

CHAPTER FIVE

BACKGROUND TO THE UNITED NATIONS' RETURN TO WEST IRIAN

1963 to 1967

Indonesian Rule Begins. Article XVI Ignored

Three days after Indonesian administration began, Sukarno arrived in West Irian for a triumphal two-day visit. By all accounts he enjoyed his trip, taking time to rename eight mountain peaks (giving his own name to the largest, Mount Carstensz). He also conferred the title of “Paramount Son of West Irian” on the new Governor Eliezer Bonay. Indonesia was now, he said, the fifth largest country in the world and he predicted that it would one day be the second largest; “though we can never be the first since the Chinese breed like marmots.”¹ Whether he was implicitly threatening further territorial expansion is unclear as are his motives for insulting the Chinese. Publicly he stated that he had no more territorial ambitions, but he pledged Indonesia’s continuing support “to the last drop of blood” for all nations fighting for independence, such as Angola and North Borneo.²

Shortly after the visit, Sukarno issued two decrees banning all existing Papuan political parties and prohibiting all political activity not sanctioned by the authorities, both clear breeches of the Agreement.³ The motive for this imposition of “political quarantine” was, according to the British academic M.A. Jaspan:

that Indonesia was faced with an exceptionally difficult and delicate task, and that this would not be made easier if deliberately hostile

critics or destructive influences were given freedom of access into or movement within West Irian.⁴

Writing in 1965, he added optimistically that Jakarta did not regard this quarantine as either permanent or inherently desirable unlike Australia's "strict entry permit system" for PNG which he described as appearing "both permanent and relatively inflexible."⁵

Political quarantine also meant that the territory was virtually closed to the outside world making it extremely difficult for foreigners to gain an accurate impression of the internal situation. In the first few years, except for official information, journalists and academics relied mostly upon eyewitness accounts from West Papuans who crossed into PNG or from Indonesians willing to pass on information. Although there were several hundred foreign missionaries in West Irian, there is no evidence that they were a particular source of useful information. In fact, the American missionaries and their families, who made up the largest group (256 resident in the interior in 1964) were described as having excellent relations with local government officials,⁶ which perhaps explained their unwillingness to do anything that could jeopardise their future.

This absence of any clear picture of the situation in West Irian was another fundamental breach of the terms of the Agreement. Article XVI specified that once the UNTEA administration ended, a "number of United Nations experts" would be designated to remain to advise and assist the authorities in preparations for carrying out the provisions for self-determination. On 30 May 1963, the Dutch informed

Britain that Indonesia had agreed, in principle, to the implementation of this part of the Agreement. Nonetheless the British noted, “the Dutch are rather astonished that the Indonesians have agreed to this proposal but are sceptical as to how effectively the Indonesians will permit it to operate.”⁷ Their scepticism was well-founded because Article XVI was never fulfilled. U Thant’s original suggestion was for the establishment of a panel of six UN officials under the supervision of Narasimhan and Rolz-Bennett.⁸ But in 1964, a memo by the Australian Mission to the U.N reported:

...the failure of the Secretary-General to give effect to his intention to send Article XVI experts to the Territory. In a letter to Mr Palar (Indonesian Ambassador to the UN) of 14th May 1963, Mr Narasimhan named the experts (some of whom have since been withdrawn) and added ‘it is the intention of the Secretary-General that two or three of these experts will visit the Territory at intervals of six months or so and submit reports to him under Article XVI of the Agreement’. While the terms of this letter have not been made public, a public statement in similar terms was made to the press by Narasimhan on 16th May, 1963. To our knowledge, none of the Article XVI experts has visited West Irian and other experts have been obliged, in order to ensure freedom of movement, formally to dissociate their visits from the purposes of Article XVI.⁹

A British report three years later echoes the Australian memorandum, and notes that following the Secretary-General’s request, “we seem to have heard no more.” Describing the situation up until Indonesia’s withdrawal from the UN in 1965, the report continues:

In 1964 a U.N. representative Mr. Rolz-Bennett did visit West Irian. It appears that he was the only U.N. representative to do so apart from FUNDWI [U.N. Fund for West Irian] personnel who seem to have been resident in the territory. According to a statement made by Indonesia’s Special co-ordinator for West Irian affairs, no permanent U.N. observer ever reached West Irian before August 1964 and we can trace no record of one arriving between that date and February 1965 when all U.N. personnel were withdrawn from Indonesia when she left the U.N...‘The personnel in West Irian’

referred to by the Secretary-General consisted apparently of only one person, as a New York telegram to the Foreign Office said 'FUNDWI representative in West Irian is now at Jakarta expecting to leave'.¹⁰

As an important part of the Agreement's preparations for Papuan self-determination, one might have expected some form of protest from the Secretariat at Jakarta's refusal to abide by Article XVI. But, following a conversation with Under Secretary General Rolz-Bennett in June 1964, an Australian diplomat remarked that the Under Secretary-General was "disinclined to discuss Article XVI in detail and left me with the impression that the Secretary-General did not intend to make too much of [it]."¹¹

The only UN presence permitted in the first years of Indonesian rule were officials involved with FUNDWI. The fund had been established in November 1963 with a US\$30 million grant from the Dutch and its purpose was to assist in the economic and social development of West Irian. Under the arrangements for the operation of the fund, the U.N. was authorised to:

...appoint special staff to Jakarta (to come under the jurisdiction of the UNTAB [U.N. Technical Assistance Board] Resident Representative in Jakarta) and to appoint (through executing agencies) project managers and experts as necessary for agreed Fund projects.¹²

Only a small number of FUNDWI officials actually visited the territory before February 1965 when an Australian report noted:

Mr. Rapaport, the Executive Director of FUNDWI, visited West Irian in March 1964 to discuss the implementation of FUNDWI projects, and occasional visits have been made by the United Nations personnel stationed elsewhere in Indonesia. However, no

development work under FUNDWI has yet begun, although the Indonesians have submitted lists of projects...It would seem that Indonesia's withdrawal and the cessation of FUNDWI...will not have much effect on the administration of West Irian at present, and the continuation of development projects (other than FUNDWI) such as they are.¹³

Conditions in the Territory. Armed Rebellion Begins

Unhindered by independent observers, Indonesia's first few months of administration were nonetheless criticised by some Papuans such as Herman Wajoi, who had campaigned for them during UNTEA. Wajoi, then President of the Indonesian National Party (PNI) in West Irian, sent a resolution to the Government on behalf of his officially-sanctioned organisation. The resolution reported that young Papuan government employees were being harassed and dismissed from their jobs. Furthermore; "possessions of the people, such as: radio receivers, fridges, beds, clothes and garden products are being stolen in a big way or robbed with the strength of firearms." The resolution concluded by calling for an end to the recent corruption and theft, and asking for a curtailment of the flow of non-Papuan officials into the territory so that more use could be made of existing Papuan officials.¹⁴

In 1963, Foreign Minister Subandrio had pledged that West Irian would not be 'colonised' by the Javanese and there would be no transmigration to the territory from other provinces of Indonesia. It was, according to the British Ambassador, a logical enough decision "in view of the already serious problem of feeding the existing population."¹⁵ By 1964, however, the resident Indonesian population was estimated to be 16,000, twice as large as the maximum pre-1963 Dutch population. A

1964 U.S. report remarked; “the very size of the Indonesian influx has, of course, created problems. Housing has become very tight.”¹⁶ The next year an Australian diplomatic memorandum referred to “recent press reports about large-scale emigration of Javanese to West New Guinea.”¹⁷ The same communication quoted the exiled Papuan nationalist Markus Kaisiepo noting that ex-Governor Eliezer Bonay had:

...recently been appointed as Vice-Minister for the interior in Djakarta and his main responsibility was the movement of Javanese to West New Guinea. Kaisiepo remarked on the irony of this as Bonay’s opposition while Governor to the settlement of Javanese in the territory was one of the reasons for his removal from this post.¹⁸

Although the numbers of transmigrants in the 1960’s were small compared to later settlement programmes in West Irian, the Anti-Slavery Society records that in 1966, 100 transmigrant families were settled in both the Merauke and Jayapura regions; “in neither of these cases is there any record as to how the land was acquired from the West Papuans.”¹⁹

Papuan antipathy towards Indonesia was witnessed in 1964, when, after twelve months of delay by Jakarta, a team of two U.S. Embassy officials was permitted to enter West Irian for a ten day field trip. On their return they reported that Jakarta wished to portray an image of eternal union with West Irian and wanted to avoid a plebiscite. The officials also claimed that “the cream of its crop” of Indonesian bureaucrats had been sent to the territory, but:

Initial Papuan reaction to Indonesian administration was largely wait and see. After fifteen months, however, it has changed to a major degree of alienation. Even those Papuan leaders who were

instrumental in promoting union with Indonesia are adamant that the provisions for a plebiscite to be held before the end of 1969 must be fulfilled. To many it is the one hope which perhaps deters attempts at rash action...latent Papuan nationalism fostered actively during the latter part of Dutch rule seems to have received a new lease of life.²⁰

They then noted that several different informants had revealed that a “near insurrection” had almost broken out the previous month in Manokwari.²¹

Despite being the “cream of the crop,” the Americans also observed that the Indonesians patronised the Papuans in an almost “classical colonial sense” and were quick to complain how lazy the locals were and how “like children they must be led.” Furthermore, the report remarked that there was a steady flow of consumer goods leaving the territory and estimated that only 25 per cent of these goods shipped and invoiced to West Irian were actually unloaded there. Non-Papuan officials served in the territory for two years only which the report stated:

...discourages any tendency by the Indonesians to consider Irian their home and the individual tends to count the days until his going home, much as many a colonial administrator in the past, busily taking advantage in the interim of the opportunity to lay up imported commodities to take with him.²²

Significantly they also remarked “except for the figurehead of the Governor at the top, few Papuans are to be found in the government civil service positions and this is resented.”²³ In support of their assessment, they revealed that an Australian ABC journalist had, perhaps uniquely, managed to visit the territory in both May 1963 and August 1964. In his opinion, the political situation had markedly deteriorated since the previous year to the point of being ‘explosive’.²⁴

Although the US report acknowledged grave problems in West Irian, American assessments of the situation tended to be more optimistic than those of the Australians or British. An Australian Governmental briefing from early 1965 predicted that the territory would stagnate and deteriorate economically.²⁵ In October 1967, the British Embassy in Jakarta interviewed a German agricultural officer, one of the few non-missionary foreigners to remain in the territory after 1963. He estimated that over ninety per cent of the Papuans wanted independence, and this applied to the Governors and government officials as well as the common villagers:

Naturally, however, no Papuan expresses nationalistic sentiments openly since the present governor's predecessor [Elizer Bonay] was dismissed two years ago for doing just that, and a number of leading Papuans have been in gaol since 1965 for petitioning for independence.²⁶

He also revealed that rebellion had been going on intermittently since 1965, reaching a peak in January 1967 when the airforce had bombed guerrilla camps. Accusing official reports of greatly underestimating the casualties, he added:

In his town alone [on the Bird's Head Peninsula] 20 Indonesian soldiers have been killed in ambushes and a very large number of Papuans, mostly ordinary villagers rather than guerillas, have since been killed by way of reprisal. Although the government now controls the main towns, thanks to a great increase in the military contingent which now includes units of the crack West Java 'Siliwangi' division and RPKAD (para-commandoes) as well as the less discliplined Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) and the West Irian (non-Papuan) 'Tjenderawasih' division, government forces are always liable to ambush outside of town.²⁷

Explaining the reason for Papuan nationalism, the German concluded that it was simply due to Indonesian maladministration. He also echoed earlier Western reports by stating:

Many officials go to West Irian solely to enrich themselves through embezzlement or, in the case of many of the soldiers, by simply stealing. Most Javanese in any case have an almost Afrikaner attitude towards ‘those black men’ and social mixing between the two races is rare.²⁸

Elsewhere, an Australian journalist resident in PNG during 1964 wrote that the ‘interior’ of West Irian appeared to be completely neglected by the Indonesians. The “natives had reverted to headhunting” and serious tribal fighting had broken out in the Baliem valley with hundreds reported killed.²⁹

According to Van der kroef, increasing Papuan discontent led in 1965 to the founding of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM - Free Papua Movement) on the Bird’s Head Peninsula, where sporadic rebellion against the Indonesians had been continuing since 1963. In May 1965, OPM members were arrested in the area following attempted raisings of the Papuan flag.³⁰ Papuan rebels were also reported to have attacked Shell Oil Company installations on the island of Biak.³¹ In August 1965, the British Ambassador in Jakarta telegrammed the Foreign Office to forward information given to his embassy by the Americans:

...there had been an uprising in the vicinity of Manokwari in the Bird’s Head of West Irian. Rebellious tribesmen have killed members of the Police Mobile Brigade stationed in the area. Airforce PGT troops were then parachuted in to restore situation but nothing has been heard from them. One battalion of the army parachute commando regiment was to be flown from Djakarta to Biak on 12 August. U.S. AAA [Assistant Army Attache?] obtained information from a member of this battalion believed reliable and passed information to us without knowledge of his superiors. Please protect.³²

According to an official Indonesian military history, the deployment in Manokwari of Infantry Battalion 641 and Battalion 642 of the Cendrawasih Division in late 1964 led to:

disturbances demonstrations and the display of posters in Manokwari, Sorong, Ayamaru, Teminabuan, Bintuni, Fak Fak, Kaimana, Kokonao and several other places. This was followed by an attempt by separatists on 16 December 1964 to steal weapons from the local police.³³

On 26 July 1965, Papuan government employees attacked and killed a number of soldiers during a Papuan flag-raising ceremony, before fleeing into the bush with some stolen weapons. Two days later, rebel leader and ex-Papaun Volunteer Corps sergeant, Frits Awom led several hundred men in an attack on Battalion 641's barracks in Arfai, Manokwari. The Indonesians responded on 4 August by launching their first counter-insurgency operation, Operation Sadar.³⁴

Despite this operation, rebellion continued, particularly in the Manokwari region. According to the Indonesian army, in 1966 the rebels went on the offensive attacking numerous military posts. They also gained support from the local people, and from Papuans in the army, police and civil service.³⁵ In April 1967, the Indonesians publicly admitted that their air force had strafed Manokwari town the previous January, killing forty people. This, they said was in response to Awom declaring a "Free Papua State" and taking virtual control of the town.³⁶ The same year, Johan Ariks, a seventy-five year old local Arfak 'Big Man' (a non-hereditary leader who achieves their position through their own efforts and charisma), was

captured by the military after leading a two-year guerrilla campaign in the area. He died in prison in 1969.³⁷

Further details about these disturbances is given by P. Szudek writing for the pro-Papuan Anglo-Melanesian Aid Committee in 1968. While the allegations are serious enough to warrant mention, it is important to note that Szudek does not give his source of information. In the Baliem Valley during 1966, he alleges that eighty males, some as young as ten, were shot by troops in the village of Gulunu and a boy of ten was publicly hanged. The reason given was that the people had refused to call themselves Irianese. In the districts of Sukarnapura, Manokwari and Teminabuan at least fifteen men were publicly hanged by military police in 1967, including a Papuan police inspector called Nico Jacadewa, and a number of his Papuan constables. In the district of Ayamaru in February 1967, the army launched a 'military' operation shooting and executing numbers of Papuans and burning down villages. In the same month on the Bird's Head Peninsula, villages were shelled and bombed by the Indonesian navy and air force.³⁸

Szudek also records that Indonesian Foreign Minister Malik travelled to West Irian in August 1966, accompanied for the first time by foreign journalists. Quoting one of the correspondents, the Dutchman Frank de Jong, writes:

Whereever he went, Mr. Malik was greeted by people shouting...Where is the plebiscite?...A Papuan policeman (critically viewing Mr. Malik's escort) said: 'We are heirs to this country. We want a plebiscite, not parades!'³⁹

United Nations Reaction

The response of the international community to these events was muted. Crucially, it appears that neither the Dutch nor the UN ever intended to argue the case for a plebiscite in West Irian. As early as 21 May 1963, Australia's Washington embassy forwarded information from the Americans, concerning some 'impressions' on the issue which they had recently received from U Thant's chef de cabinet, Narasimhan:

The Dutch and Indonesians have apparently been sounding each other out on the question of the form of the self-determination exercise. The Dutch apparently are prepared to agree to the exercise taking some form other than a plebiscite if this is acceptable to other parties to the West New Guinea Agreement. Narasimhan's view is that the Act might take the form of consultation with local councils and village representatives. Regarding timing, the Dutch, with an eye on their relations with Indonesia, are understood to be anxious to get the act of self-determination over in 1965 or 1966.⁴⁰

In May 1964, Rolz-Bennett (Deputy Chef de Cabinet U.N. Secretariat) arrived in Jakarta for talks with Sukarno and Subandrio before flying on to West Irian where he met Sudjarwo, the Indonesian Government's representative for West Irian affairs. He also embarked upon a brief tour of Biak, Sukarnapura (Jayapura) and Manokwari. At the talks in Jakarta, Rolz-Bennett claimed that the Indonesians "responded positively" to his arguments in favour of a plebiscite, although his overall impressions of the visit were, according to Australian diplomatic reports, 'negative'. In the written text outlining his case, he refers to the need for "some form of plebiscite," and in his discussions in Jakarta he recommended a system whereby each

district would elect an enlarged council. This would then meet to decide, on behalf of the population, whether or not to remain with Indonesia.⁴¹

Significantly, apart from a reference to the importance of a free and secret vote by each council, Rolz-Bennett's suggestion is remarkably similar to the method eventually adopted by Jakarta. As will be discussed in Chapter Eight, this chosen method was publicly presented in 1969 as an Indonesian plan without any mention of the U.N.'s long-standing support for the idea.

It is also relevant to note that the word 'plebiscite' was misused by Rolz-Bennett. A plebiscite, as defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is a "direct vote of all electors of state on an important public question." The election of representatives to decide upon an issue on the population's behalf is not a plebiscite, no matter how democratic the selection process.

As well as encountering a small number of Papuans at the airport bearing 'no plebiscite' placards, Rolz-Bennett later informed his U.N. colleagues that he had received four anonymous letters urging a return of the Dutch. Australian documents state that "the Indonesians were pleased when he told them that he had received the letters and that he was, of course, ignoring them."⁴² Among his allegations of Indonesian brutality, Szudek asserts that in February 1967, three men were taken from Teminabuan jail (on the Bird's Head Peninsula) and publicly executed. The

reason given was that they had handed anti-Indonesian petitions to Rolz-Bennett during his 1964 visit.⁴³

Although very flexible on how the Act was to be conducted, the UN was firm on the point that some form of self-determination was necessary. An Australian Government document from early 1965 predicted that the Indonesians were unlikely to risk an act of self-determination if they could avoid it. However, Narasimhan informed the Americans in May 1963 that he had warned Subandrio:

...that if the Indonesians thought they could avoid carrying out the self-determination element in the agreement, he could assure them that on the day they said that publicly, the Secretary-General would immediately inform the UN that Indonesia had broken the Agreement.

However, the same document continues:

N.S. Subbaram of UNTAB in Djakarta told the [Australian] Embassy in March, 1964 he thought there was a possibility that Indonesia and the Netherlands would come to some arrangement about the plebiscite, and if they agreed it was not necessary, the U.N. would not be able to interfere.⁴⁴

The Australians assessed that U Thant would not make a stand on such an Indonesian/Dutch decision “unless he knew that a majority of Afro-Asian and Latin Americans were crusading for self-determination for West Irian.” The Australian report concluded that such a protest would be unlikely,⁴⁵ noting incorrectly that no States had spoken out against the Agreement in the UNGA meeting of September 1963.

From the evidence, the U.N.'s attitude seemed to be that, while genuine Papuan self-determination was impracticable and probably undesirable, an appearance of self-determination had to take place in order that the issue could be legitimately concluded. Indonesian threats to this process were to be resisted so long as the UN still had a responsibility under the Agreement. However, a decision by the two signatories to abandon the process would release U Thant from his obligation and was therefore acceptable, possibly following some expression of official disapproval. As with the international community generally, the emphasis on appearance, rather than substance, would be a characteristic of UN policy on Papuan self-determination throughout its involvement in the issue.

Dutch Reaction

The Hague's attitude was broadly similar to the UN's. In addition to sharing the Secretariat's position that direct voting was unnecessary, they had little enthusiasm for any continuing involvement in the issue. On the one hand, Foreign Minister Luns had rejected repeated private suggestions by Subandrio in April 1964 that he announce to the Dutch Parliament that an act of Papuan self-determination was no longer necessary. The Indonesian Foreign Minister had justified his proposal on the grounds that it was a burdensome obligation which meant lasting insecurity and uncertainty.⁴⁶ On the other hand, two months previously, De Beus, the former Dutch Ambassador to Australia, had informed Australia's Ambassador in The Hague "on a personal basis" that:

the Dutch Government was moving towards the point of view first, that an effective plebiscite would never be held in West Irian, and

second, that it should be prepared to be very elastic about coming to an agreement with the Indonesians and the U.N. for self-determination, including substitutes for a plebiscite or even waiving it altogether.⁴⁷

On 9 April 1965, Australian diplomats in Jakarta referred to “political activities in West New Guinea” in a discussion with Dutch Ambassador Emile Schiff and asked him:

what the Dutch Government was doing about this, and whether he felt that it would be quickly buried. He has had instructions to raise this matter (which he does not like), and is apprehensive about the matter becoming something of a political football in Holland. Schiff can see no point in making a fuss about all this. It all stems from what he regards as an executive mistake which the Dutch made, which was to give [the Papuans] the idea that they could have an independent political future with a hostile Indonesia next door. Schiff regards such an idea as nonsense, and hopes that the Ministers all forget it.⁴⁸

On this evidence, it is not surprising that the Australian assessment of the Dutch position at this time was that:

Self-determination could be the one final stumbling block in the way of the resumption of genuine Netherlands/Indonesian co-operation, and, subject to some restraints imposed by continuing but dwindling Dutch public feeling about the issue, the Dutch Government is clearly anxious to come to an amicable arrangement with Indonesia about it.⁴⁹

Dutch sensitivity towards relations with Jakarta also affected The Hague’s attitude towards the Papuan nationalist community in the Netherlands. This was despite the active involvement of the Dutch in ensuring that leading nationalists were settled in the Netherlands before the Indonesian takeover.⁵⁰ A British document from June 1965 notes:

There are some indications that the Dutch are becoming increasingly embarrassed by the activities of these emigré organisations in the Netherlands, and it is believed that they may have instructed the more active organisations to remove their HQs elsewhere.⁵¹

Although Papuan nationalist organisations have remained active in the Netherlands to this day, Jouwe's group, the "Freedom Committee for West Papua" did move its HQ to New York in 1967.⁵² But it is not clear whether this was as a result of Dutch pressure, or simply a practical step to be nearer the UNGA in preparation for the 1969 Act of Free Choice.

British Reaction

The British also took note of the attitude of Luns towards the loss of West Irian. In conversation with Oliver of the British Embassy in The Hague, the Dutch Minister made clear that he was still bitter, and blamed the Americans for everything that had happened in the territory in recent years: "If they had wanted to, they could have stopped Sukarno right at the beginning of the West Irian affair."⁵³

The British themselves, were preoccupied with Indonesia's Confrontation policy towards the creation of Malaysia, and had no wish to involve themselves with West Irian. In February 1963, the first armed Indonesian infiltrators crossed into Sarawak as part of Jakarta's campaign to 'confront' the planned incorporation of the British Borneo territories (North Borneo and Sarawak) with their mainly non-Malay population, into the new Malaysian state. In late August and early September, a small U.N. team led by a UN Representative conducted a brief 'survey' of public opinion in

the territories, before deciding that the majority wished to join Malaysia.⁵⁴ Although more comprehensive assessments of public opinion had already been conducted (specifically the 1962 Cobbold Commission), this exercise obviously bore no relation to an act of self-determination. The Indonesians, who had previously demanded a plebiscite on the issue, subsequently refused to accept the result, despite previously having agreed to do so. On 16 September, the state of Malaysia came into being and the next day, the British Embassy in Jakarta was stormed and ransacked by a mob.⁵⁵

The effect of this crisis on British attitudes to West Irian, such as they were, was summed up in June 1965 by Sir Paul Gore Booth, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office. In a letter to Lord Avon, he wrote:

Although the [Papuan] emigré organisations sometimes evoke sympathy it will not surprise you to hear that we invariably recommend those who ask our advice not to involve themselves in correspondence with them...It is not that we are moved by fears about Indonesian susceptibilities or that we suppose that such correspondence could make our relations with Indonesia very much worse than they are. But one of our main objectives, in which we have so far had a fair measure of success, is to enlist the support of Afro-Asian countries for Malaysia as an independent Asian state. To do this we have to combat propaganda alleging that Malaysia is only a puppet employed by Britain to harass Indonesia. Such propaganda would be assisted if we were to take up the cause of the Papuans with whom African and Asian governments (most of them with their own minority problems) feel little or no kinship or sympathy. British support for the Papuans would be widely regarded as a specifically anti-Indonesian move lending credence to Indonesian charges which otherwise command little acceptance.⁵⁶

Interestingly, despite Gore Booth's belief that the Papuans had little support in Asia, there is evidence that, initially at least, Malaysia itself disagreed with Britain's policy of non-interference in West Irian affairs. In October 1963, the

Papuan nationalist Jouwe visited Malaysia and to the concern of the British appeared to receive a warm welcome from his hosts. During the visit, a British diplomat from the High Commission reported meeting Jouwe and a colleague by chance in the office of Tar Nurdin Sopiee, the Malaysian Director of Government Information Services. In a telegram to the Commonwealth Relations Office on 18 October, the diplomat warned:

Malaysians are allowing themselves to become embroiled. Jouwe and his colleagues have already met Ghazali and are apparently scheduled to see Tunku on 21 October. Malaysians are considering printing 30,000 copies of a brochure for this organisation. Jouwe is anxious to contact Australian High Commission here and hopes to go on to Australia. We have warned Critchley [of the Australian High Commission] who is trying to keep out of his way. We shall do our best to avoid Jouwe. We are also ensuring that no British counter-subversion funds are used by Malaysians in anyway connected with this body.⁵⁷

The next day, the British High Commission contacted London again on the issue:

To put it mildly, the Malaysians seem to be acting most indiscreetly and unwisely. We have considered whether we could profitably intervene. We have decided that it would be better not to make any attempt at this stage to sober down the Malaysians. Clearly, however, if at a later point in time it did seem appropriate to mount a wider exercise aimed at reducing the Malaysian's ebullience this would be high on the agenda.⁵⁸

Whether or not the British did act to reduce Malaysian 'ebullience' is unclear, but Kuala Lumpur's brief flirtation with the Papuans, motivated by Jakarta's Confrontation, seems to have been short-lived and there appears to be no further reference to it in de-classified British documents.

While the British could see no advantage in involving themselves in the issue of Papuan self-determination, they did, at times, acknowledge that there was

something to be gained on the issue with regard to Indonesia. On 7 January 1965, Indonesia withdrew from the UN in protest at the appointment of Malaysia as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Five days later a handwritten minute from the British Prime Minister's office remarked:

It would be in our interests to see that publicity is given to the dissident Papuans and, even though Indonesia is no longer a member of the U.N., it would presumably help to [harm/tarnish (?)] the Indonesian image at the U.N.⁵⁹

Of more interest, however, was the perceived threat (felt by sections of Australian opinion in particular) posed by the Indonesians in West Irian towards PNG. It was a scenario exploited by London in its efforts to gain support from Western powers for British policy on Confrontation. This seems to be particularly the case in Britain's dealings with the Washington. In a Foreign Office 'steering brief', drawn up in preparation for some 'Quadripartite talks' on Indonesia (involving the British, Americans, Australians and Malaysians), the analyst advised on the line to take with the US:

Any further concessions to a policy of confrontation will eventually lead to an attempt against East New Guinea. The Americans are pledged to defend that territory under the ANZUS agreement. It is therefore much better to stop the Indonesians now. The first line of defence of Australian New Guinea lies in Malaysia.⁶⁰

Australian Reaction

As West Irian's neighbour in New Guinea, over which it had long exercised a mandate, Australia had a particular interest in events within the territory. First of all it

had no illusions about the Papuans' future. In early 1965, one Australian document declared:

It was fairly clear before Indonesia announced its withdrawal [from the UN] that Indonesia would not carry out the obligations under the Netherlands/Indonesia Agreement in a manner that could be genuinely represented as offering a meaningful exercise of freedom of choice. The prospect was (and is) that West Irian would be absorbed into Indonesia without adequate respect for the choice of the people.⁶¹

Apprehension about their new neighbour was heightened in the weeks following Indonesia takeover of West Irian as a result of several incidents along the border. In May/June 1963, 220 refugees from the Merauke region crossed the border into the Western District of Papua and New Guinea. An Australian document notes that their motivation was mistrust of Indonesia and fear of reprisals for cooperation with the Dutch. On 20 June 1963, an Indonesian military patrol searching for refugees crossed the border near the south coast. Unable to induce 150 refugees to return, an Indonesian officer remarked to the local Australian official that he would soon 'persuade' them to change their minds if the latter turned a blind eye. The same document lists other relatively minor incidents such as threats by Indonesian troops to locals in PNG, and disputes over Australian erected border signs.⁶² At the same time, there were reports that an Indonesian radio station in West Irian had begun referring to PNG as "East Irian." Another report claimed that Subandrio told visiting Australians in Jakarta that although Indonesia had no territorial claims on PNG, it would support any indigenous liberation movements which might arise.⁶³

In retrospect, none of these incidents were particularly serious and the rumours of Indonesian aggression towards Australian New Guinea now seem far-fetched. But at the time, some Australians and Papua New Guineans did genuinely fear attack, particularly during the period of Confrontation in Borneo where Australian troops were involved in armed clashes with Indonesian infiltrators. One Australian journalist, writing in 1965, spoke of Government plans for a large increase in expenditure on military installations and infrastructure in PNG:

Indonesia's withdrawal from the United Nations this year ended the last flickering hopes that the [West Irian] plebiscite might be held. Now the gloves are off and Australia, while continuing to hope for the best, is preparing for the worst in her New Guinea territories.⁶⁴

Commenting that the territory had been given the status of a "full military command," the journalist explained that the aim was to provide a basis for rapid expansion in the event of all-out attack when British and US support would be expected. But in the case of "Borneo style" infiltration by small bands of guerrillas "headed by some renegade native," defence would be largely in the hands of the local Pacific Islands Regiment, numbering less than 3,000 men.⁶⁵

Papuan nationalists who hoped to benefit from deteriorating Australian/Indonesian relations were disappointed. In October 1963, Australian missions were instructed to avoid official contact with Jouwe and his colleagues. Along with Markus Kaisiepo, Jouwe was the most prominent exiled Papuan nationalist at the time. The missions were also told not to issue them entry visas without reference to Canberra. As the British High Commission in Canberra observed

at the time “they do not want to see them in Canberra and it seems likely that they will impose considerable administrative delays on any applications for visas.”⁶⁶ In the event Canberra did more than simply delay the applications. An Australian Department of External Affairs paper from 1968 reveals:

Australian contact with nationalists abroad has been kept to the unavoidable minimum. Correspondence from nationalists has not been acknowledged and their applications to visit Australia and TPNG [east New Guinea] have been consistently refused.⁶⁷

Even after the end of Confrontation, West Irian remained an uncomfortable issue for Canberra. A British diplomat in Jakarta wrote in October 1967:

It may be worth recording that [Australia's] attitude [on West Irian] in Djakarta is one of extreme caution verging on embarrassment. Their main concern is ‘not to get involved’, since this is the one issue which could seriously jeopardize Indonesian/Australian relations as 1969 approaches. Already some Indonesian officials suspect Australia of backing the O.P.M. because political refugees from West Irian have crossed into Papua/New Guinea on many occasions and the Australians feel they cannot send them all back. In addition there was the demonstration against the Indonesian Ambassador, Kosasih, at Port Moresby in April; it is also true that many of the letters between Holland and the Papuan nationalists are smuggled out via Papua/New Guinea.⁶⁸

Australian policy makers were well aware there was no international interest in challenging Indonesian activities in West Irian, and that it was “alone in its serious continuing concern over what happens” in the territory.⁶⁹ In particular, they came to the assessment in 1965 that:

On the information available the United States does not wish to engage itself further in the question. West New Guinea was a major irritant in American-Indonesian relations and the State Department also hoped that after acquiring the territory...Indonesia would develop greater stability. Although these hopes were not fulfilled,

there is no disposition on the part of the Americans to reopen the policy issues.⁷⁰

Furthermore, a “strong stand” by Canberra on the implementation of Papuan self-determination, could, it was felt, “produce awkward complications” for them with regard to the West Papuans. Such a move would encourage Papuans to expect a “more liberal policy” towards refugees and jeopardise the existing policy of “keeping them to their side of the border and not allowing a tradition of asylum to grow.”⁷¹ There were also concerns that if Indonesia refused to hold an act of self-determination, a “strong stand” on the issue would result in Canberra being unable for domestic political reasons to then recognise Jakarta’s sovereignty of West Irian once the 1969 deadline had passed. This it was felt, could create tensions over the border which would then be exploited by its “unstable and possibly aggressive neighbour.”⁷² For this reason, Australia shared the UN’s favoured option of persuading Indonesia to permit an appearance of Papuan self-determination to take place. This could then produce the inevitable result in favour of remaining within the Republic, the Agreement would be legitimately fulfilled, and an important potential cause of instability in Canberra’s relations with Jakarta would be removed.

The only situation where Australia could see an independent West Papua, or one linked to PNG, as feasible was, according to the 1965 paper, one in which Indonesia were to fragment following a loss of control of its territories by the central Government. Finally, the paper also speculated that Australian policy towards Papuan nationalists could change, but only in the event of a PKI (Communist Party) takeover

in Jakarta “In these circumstances resistance in the outer provinces to accepting the rule of this kind of government in Java could be to Australia’s advantage.”⁷³

It is also worth noting that the importance some Australian diplomats and politicians attached to placating Indonesia, expressed itself in their attitudes towards other areas of potential dispute. Evidence of this appears in British documents from early 1963 on the military threat posed by Indonesia to Portuguese Timor. One dated 4 January 1963, warns “our intelligence shows that the Indonesians are undoubtedly plotting some action against Portuguese Timor, though we still can not predict how or when they might act.”⁷⁴ While the British were not prepared to provide military assistance to Portugal in the event of an attack (despite having a treaty obligation since 1707 to do so), a Foreign Office official advised; “we cannot go as far in the opposite direction as the Australians who want the Portuguese out and are studying the idea of some form of U.N. trusteeship for Timor.”⁷⁵ While such a solution could have facilitated de-colonisation and eventual self-determination, at least one senior Australian diplomat appeared to view it as an opportunity for a settlement along the lines of that adopted for West Irian. Mention of this is made in an internal communication by the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in January 1963:

It may be that Timor is an anomaly. But in my judgement the sort of charade suggested by the Australian Ambassador in Djakarta, i.e. of arranging a play as a result of which the Indonesians ended up with Timor in their possession, is full of danger.⁷⁶

Following the failure of the alleged PKI-backed coup of September 1965 and the right-wing military backlash, political power in Indonesia moved from Sukarno to

General Suharto. Although Suharto did not formally become President until March 1968, his pro-Western policies took effect much sooner. Confrontation ended in 1966 and in September of that year Foreign Minister Malik travelled to the UN in New York to arrange Indonesia's re-entry to the organisation. He also announced on 30 September that Jakarta would permit an act of self-determination in West Irian, something which Sukarno had ruled out as recently as May 1965.⁷⁷ It was a controversial statement domestically and Malik had to repeat his assurance on 12 December to counter an assertion by Rahmat, the Home Affairs Minister, that it would not take place.⁷⁸

With the prospect of a Papuan act of free choice back on the agenda, Jakarta had some renewed interest in the ongoing issues in West Irian of economic neglect and anti-Indonesian sentiment. In March 1967, during a session of the Indonesian Provisional Peoples' Consultative Congress (MPRS), Karubuy, a West Papuan member, made an impromptu speech accusing the authorities of bombing the Papuans and treating them like enemies. He added that the people were in a state of revolt because of economic neglect. Although soon afterwards he retracted his statement in front of the press, the Government was concerned enough to reply publicly to the accusations.⁷⁹ At a press conference on 15 March, Malik described Karubuy's accusations as exaggerated. Nonetheless, he admitted an unpleasant state of affairs existed in West Irian and pledged that every effort was being made to improve the economic situation.⁸⁰

However, British reports from February 1967 state that, while economic relief was getting to West Irian, most of Indonesia's available economic resources were still being devoted to Java for "political reasons" and Sumatra for longer-term economic ones.⁸¹ In addition, information from the US and Canadian Embassies in Jakarta suggested that Papuan dissatisfaction with Jakarta was still widespread and growing. Government officials, particularly the Javanese, were distrusted and economic development was at a virtual standstill.⁸²

Eight months later, the British predicted that the biggest hope for investment in West Irian in the near future was the US\$30 million provided by the Dutch under FUNDWI. This aid had become available again following Jakarta's re-entry into the UN. But, quoting Powers, the fund's American administrator, the prospects for the money being well spent were very poor: "his gloom about the future appears to be justified by a recent report that, of the 3 Otter aircraft already bought under the Fund, one has already been commandeered by the Military."⁸³

As 1968 began, the prospects of economic and political stability in West Irian were not favourable. Furthermore, with no Indonesian or international interest in a genuine act of self-determination, it was clear that the UN's return to the territory would be unlikely to fulfil the nationalist aspirations of thousands of Papuans, or safeguard the political and human rights of the population as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOTES

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