

Indonesian Independence
and the
United Nations

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WITH A FOREWORD BY THE

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FOREWORD

THE fury and the ferment of the Second World War, the dislocations and destructions of defeat, the sacrifices necessary for victory, brought about many shifts and changes in the international scene.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in Asia where many former colonial or semi-colonial territories of European Powers were able to exploit fluid situations so as to secure their own full political independence. In some cases this was done with a minimum of strife and with goodwill on both sides. In others, the change-over was very different. The transition from colonial to sovereign status, however, whether smooth or rough, was inevitable. When it was opposed there was bound to be trouble and bloodshed, without any real possibility of altering the result.

The Japanese, though totally defeated, had inflicted great blows on the power and, even more, on the prestige of the European rulers of Asian territories. There had been humiliating surrenders of white overlords to Asian conquerors whose rule, though more autocratic than that which it had replaced, was at least Asian, at times channelled through local leaders and, in any event, not likely to be permanent. Furthermore, the Western European governments had themselves, as part of their war aims, proclaimed the right of all peoples to be free to govern themselves.

War, as so often before, proved a forcing ground of development. In Asia it paved the way for change, and prevented the return to the old state of affairs. There were ardent nationalists ready to move in and take over before the last Japanese invader had withdrawn to his homeland. The result was the emergence of new Asian, independent States. It was a process that was inevitable, even if from the point of view of order and stability, it may in some cases have been premature.

This process of withdrawal and reconstruction was often accompanied by bloodshed and confusion, but it was always pursued with an impetus and nationalistic fervour that was not to be denied. In some cases it led to the fragmentation, rather than the unification, of political society. But who can say that this was not necessary, if

one day the peoples concerned are to reverse the process and come closer together in international groupings that reflect the basic interdependence of our age; where the nation State, alone, is not enough for either security or progress.

In no place were the hopes for the future and the frustrations and bloodshed in the means of realizing it more tragically associated than in Indonesia. The freedom of the Indonesian people was an objective that was admitted by all, including the Dutch, as something that was both necessary and desirable. The tragedy was the strife and struggle which took place before freedom came.

This book is the record of that struggle, told with fairness and objectivity, with careful and scholarly attention to detail and to accuracy. It is a tragic story of lost opportunities and might-have-beens. Its lesson has an application—especially in the intervention of the United Nations—to situations and developments far beyond Indonesia.

Perhaps the normal reaction after reading this book is most likely to be that in a quotation which Dr. Taylor includes from Sir Herbert Butterfield: “In historical perspective we learn to be a little more sorry for both parties than they knew how to be for each other.”

This progressive disappearance of sorrow and sympathy between the Dutch and the Indonesians in the years after 1945 was both a cause and a result of the mistrust and misunderstandings that bedevilled the negotiations and efforts at agreement on both sides.

Mr. Stikker, the Dutch Foreign Minister, once complained that there was a “basic mistrust of our proclaimed intentions, of our most formal pledges.” Both the Indonesian Republicans and certain members of the United Nations Security Council were the target for this complaint. But the Dutch, in their turn, mistrusted the sincerity of some of the Republican leaders, as well as their will or ability to implement their proposals, even if they were sincere. Naturally, any negotiations were bound to be harmfully affected by this mutual distrust, which got worse with events.

As is always the case in circumstances of prolonged and difficult negotiations, the moderate and reasonable men on both sides came under increasing pressure from extremists. They were also, in the case of the Netherlands, pushed into courses, the wisdom of which they may themselves have doubted, by the exigencies of domestic politics.

As for mistrust of the United Nations Security Council, it was born of the feeling, both in Dutch and Indonesian circles, that some members of that Council were more concerned with their great-Power interests and responsibilities than the merits of the issues at stake.

It is not surprising, therefore, that negotiations were long and bitter and filled with delays and obstructions. Events, however, worked progressively for the Indonesians and against the Dutch, in part through the skill with which the former advanced their case at the United Nations. It was this compulsion of events, as well as the force of public opinion, especially in Asia, and expressed at the United Nations, which finally brought the Dutch Government to the realization that its diplomatic and negotiating position was not as strong as it was thought to be. Moreover, it was getting weaker, as certain actions of the Netherlands, such as the breaking of the truce in December 1948, forfeited the possibility of active support from its North Atlantic friends. This deterioration in the diplomatic position was a bitter disappointment to the Dutch, but it made a solution possible. The Dutch, after all, unlike their bitterest critic on the Security Council, the U.S.S.R., were not the kind of people to pursue a quarrel of this kind to its ultimate and brutal conclusion by fire and sword—especially as they were already committed to the objective of an independent Indonesia.

Could the sad sequence of events, before a solution was found, have been avoided? Not without restraint, imagination and generosity on both sides. On the Indonesian side popular passion and suspicion made this well nigh impossible. On the Dutch, Van Mook himself stated the main difficulty when he said that the national character of his fellow countrymen contained “an excess of caution and deficiency of imagination” which “stood in the way of a large gesture that might have given the history of the conflict a turn for the better.”

In any event, a “large gesture,” if it were to be effective, had to be made in time and in circumstances where it could be considered as generous as it was welcome. That was not done. So, as is so often the case in the struggles of peoples striving to be free, the gesture that was not made voluntarily at the beginning became the forced and reluctant concession at the end of long and bitter conflict, with bad results that might have been avoided if wisdom had been shown in time and by both sides. This is a lesson from

the history of other places than Indonesia, a lesson which is rarely learned. It is when these lessons are not learned that history is forced to repeat itself in strife and bloodshed.

An Indonesian federal State, with friendly relations with the Netherlands and a true democracy maturing and developing in accordance with the will of all its peoples, might have been possible if the “large gesture” could have been made in 1945. Instead there was the prolonged diplomatic and military struggle so well and thoroughly described by Dr. Taylor. And the result? An independent Indonesia, the sixtieth Member of the United Nations, fully fledged in the international community, yes, but a centralized, unitary State, whose people have for two years now been living under an officially proclaimed state of siege, with rebellious outbreaks by Indonesians unhappy under their present kind of independence, with the elected parliament dissolved, and with democracy “guided” in a manner which resembles in some ways that of a police State.

Perhaps if more patience and wisdom had been displayed on all sides—if, for instance, the possibilities and the requirements of the United Nations intervention had been as fully accepted by the Dutch at the beginning as they were at the end—the results might have been different and some of these growing pains of freedom, if that is all they are, might have been avoided.

The whole-hearted and constructive acceptance of United Nations intervention by the Dutch could not have been easy in any event. They felt strongly that the differences which had developed between them and the Indonesians could have been far more satisfactorily settled by direct negotiations. This feeling was strengthened by the conviction, which a strict and legal interpretation of the Charter supported, that the United Nations had no right in any event to intervene in what was a domestic dispute.

The Security Council, however, rejected this legal limitation on its powers. In view of what actually did happen, the Dutch Government could not have done worse, and might have done better, if it had accepted the larger view of the Charter and had encouraged, rather than opposed, the full use of United Nations machinery, once some form of international intervention became inevitable.

The Indonesian Question was an early and difficult test for the new world Organization. Its intervention there established a

pattern of policy, if not of machinery, for the future. In particular, decisions taken by the Security Council began the process of whittling away the Charter reservation of “domestic jurisdiction,” until now it is not much more than something to be observed at the United Nations only if you have the votes, or the influence, to make good your claim that it must be.

The Indonesian dispute underlined a major dilemma and difficulty under the United Nations Charter. If action, or even discussion, can be prevented in situations of an international significance, merely because of a legal and narrow interpretation of domestic jurisdiction,” the United Nations will become less and less able to assist in bringing about any solutions, or even in making proposals for such solutions to the parties concerned. But if “domestic jurisdiction” is to mean nothing except when it can be claimed and established by powerful States like the U.S.S.R. in situations such as Hungary in 1956, then a “double standard” of action and morality in regard to intervention will grow up in the United Nations. This will work to the grave disadvantage of the loyal Members of the international community, as the Netherlands was during this dispute and as it remains; but as neither Hungary nor the U.S.S.R. was, when the United Nations attempted to intervene there, even mildly, in 1956.

There is no easy way out of this dilemma. Yet it is dangerous, both to the future of the United Nations and to the orderly evolution of colonial peoples toward a freedom which will mean more for them than merely membership in the world community.

The travail and struggle that accompanied the achievement of independence for Indonesia might or might not have been avoided. This book indicates, and I think rightly, that it might—but only if! And it is the “only if’s” of history that make so much of it depressing to read, and so depressingly repetitive.

The experience of Indonesia is in fact part of a longer and larger story which now takes on a clearer and more compelling meaning in a shrinking world where all peoples must learn to live and work and progress together, if we are to live at all. This cannot be done if people who wish political freedom cannot achieve it by peaceful change—or at all. But it also cannot be done if freedom means only national narrowness and prejudice and suspicion of others.

We have made progress in recent years, halting and limited if

you will, but some progress toward the prevention of war by collective action. Why have we been unable to make even the same amount of progress in assisting the growth to national independence from colonial status by planned collective action and by international support for the emerging States on a broad and acceptable basis?

We have, of course, done something to this end through the United Nations Trusteeship System. But the so-called “colonial Powers” have never been anxious, or at times even willing, to use this system to any greater extent than was necessary—and certainly not to apply it to their own colonies. The newer nations on their part were suspicious that Trusteeship, if developed and extended, might become a cloak for a return to Imperialism. The Soviet Union which, while rejecting the designation of colonial Power, had its own direct methods for forcing free peoples into its own imperial system, professed to share this suspicion.

So a great opportunity was lost at San Francisco in 1945—and subsequently—to organize the United Nations so that it could play an active and continuous role with adequate resources in directing movements toward independence, and in assisting through international rather than national channels, both the colonies which were on the way, and those which had reached the goal.

Indonesia, I know, is now independent, and that is good. But the reality of its independence might be deeper, and more secure, if it had been achieved in a more peaceful, orderly and co-operative fashion.

That is why this book tells a sad story, in spite of its happy ending for so many by the establishment of the Indonesian Republic. It is a story that has been well told and should be read by those interested in the stirrings and strivings of our world, especially in that Asian part of it which has now emerged into the responsibilities and the freedoms of the twentieth century.

LESTER B. PEARSON.

April 26, 1960.

PREFACE

A DISTINGUISHED English historian has pointed out that in issues involving conflict, it is the function of what he terms the “higher historiography to strip away the surface passions in order to reveal the underlying human predicaments.” This I have sought, within my limitations, to do in the present study—despite the virtual impossibility of achieving that level of historical analysis which Sir Herbert Butterfield has in mind, for the years ahead are certain to provide new evidence and with it a sharper focus. Nor do I in fact wish to give the impression of having minimized the importance of the passions which this particular conflict aroused, since they were not the least dynamic element in an issue for which the United Nations was called upon to find a solution acceptable both to the protagonists themselves and to the international community at large. In its search for that solution, the Security Council had quite enough to do without burdening itself with what would have been construed as a gratuitous concern for the motives of the parties directly involved. Yet if we are to adhere to Sir Herbert's thesis, we must at least attempt to search out the motivations not only of the protagonists but indeed of all those who acted at the horseshoe table of the Security Council. For together they comprised the *personae* of a drama sufficiently complex and protracted to reveal what Sir Herbert has in mind—those fundamental predicaments from which neither governments nor individuals can escape, since they are inherent in all human decisions.

As the title suggests, this study concerns itself with the struggle for Indonesian independence, but from a particular point of view—namely, the involvement of the United Nations. It does not attempt to review the history of Indonesian nationalism. Its analysis of immediate post-war Indonesian-Netherlands relations, culminating in military operations in July 1947, is designed merely to clarify the basic issues involved at the time the struggle was propelled into the international arena. The following three years were to prove crucial to the movement for Indonesian independence, and they have been both chronicled and analysed in detail in this work. The domestic and external affairs of the two protagonists figure prominently in

its pages, but they have been examined primarily from the standpoint of the manner in which they affected, or were in turn affected by, the efforts of the United Nations to resolve the dispute. The Organization's contribution virtually ceased with the creation of the new Indonesian State on December 27, 1949. As a consequence, this might be considered the terminal date for this study. However, the analysis also includes the role of the field machinery in the subsequent implementation of the Round Table Conference Agreements, while an Epilogue narrates the United Nations' involvement in the two major issues arising from those Agreements, namely, Indonesia's termination of debt payments to the Netherlands, and the Western New Guinea dispute.

In addition, this work is designed to serve as a detailed—the term “definitive” would be too ambitious and foolhardy to employ—case study of the activities and effectiveness of the United Nations in the field of pacific settlement, that is, under Chapter VI of the Charter. In attempting it, I have sought to avoid an *ex post facto* attitude. The problem has been approached in the same chronological framework as was required of the Security Council and its field machinery, and consequently within the limitations set by factors which they could not control or, in various instances, fully comprehend at the time. These included the impact of political and ideological developments in East and Southeast Asia and, in addition, the ramifications—often still below the surface—of the domestic politics not only of the protagonists themselves but also of the chief members of the Security Council. Such factors have, of course, to make their appearance in an author's over-all analysis of the Indonesian Question, but I have done my utmost to assess the Organization's activities on the basis of a demarcation between information available to its organs and that which came to light subsequent to the time when they had to act.

A. M. T.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,
May 15, 1960.