

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has traced the development of Australia's WNG policy from one extreme in 1949 to another in 1969. The pressures which shaped Australian policy have been described and the outcome in PNG shown; the chapter conclusions have already summarised the broad outlines of the story. These final paragraphs will merely elaborate briefly on two of the more general points of significance that have emerged.

First, it is noteworthy that the most powerful pressures on Australian policy were the international ones - from Dutch, Indonesian and most importantly American policies, both before the New York Agreement in 1962, which handed over WNG to interim Indonesian rule, and before 1969 when that rule was made permanent by the Act of Free Choice that the Agreement required. In 1962 the potency of these factors was related to calculations of Cold War politics and the need to try to keep Sukarno out of the Communist bloc. In 1969 it derived from the wish to give every assistance and encouragement to the Suharto regime's efforts for the stabilisation of Indonesia, which in its turn would enable that country to play an appropriate role in the post-Nixon Doctrine South East Asian international order.

Second, one of the consequences of the 1949-1969 WNG drama was to boost the development of both WNG nationalism and a pan-Papuan sentiment, which, in turn contributed to rebel activity against the Indonesian Administration and to a refugee movement into PNG. The resulting border problem and Australia's reaction, a defence build-up and an unprecedented development effort, stimulated Papua New Guinean hostility towards Indonesia, as well as sympathy for the people of WNG, and criticism and resentment of Australia itself. The New Guinean response, both east and west, to the international politics of the WNG question proved to be unexpectedly strong and tenacious because of the circumstances which produced it, a crisis atmosphere and rapid political change.

Can we, then, draw any significant conclusions about the pressures making for change in Australia's WNG policy and about the reaction

of NG? The significance of the international pressures at work on Australia's WNG policy lies in what their results reveal about developing Australian foreign policy. In March 1950, Spender asserted that NG was vital for Australia's defence and that Australia had the right to be consulted on any change in the status quo of the western half of the island. However, in 1959 with the Casey-Subandrio Joint Statement, Australia acknowledged that she was not a party principal in the WNG dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia and in the ensuing parliamentary debates the defence significance of WNG was explicitly denied. By this time, although there were to be minor reversals of Australian policy, especially at the time of Indonesia's confrontation of Malaysia, on account of divisions in government between one view which continued to place central importance upon the need to develop Australia's relations with its region and another which favoured "standing up to the Indonesians", the process of adjustment to the inevitable accession of Indonesia to WNG, and more broadly to the facts of her international life, had begun. Whether it was a change of policy or not, the Casey-Subandrio Joint Statement marked the end of an era of entrenchment, absolutes and ostrich policies, and as such it was a crossing of the Rubicon: Mackie has pointed out that "for the first time an Australian Government was engaged in negotiations with our neighbour over a matter of vital concern to us which did not involve the great powers".<sup>1</sup>

Thus the WNG question takes its place in the history of the development of Australia's foreign policy. It was the first testing of the limits of the alliance relationship with the US which constituted the foundation of that foreign policy. We saw at the outset that throughout the history of Australia's foreign policy there was a difference between her own view of the importance of NG to Australia and that of her major ally; but this counted for little until the WNG dispute came to touch on the global balance of power. The Indonesian-Dutch dispute, along with the continuing WNG question, therefore highlighted the limitations within which Australian foreign policy had to work. It compelled her to review her own interests and to take into account those of her neighbours and her friends (interests which were

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<sup>1</sup>J.A.C. Mackie, "Problems of Australian Foreign Policy January-June 1959", AJPH, Vols. 5-6 (1959-60), pp.139-146.

not always entirely synonymous). Hence, in the period under consideration, we see a shift from an idiosyncratic "special" relationship with NG and the colony of PNG towards something less charged with notions of moral obligation, or a change in the assessment of Australian interests as NG takes its place in a hierarchy behind the American alliance and Indonesian relations.

The difficulty the WNG question posed for Australia arose not only from different views of foreign policy priorities but also from her position as a colonial power in NG. Contradictions undoubtedly arose from the situation in which PNG was wholly the responsibility of the Department of Territories at the outset of the period under consideration. For obvious reasons, Australian policies towards NG (east as well as west) moved into the realm of Foreign Affairs: thus a tension developed between the former which had the interests of NG at heart, and the latter which was concerned first with those of Australia. It was this divergence that led to the different reaction of Barnes and Freeth to the incidents that took place on the border in NG in 1969, just as it also accounted for the tension between these departments later, when an Australian Labor Government was determined to move PNG from self-government to independence regardless of whether its politicians, much less its people, wanted it or not. Australia's colonial involvement in NG has left (in Australia) a legacy of sympathy, a sense of responsibility and continuing attachment to some sort of "special" relationship with the independent PNG amongst members of both Labor and LCP Governments, in spite of advice to the contrary,<sup>2</sup> a special relationship which, among other things, gives that country first claim on Australia's aid. This gave rise to public interest and outcry in Australia before 1962 and in 1969. But we have seen that it had little influence on policy in the first instance and less in the second - and the trend is likely to continue.

The significance of NG's reaction to the WNG question for Australia is that in solving one problem, she contributed to the creation of another. The legacy of the WNG question can perhaps best be suggested by exploring one of the hypothetical "might have beens" of

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<sup>2</sup>See Hedley Bull, "Australia's Involvement in Independent Papua-New Guinea", Fourth Heindorff Memorial Lecture World Review, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 1974), pp.3-15.

history. If the Netherlands had not decided to retain WNG in 1949 there would probably have been no WNG nationalism, or pan-Papuan sentiment, or dissent on the scale that there was and still is in the west of the island, with all its associated problems for Australian-Indonesian relations and for PNG-Indonesian relations. Australia, and PNG, would still have had a land border with Indonesia, which might well have caused Australia as many worries in the middle sixties as, in the event, it did. But those characteristics of the situation which have led us here to conclude that the WNG question was not fully resolved in 1962, nor even in 1969, would have been absent. Although the continuing WNG problem is more an irritant than an issue in present day foreign relations between Indonesia, Australia and PNG, its potential for trouble remains.

In 1962, after a period in which the Administrations in both halves of the island had fostered, with varying degrees of encouragement from the metropolitan governments, the growth of an awareness of the people in the other half, the island moved into an era in which every effort was made by the administrations of both east and west to erase the notion of a shared political future. The border was frozen, though for different reasons by each administration. Communication and co-operation between east and west ceased abruptly, and two halves of one great island, finally, turned their backs on each other to move away into two quite different worlds, thereby underwriting an arbitrary, colonially devised line between them. PNG faced east but looked to the west; it was Australian-inspired and ruled, South Pacific oriented, Christian and, eventually, would become English-speaking. WNG, or West Irian or, much later, Irian Jaya, became Asian and moved into the cultural orbit of Islam. Its lingua franca came to be Bahasa Indonesia. As its young people began to be taken into the arms of Indonesia, for education and advancement, it came to be believed that they would forget the fight of their fathers for freedom from what some of them regarded as an Asian brand of imperialists. The Dutch colonial contact had done all those things that the Australian contact had done for PNG, but it was so short, effectively hardly more than a decade, and its impact although intense was narrow and limited. It left, primarily, a tiny, discontented West Papuan elite who had been led to the Garden of Eden and then, at the gate, been denied entry.

The disappointment of this group left a proportion of them permanently disenchanted and potentially troublesome for the Indonesian regime.

On a visit to Port Moresby in October 1973, Major-General Ali Murtopo, President Suharto's personal assistant, dismissed as dreams reports that WNG's refugees wanted union with PNG. It is, he said, just like a dream of uniting France and Germany.<sup>3</sup> Dreams these may be, perhaps impossible dreams, but contrary to expectations a significant proportion of the new elite of WNG today, the younger generation educated and trained in Indonesia and beholden to her, are West Papuan nationalists who wish to be free from Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> But their fate has been sealed in one way by the international politics of their position which have caused even supporters in PNG to abandon them as the interests of the new PNG Government crystallised and it fell into line with the interests of its two omnipresent neighbours. Meanwhile their fate is also being sealed in another way by integration and by Indonesianisation.<sup>5</sup>

Why is it so inconceivable that the Indonesians might some day decide that it would be in the best interests of all concerned to allow WNG to secede from the Republic and perhaps merge in PNG in a broader island unit? The reply of an Indonesian politician to an Australian question on the possibility probably gives us the key. It was his conclusion that this would be possible "only if by that time the process of nationhood in Indonesia has advanced to that stage in which a relinquishing by Djakarta of West Irian would not create a wave of demands for equal self-determination or separatist movements from other areas in the archipelago, only then would Djakarta consider such a step, but mind you, consider ...".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>PC, 15 October 1973.

<sup>4</sup>See June Verrier, "Irian Jaya 1975: The West New Guinea Question Phase Three", New Guinea Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 2 (September-October 1975), pp.2-20.

<sup>5</sup>See R. Garnaut and C. Manning, Irian Jaya: The Transformation of a Melanesian Economy, (ANU Press, Canberra, 1974).

<sup>6</sup>The politician was quoted by Antara's representative in Canberra in an address to a meeting of the Indonesian Study Group on 22 August 1968, "Indonesian-Australian Relations: Possible Obstacles and Pitfalls" (ANU, Canberra, 1968), mimeo, p.20.