnam in the wake of World War II.

Outside of Vietnam, Algeria stands as the bloodiest of all the decolonization wars, a brutal conflict that claimed as many as half a million lives. There, an extraordinarily skillful diplomatic effort persevered, even in the face of a savage French counter-insurgency offensive. By the late-1950s and early 1960s, the world had almost completely transitioned into one in which anti-colonialism had assumed normative status in international politics. The new, anti-colonial norms represented a sea change in "global historical time," making the violent suppression tactics preferred by policy makers in Paris ever more problematic and ever more at odds with global opinion than anything faced by their predecessor's vis-a-vis the Vietnamese insurgency just a decade earlier. When the Algerian independence-seekers formed the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRN), in 1958, it controlled hardly any territory. Yet within weeks it was recognized by thirteen countries, including China, North Vietnam, North Korea, Indonesia, and virtually all the Arab states. The FLN's leaders exulted when, in October 1960, Moscow accorded de facto recognition as well, promising to provide all possible Soviet aid. For its part, the United States, wary of being caught on the wrong side of history, was considerably less averse to pressuring its French ally than it had been in the early postwar years. The administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy were keenly aware that Algeria had become, in the words of historian Matthew Connelly, "the preeminent anticolonial movement in a profoundly anti-colonial era." Consequently, they kept up the pressure on France to bow to the inevitability of an independent Algerian state. Algerian nationalists masterfully navigated the treacherous shoals of U.S.-Soviet rivalry to gain a degree of legitimacy from each of the superpowers. Their diplomatic finesse and pragmatism, more than their military achievements, led directly to the Evian Accords of March 1962 which gave birth to a fully independent Algeria.

In sharp contradistinction to the decolonization contests in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Algeria, each of which produced a single, hegemonic organization that spoke for the nationalist cause and attained strong domestic legitimacy among its internal constituents,

Angolan freedom-fighters of the early and mid-1970s split into three factions. They clashed with each other—and with Soviet-supplied Cuban troops—rather than with a European colonial military force intent on preserving empire. Here, too, diplomacy played a significant role. Support from the so-called African "front line" states, determined to help eradicate the last vestiges of empire on the continent, kept up steady pressure on the reactionary Portuguese Government of Antonio Salazar. At the same time, early backing from a more assertive Soviet Union, intent on capitalizing on Africa's anti-imperialist surge for its own Cold War interests, fortified the Angolan independence-seekers. A regime changes in Lisbon, in April 1974, settled the core issue of whether Angola would achieve unfettered sovereignty. It would. But a civil war among indigenous contestants, each drawing support from one of the superpowers, determined which one would rule. The shape and contours of the Angolan Government that eventually claimed power and speedily won international recognition—the Moscow-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Anglola (MPLA)—thus owed more to superior fighting skills than to diplomatic maneuvers.

The story of decolonization is in large measure the story of Third World nationalist movements' search for internal and external legitimacy and recognition. The insurgencies that faced violent imperial resistance, such as those discussed above, endeavored to achieve the bedrock goals of genuine independence and acceptance in the state-based international system by pursuing strategies that mixed armed resistance with diplomatic outreach. The relative importance of fighting and diplomacy differed in each case, of course, but the pragmatic mix of the two in the end proved efficacious to all four of these armed insurgencies. The United States and the Soviet Union constituted key audiences in each instance since the superpowers possessed unparalleled influence within the wider international community. The decolonization wars imposed an unusually nettlesome dilemma on policy makers in Washington, caught as they were between the contradictory goals of supporting European allies and yet not alienating the emerging nations of the global South. Cold War priorities shaped the U.S. response in each case, leading to support—however halting and reluctant—for Indonesia's bid for independence, open opposition to Vietnam's, and an embrace of the independence cause in both Algeria and Angola. The Soviet Union faced no such dilemma. Indeed, it eagerly supported national liberation movements across the Third World and wholeheartedly embraced the anti-colonial cause, especially in the post-Stalin era. Such a stance, Kremlin decision-makers calculated, aligned Moscow with the newly emerging forces while weakening the West and tarring it with the brush of imperial aggrandizement—and

racism. For their part, the independence movements of the decolonization era benefited from the East-West conflict, using the prevailing bipolar international system to enhance their prospects for achieving independence as quickly as possible. Structure and agency thus combined in manifold ways, creating unique historical opportunities for long-suppressed nationalist groups. They seized them with skill and foresight.

References

Asselin, P. (2003). *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement.* New York: University of North Carolina Press.

Brigham, R. K. (1999). *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The Nlf's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* . Hagerstown: NCROL.

Bush, G. H. (2004). Introduction. In T. C. Reed, *At the Abyss: An Insider's History of the Cold War* (p. 1). New York: Ballantine Books.

Byrnes. (1945, December 23). Byrnes to Consul General Walter Foote, October 31, 1945. *U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 13*.

Duiker, W. (1994). *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution In A Divided Vietnam.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

FRUS. (1948, September 27). Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27, 1948. *FRUS, 6*, p. 48.

FRUS. (1949, March 31). Memorandum by Acheson of a conversation with Stikker, March 31, 1949 . *FRUS*.

Gaiduk, I. V. (1996). *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.

Grady, H. (1947, July 26). to the State Department. *FRUS*, pp. 990-991.

Graham. (1947, December 31). To Marshall.

Hess, G. R. (1978). The First American Commitment in Indochina: The Acceptance of the "Bao Dai Solution". *Diplomatic History, 2*(4), 331-350.

Hess, G. R. (1987). *The United States' Emergence As a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Hornbeck, S. K. (1948, January). The United States and the Netherlands East Indies. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 255*.

E-ISSN: 2798-4427
DOI: 10.36859/jgss.v3i2.1772

Logevall, F. (2014). *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam.* London: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

McMahon, R. J. (1981). *Colonialism and Cold War.* New York: Cornell University Press.

McMahon, R. J. (1999). *The Limits of Empire .* New York: Columbia University Press.

New York Times. (1947, July 24). *New York Times*, p. 3.

New York Times. (1947, July 22). *New York Times*, p. 2.

New York Times. (1947, July 25). *New York Times*, p. 3.

Prados, J. (2009). *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975 (Modern War Studies).* Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

Salim, Hadji A. (1948, June 19). To Graham, June 19, 1948, in Indonesia Files. *Frank Porter Graham Papers*.

Secretary of State's Weekly Summary. (1948, August 18).

Sjahrir. (1945). To Truman December 25, 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 6*.

The Political Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia. (1948). In C. Wolf, *The Indonesian Story: The Birth, Growth and Structure of the Indonesian Republic.* New York: John Day.

UN Library. (1948). *Summary records of 60th and 61st meetings of the GOC, January 12 and 13, 1948.* New York: UN Library.

White, T. H. (1947, August 4). So the Dutch Are at War. *New Republic*, p. 8.

Zhai, Q. (2000). *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975.* Chapel Hil: The University of North Carolina Press.

MAGISTER HUBUNGAN INTERNASIONAL

http://ejournal.fisip.unjani.ac.id/